

Wind of change needed for energy farms

To avoid jeopardizing the energy transition, solar and wind farms need to be made more attractive and multifunctional. That is the gist of a joint position paper by the Dutch Nature and Environment Federations (NMF) and WUR.

‘Otherwise we shall get more and more of what we don’t want, even though we increasingly know what we do want,’ says Sven Stremke, associate professor of Landscape Architecture. To meet the Climate Agreement goals, the Netherlands needs to be generating 35 terawatt hours (TWh) of renewable energy on land by 2030. What that means is becoming increasingly obvious, with wind and solar farms springing up rapidly around the country. Many of them look almost indus-

trial and are not exactly a pleasant sight or an appealing local feature. Such ‘industrial’ wind and solar farms are shooting up all over the place because of the current subsidy system, which primarily targets the greatest possible CO2 reduction at the lowest cost. Factors such as nature or landscape are low priority. As a result, there is a surge in objections to solar farms at the moment. As for wind turbines, there was not much enthusiasm for them in the first place. Partly due to all the opposition, the implementation of the regional energy strategy (RES) is running behind schedule.

Room for improvement

The objections are not unfounded, though, as long-term research by WUR

shows. The spatial quality of recent energy projects is not a patch on that of the earlier innovative examples. Promising combinations with nature, landscape or agriculture are largely absent from the newer projects – with a handful of exceptions, such as a solar farm where soft fruit is grown under the panels (see page 3). NMF and the WUR experts propose that every land-based wind and solar farm should meet a number of key criteria related to people, nature and the economy. These include leaving landscape patterns intact, preserving soil quality and preferably ensuring joint ownership of the farm with the local community. They also argue that the farms should have a dual function, combining energy generation with agriculture, nature or recreation. ME