

DON'T OBSESS ABOUT 25 PER CENT ORGANIC

The Netherlands shouldn't get obsessed with the target of 25 per cent organic agriculture by 2030. This was one of the conclusions of the *Resource* debate on organic agriculture on 29 April.

There is more than one way to achieve sustainable agriculture that meets environmental and climate targets and restores biodiversity. The organic farming sector holds out inviting prospects with its production conditions and reward system for more sustainable farming practices.

The debate was inspired by a discussion that arose from a *Resource* article. Agro-ecological researcher Wijnand Sukkel called target of 25 per cent organic agriculture unrealistic in present circumstances. Rogier Schulte, professor of Farming Systems Ecology, retorted that it is the duty of scientists to find ways of reaching sustainability targets. Schulte and Sukkel were the speakers at the debate, and Ilse Geijzendorffer, director of the Louis Bolk Institute, was also invited to contribute. More than 50 people attended this fifth *Resource* debate.

Change

Even organic agriculture still has a way to go before it is fully sustainable, asserted agro-ecologist Wijnand Sukkel. He proposed what he calls Organic 3.0 as a means of achieving all the climate and biodiversity targets. Rogier Schulte, professor of Farming Systems Ecology, added that WUR should come up with realistic proposals for how farmers can make that transition. We in the Netherlands must stop piling on the requirements for farmers, and at WUR we must design ways for them to become sustainable. In the transition to climate-



Is 25 percent organic farming by 2030 realistic in the Netherlands? *Resource* ran a debate on this on 29 April. Photo Shutterstock

neutral agriculture, organic farming has a pioneering role to play because it already has a network of climate- and environmentally conscious producers and consumers, argues Schulte. Ilse Geijzendorffer, director of the Louis Bolk Institute, shares the view that organic agriculture is one of the options for making agriculture sustainable.

Price differences

To speed up the transition to organic food among Dutch consumers, the price differences between organic and regular food products need to go down, said Geijzendorffer and WUR economist Katja Logatcheva. That could be achieved through VAT adjustments. It also helps if public sector organizations such as schools drive up demand by routinely serving organic food, said Schulte. A

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thorny issue in the Netherlands is the high land prices that impede the transition to organic farming, because it has lower yields than conventional farming. By way of comparison: in Austria, many farmers have switched to organic farming on marginal land where the yields were already low. But that only partially explains the big market share of organic food in Austria, said the Austrian farmer Alfred Grand, who attended the debate too. 'Supermarkets invest in selling organic food. Don't focus too much on the price. People will buy a Mercedes too. Food is emotion.' ■