



Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and  
Food Quality

# Sustainable Food

Public Summary of Policy Document







**Core policy statement Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality**

If consumers are to choose sustainable food, these products must be available in sufficient quantities. We will therefore introduce measures to greatly improve the sustainability of production and supply across the entire chain. We will then encourage consumers to choose sustainable products by launching an intensive awareness-raising campaign. The term 'sustainable' applies to the use of raw materials and space, emissions, energy and water use. However, it also involves creating less waste and improving the welfare of people and animals. In short, production and consumption with respect for people, animals and the environment. These actions are intended to position the Netherlands as a world leader in sustainable food within fifteen years. The Netherlands can make a significant contribution to global food security and to the preservation of the vitality of the global ecosystem. To achieve these aims, the Netherlands will make full use of its prominent global position in the area of food.





# What will we eat tomorrow?

In recent years we have become increasingly aware of the need to live more sustainably. That means less waste, less depletion of the planet's resources and a fairer distribution of these resources among the world's population.

This applies to all areas of life, but certainly to our food. By 2050 there will be some nine billion mouths to feed in the world. How can we do this without exhausting our planet's resources?

And how do we distribute the food? In the world there are currently as many people who are overweight as there are who are undernourished. Problems such as these must be overcome.

How do we wish to produce food in the future and what food do we wish to eat?

What does that mean for a small country like the Netherlands? What does that mean for us as consumers? And what does it mean for farmers, for food manufacturers, and for shops?

When you start to actually consider all the changes that need to happen, it is enough to make your head spin. Where do you start?

## A sensible and ambitious plan

Minister Verburg of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality has prepared a policy document on sustainable food that describes some of the necessary changes. Her approach is based on a combination of common sense and strong ambitions.

The common sense behind this approach is evident. You cannot achieve a sustainable supply of food through setting regulations, nor by imposing rules from the seat of government and certainly not by tackling all fronts at the same time. Sustainable food can only be achieved if everyone cooperates in their own role. And that is what the Minister wishes to actively stimulate, in both the consumer and the producer.

The policy document is ambitious: within fifteen years the Netherlands must be a world leader in sustainable food. This is by no means an overconfident assertion. Although the Netherlands is a small country, it plays a key role in food production and is the second largest exporter of agricultural products in the world, the largest exporter of seed and propagating material and breeding animals and internationally it is a prominent centre of knowledge. This position can only be maintained by also being a pioneer in sustainable food.

Minister Verburg wishes to achieve this through setting key objectives and encouraging cooperation.

## Three key objectives

Based on the realisation that the opportunity for success is greatest by avoiding an approach that tackles all areas at the same time, the Netherlands will concentrate on three key objectives:

1. Stimulating producers into developing sustainable innovations;
2. Stimulating consumers into buying sustainable and healthy food
3. Stimulating the international agenda to ensure good agreements are made.

### Producers

The first key objective begins with the products supplied, because if there aren't any sustainable products on offer, there is no way they can be sold. The supply of products can be quickly increased. Already, within two years it can be possible to raise the amount of sustainably-produced meat and fish on sale in shops and work canteens by 15%. A very promising development is that agreements have been made along the entire production chain, meaning greater sustainability from the raw materials used to the end product.

Promoting innovation in products and production processes will become increasingly important. Minister Verburg will take measures to support and inform consumers about new sustainable products.

## Consumers

It is not just about product availability. These products also have to be sold. Consumers have to be enticed into paying more attention to sustainability and health (and perhaps paying less attention to price).

However, the consumer can also have a major influence, the more demand there is for sustainable products, the more they will be offered by producers.

We must also encourage each other to be less wasteful.

Currently, 30% to 50% of food produced ends up in the bin. Consumers throw away yearly some € 1.6 billion of food (and producers and retailers waste a further € 2 billion yearly). Consumers must know what sustainable food means. The chaotic situation caused by having so much information (certificates, health marks and logos) can certainly be improved.

An instrument called the Voedselbalans will also be introduced to gauge the rate at which consumers are switching to sustainable patterns of food consumption.

## The international agenda

Good international agreements are just as important in stimulating sustainable food production.

If you want to be an international leader, these agreements are even more important. You do not wish to endanger your competitive position through other countries showing less commitment to sustainability. The Netherlands will also help to improve productivity elsewhere in the world, particularly in developing countries.

## Broad cooperation

Cooperation provides the foundation for Minister Verburg's plan. This cooperation must involve all parties involved in food production: the consumer, industry, science and politics.

That is why the Platform for Sustainability in Food was set up. The platform provides a forum for discussion, and its purpose is to make concrete plans and seek answers to important questions, such as: how do we achieve a large supply of sustainable products?

## A turnaround within fifteen years

Rapid action is required, as the Netherlands does not want to miss the boat. Fortunately, in recent years the Netherlands has already made great progress in providing more sustainable and healthier food. The Minister would like to see this process accelerated.

All the initiatives, both small and large-scale, will form part of one common objective: production and consumption that respects people, animals and the environment.

## A change everyone will notice

To stimulate sustainability in food, 'everyone' has to be reached: from consumers to producers, from farmers to retailers, from young to old.

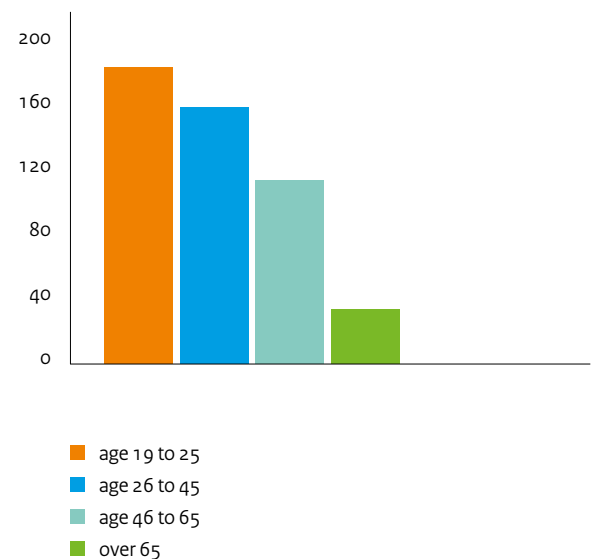
Of course, the Government wishes to set the right example, and it will do so by ensuring that all canteens run by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will from now exclusively serve sustainable food.

And when consumers, producers, farmers, retailers and the Government all take up their responsibility, it will undoubtedly lead to a sustainable food supply. The shape that this will take depends on how the various parties involved cooperate. However, we will gradually start to notice changes to our daily menu:

- when selecting meat and fish, we will pay more attention to making responsible choices;
- we will probably consume more vegetables;
- we will consume more seasonal food;
- our choice of food will be guided by more respect for nature and the environment;
- we will eat more healthily.

And if we do our work well, we will be able to say 'bon appétit' with even greater conviction!

Food wasted yearly (in euros)



# Reactions to the ‘Sustainable Food’ policy document

**Albert Jan Maat,**

Chairman of LTO Nederland (Dutch Organisation for Agriculture and Horticulture)

**‘Sustainability is the future’**

*‘Sustainable production is the future. Producing more food with fewer resources is the challenge for agricultural producers and for all the other links in the production chain. The winners will be those that can perform sustainably.’*

**Dick Boer,**

CEO of Albert Heijn (largest supermarket chain in the Netherlands)

**‘Stimulating responsible consumption’**

*‘It is our ambition to stimulate responsible consumption and to make it easier for customers to choose the responsible and tasty products which are made with extra consideration for people, animals, nature and the environment. We are also noticing that our customers want to make more responsible choices in the products they buy.’*

**Johan van de Gronden,**

Director of the World Wide Fund for Nature

**‘Sustainable fisheries’**

*‘Fish is tasty and healthy, and we also want to be able to enjoy a nice bit of plaice in the future. That’s why we make agreements with stakeholders about sustainable fishing techniques, which do not damage the seabed and minimise by-catches. We are all working together for sustainable North Sea fisheries.’*

**Wouter van Eck,**

campaign leader, Friends of the Earth Netherlands

**‘Less Meat’**

*‘Sustainable livestock farming basically means less livestock farming. The Government must not sit on the fence, but should take active measures to reduce livestock numbers. Less meat means we will be able to continue to enjoy tasty food in the future!’*

**John Huige,**

‘Stad zoekt Boer’

**‘It’s great that we want to lead the field’**

*‘I am delighted that the Netherlands is aiming to be a leader in sustainable food within the next fifteen years. We have to set time limits for ourselves, even if it’s because energy resources and agricultural land are running out.’*

**Bart Combée,**

General Manager of the Dutch Consumer’s Association

**‘Watch out for empty marketing talk’**

*‘It’s great if the industry pays more attention to sustainable food, but it shouldn’t lead to empty marketing speak, as has been the case with health claims and logos.’*

**Cees’t Hart,**

chairman of the Dutch Dairy Association

**‘Safe and healthy’**

*‘The Dutch Dairy Association produces safe and healthy food in a way that is sustainable for people, animals and the environment.’*

**Marja Verkuijlen,**

product Manager of Bonduelle Nederland

**‘Sustainability already at the top of our agenda’**

*‘Sustainable food is already at the top of our agenda, along with stimulating vegetable consumption among people in the Netherlands. We consider the consequences for people and the environment in all the decisions we take.’*

**Nico Roozen,**

director of Solidaridad

**‘Standing together with poor countries’**

*‘Poverty afflicts the lives of many people in developing countries who produce the food we eat every day. That is unacceptable. But you can’t solve poverty alone. Solidaridad works with farmers, trade, the food industry and consumers towards achieving sustainable food production.’*

**Gert Jan Jansen,**

ecologist at the Hof van Twello experimental farm

**‘You can’t be just a bit sustainable’**


*‘You can’t be just a bit sustainable. Sustainability is a concept that must be fully embraced, and it has to be on a small scale.’*

**Bart Pijnenburg,**

Amsterdam Experimental Horticultural Station

**‘Eat food that’s in season’**

*‘We can make fantastic progress in reducing CO2 emissions if everyone eats the food that’s in season.’*



And if we do our work well,  
we will be able to say ‘*bon appétit*’  
with even greater conviction!

From  
the Earth.  
To  
the Earth.

Published by:

The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality  
Prins Clauslaan 8  
P.O. Box 20401 | 2500 EK The Hague  
[www.minlnv.nl](http://www.minlnv.nl)

© Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality | October 2009