

Kromme Rijn Collective management

In the Netherlands, the implementation of agri-environmental measures and nature conservation measures in farmland is partly arranged collectively, where local cooperatives arrange and execute measures. The Kromme Rijn is a region in the Dutch province of Utrecht, where such a cooperative is active. It executes agri-environmental management and there are a few volunteer groups e.g. involved in pollarding willows.



Summary

Collective implementation of agri-environmental management has been started up throughout the Netherlands since 2016. After individual management had proven to fail to deliver the desired agri-environmental-climate public goods (AECPGs), a larger-scale implementation of agri-environmental management was considered a more feasible and promising solution. In the central Dutch province of Utrecht, a wide variety of AECPGs is required by society and farmers. This includes improvement of water quality, enhancing and emphasizing the landscape diversity that supports recreation, and providing a habitat for species including bats and owls. In the eastern half of the province, the Kromme Rijn region, the “Agrarisch Natuur Collectief Utrecht Oost” (agricultural nature collective Utrecht East) organizes the large-scale nature management. Land owners are members of the collective, which organizes payment for specific nature management actions performed by farmers, monitors, and brokers between land owners and organizations / companies that implement some specific nature management actions, based on a common regional management plan. The collective is certified by the national certification institute for agri-environmental management and has its own quality assurance controllers.

Objectives

Objectives are set by the provinces. In the case of Kromme Rijn, the province of Utrecht defines targets in its annual nature management plan. Defined are targets for nature, landscape, agricultural nature and landscape management. Landscape management targets at fostering landscape diversity. The ANLM aims at maintaining landscape elements: characteristic on the levees are tree lines, small patches of forests, wooded banks, ponds, and small traditional orchards. The lower and wetter part of the region. Langbroekerwetering, contains small patches of wet species-rich grasslands that are extensively managed through mowing, combined with tree lines and small fields. Creating habitat for amphibians, including the great crested newt, for several owls, and several bat species. Creating habitats for threatened species of extensive traditional arable lands.



© Franziska Komossa

Problem description

Agri-environmental management has been introduced in the Netherlands in 1975. 1000 km² were assigned as agriculture-nature area and managed by nature organizations, another 1000 km² included “normal” farmland, on which farmers planned their farmland and management practices in a nature-friendly way. Since the year 2000, it became increasingly apparent that farm-level agri-environmental management was not effective, because target species required a larger mosaic of land use and land cover than can be provided on a single farm. In 2016, agri-environmental management by nature collectives has been introduced by the Dutch government.

COLLECTIVE



PUBLIC GOODS



Landscape and scenery



(Farmland) biodiversity



Soil
quality
(and
health)



Water
quantity



Water
quality



Cultural
heritage



Recreational access /
Improvements to physical
and mental health

CONTRACT

Financing party:

Government (with EU-funding)

It is a public-private contract (government - collective – farmer).

Contract conclusion:



Written agreement

Payment mechanism:



Compensation payments: Measure-based, unit based (per meter or piece)
Basic and premium payments

Length of participation in scheme:

all contracts run until 31 December 2021

Start of the program:

2016

End: ongoing



Advantages of participation

- *Province*: easier subsidy allocation because of dealing with fewer partners; better nature management
- *Farmers and other land owners*: fewer administrative barriers
- *Private nature management companies*: better contracts for nature management

Data and Facts – Contract

Participation: The agricultural nature collective *Utrecht East* has approximately 300 members, who are farmers, estate owners, and other private land owners. The collective manages the Kromme Rijn, Utrechtse Heuvelrug, and the Utrecht part of the Gelderse Vallei regions, altogether approximately 500 km².

Involved parties:

- *Province*: defines the areas eligible for agri-environmental management; sets the goals for nature management
- *Collective*: makes the province level nature management plan operational by specifying management actions for specific areas; brokering with regard to implementation of plans; applies for and distributes funding
- *Farmers and other land owners*: performing part of the management
- *Private nature management companies*: performing part of the management

Management requirements for farmers: There is a catalogue of measures that farmers can or should apply. These are specified as management requirements. For example, using specific seed mixtures for herb rich field boundaries supplied by the collective or the pollarding frequency for willows.



Funding/ Payments:

- Collectives ask for subsidy at the province, based on a province-level nature management plan and an agri-nature management strategy developed by the collective as a response to the province plan. Provinces set a cap on the subsidy level for different sub-regions and different nature targets and provide the funding to the collective. The collective pays the actor that does the management. In many cases, that will be the farmer, but in other cases this is a private company that e.g. cleans ditches in an environmentally friendly way.
- The province level cap to the Utrecht Oost region is 833 k€, split up into 675 k€ for grassland and small natural elements, and 158 k€ for water.
- Payments are vary for different nature elements and for different implementation levels.
 - For part of the measures, payment is area based. This e.g. applies for meadow bird friendly management, botanically special grassland, bird feed croplands, or herb rich croplands. Payment ranges from 115.55 €/ha for the application of dry animal manure, to 2527.39 €/ha for establishment of species/herb-rich cropland field margins with a special seed mix on clay soils.
 - Another part of the measures is payed for per meter. This applies e.g. to ditches, hedgerows, and tree lanes. Payments vary between €0.10 per meter for ecological ditch cleaning to €5490.48 per hectar and year for hedgerow management.
 - Some measures are paid per piece. E.g. small pools or individual trees. Payment ranges between €2.52 for a <20 cm diameter tree to €105.85 for a large pool / pond.
- Some of the measures have basic and premium levels. Depending on the tree age, or the frequency of growing cereals on croplands, or the tree coverage, payments can vary up to a factor 3 between the basic and premium levels.
- Payment modalities: The collective receives payment from the Netherlands Enterprise Agency. This needs to be requested before May 15 and is paid annually, through a bank transfer.

LOCATION

NETHERLAND

The specific collective in focus, Utrecht Oost, is active in the eastern two-thirds of the Utrecht province, NUTS2 region NL31. The contract solution is implemented in the whole country by 40 different collectives that deal with province-specific nature development plans.

Data and Facts – Contract

Contract feature combination: Subsidies for a few specific agri-environmental measures are result-based. For example, subsidies for botanical grasslands are only provided upon the presence of 4 (out of 72) indicator species.

Risk/uncertainties of participants: A few of the measures are monitored based on results, meaning that a risk of not reaching the objectives can emerge.

Indirect effects: The management packages of which the collective is in charge do not aim at carbon sequestration and reduction of greenhouse gas emission, but this is a side effect. Furthermore, resilience against floods might be improved by setting aside land for water storage or maintaining or establishing small landscape elements. Finally, farm animal health might benefit from an increased density of shade trees in grazing lands.

Controls/monitoring: Provinces and national government are in charge of monitoring the ecological effects of agri-environmental management. This is delegated to NGOs that do regular species monitoring and provide data to the National Flora and Fauna Database. Monitoring is performed by trained volunteers. Indicators used are trends of target species in comparison between areas with and without agri-environmental management. Collectives themselves monitor if the agri-environmental management that has been agreed on is implemented. A special committee is in charge of this monitoring. Indicators used are binary; assessing if the measures are implemented or not. The Dutch Food Safety Authority (Nederlandse Voedsel- en Warenautoriteit, NVWA) inspects at least 5% of the agri-environmental management in the field.

Renewal / termination: The contract can be terminated during the term through a registered letter. This can be done if both parties agree, by the collective in case of non-performance (either quantified result-based or effort based) or if the participant in the collective receives subsidy elsewhere for the same measures as specified through the collective, or by the participant if the collective fails to commit to its payment duties.

Conditions of participation: All farmers in a specific area can join the collective and a collective exists of a minimum of two farmers. There is a detailed catalogue that describes the different management actions that can be performed. Some are specified result-based, some are specified action-based. There is a monitoring scheme. Non-compliance can lead to termination of the contract.

Links to other contractual relationships: The package of measures consists of the basic AEMs, but contains a considerable province level top-up. Province funding in some cases is compensated by a decrease of CAP greening funding.

Context features

Landscape and climate: The regions included in the collective management include (1) Kromme Rijn; (2) Gelderse Vallei; (3) Noorderpark, and (4) Soest. 1, 3, and 4 are peri-urban areas while 2 is a more remote agricultural area. Utrecht province is characterized by a temperate climate with mild winters and summers, and approx. 800mm of precipitation annually. Soils are sandy in Gelderse Vallei en Soest but also clay soils are common. Kromme Rijn region is characterized by a small tributary of the Rhine river. Gelderse Vallei, Noorderpark, and Soest are dominated by grassland with a relatively high density of tree lines. This also applies to most of Kromme Rijn, where 18th and 19th century estates have created a varied landscape. The river levees are in use as fruit orchards.

Farm structure: All farmers and private land owners can join the collective. The region is characterized by a mix of livestock farmers who almost exclusively focus on dairy, and fruit farmers. A few pig farmers and arable farmers are present as well. Dairy farms are on average 40 ha, fruit farms 12 ha. 6% of farms is organic. Farms are very intensively managed. Most farmers are fulltime farmers.



SUCCESS OR FAILURE?



The collective agri-environmental management solution can be considered being successful because of the high participation in collectives. Nevertheless, many environmental and landscape problems still are apparent, and because of the short runtime, it isn't obvious yet if this solution will yield results in terms of species abundance or landscape quality. The contract solution allows for a targeted portfolio of measures that enable optimal solutions for each farm, and the 5-year term allows for real improvement of the situation.

Reasons for success:

The contract solution matches the scale of public good delivery. In previous contract solutions for nature management in agricultural land, it was observed that farm scale implementation doesn't deliver the expected results because of the fragmented implementation. The collective implementation takes away administrative burden.

SWOT analysis



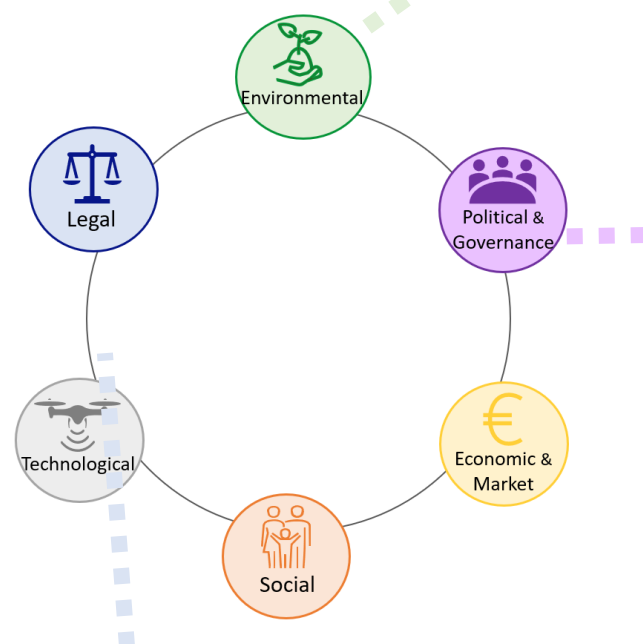
Main external factors influencing success

Political/governance, economic/market, social, technological, legal and environmental factors can all have a strong impact on the success of contract solutions. In this case study an in-depth analysis found that the following, selected factors were of specific importance.



A common understanding of AECPG situation and of the measures of improvement is the general basis for the scheme: In the Kromme Rjin region, the pressure of loss of extensive grassland and natural area, due to increases of population and infrastructure, but also due to the changes of agricultural management, are perceived. There is strong awareness of the landscape and environmental system, being differentiated into different landscape parts, characterised by very specific environmental and agricultural assets, specificities and needs.

Only this broad understanding of the landscape system, enables the common elaboration of targeted measures, which are highly acceptable for the partaking farmers and landowners.



Combining CAP and regional policies as the backbone

In the collective management of the Kromme Rjin in line with the RDP, the respective provinces are responsible for the governance of agri-environmental measures, developing a catalogue listing all possible agri-environmental management measures and a spatially explicit nature management plan indicating nature targets.

This RDP implementation is supported by another important regional policy instrument, namely the **Agenda for a Vital Countryside** (Agenda Vitaal Platteland, AVP) bringing together policy goals from different levels and is implemented under the responsibility of provinces.

Complex legal regulations within collective RDPs

- (1) On the one hand needed to secure the objectives of the program and the fair distribution of subsidies.
- (2) On the other potentially hindering participation as well as transferability to other context situations.

- The legal prerequisites for the collective is to operate in a specific area or region, where the members (farmers and other land managers) **have the right for land use**.
- Further, the participation in the collective has to be **voluntary upon entering**, the collective has to collect the subsidies and distribute them to the individual farmers, meaning the **collective contracts each farmer individually**.
- Finally, the collective bears the responsibility for **monitoring** and **control**.

One of the most important legal conditions are that the participant has the exclusive right to manage the particular land parcel - short term lease cannot be included in the collective and that it is not permitted to receive additional subsidies for the same land parcel (e.g. EU subsidy for financially troubled farms). Particularly the latter requirement can limit the willingness to participate due to income loss.