

Agriculture minister Staghouwer resigns – now what?

Henk Staghouwer's resignation did not come as a surprise to Public Administration & Policy expert Jeroen Candel. Now politicians in The Hague face an enormous task. 'The coalition will need to brainstorm to put together a comprehensive package of measures.'

What next? Candel: 'Now we need someone who has a long-term vision for the food system, someone who is prepared to take difficult decisions. Farmers are demanding a future. The government says farmers need to transition to less intensive forms of agriculture. They are being asked to deliver more environmental services but nothing is said about how they are supposed to earn income from this. Available instruments for tackling the nitrogen problem, such as European agricultural policy, have not been used.'



Photo ANP

The ChristenUnie political party will have to come up with a replacement for Staghouwer. But it is a small party with few administrators with seniority and experience in this area, says Candel. 'You want someone who can jump right in, but I don't see any obvious candidates. Anyway, paradoxically the agricultural crisis can't be resolved by agricultural policy alone. The coalition government

as a whole will have to consider the matter. Staghouwer inherited an agricultural policy from previous governments that continually postponed tackling tricky topics such as nitrogen, the climate and biodiversity. Farmers are justifiably frustrated that such huge demands are being made of them but not of other parties in the supply chain, including consumers. A comprehensive food policy is required, but that virtually means breaking open the coalition agreement.' We really need a new Green Deal for the Netherlands, says Candel, to fit in with the EU's Green Deal. 'A plan in which you figure out how to make the food system and economy as a whole future-proof with due regard for sustainability and fairness. But that is an immense task: the coalition will need to brainstorm and jointly come up with a vision for the future.' ^{WA}