

All regions can contribute to agriculture's environmental targets



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Dutch agriculture can largely achieve the environmental targets imposed on it if regions apply smart tailored solutions. That does have far-reaching consequences for farmers, though. These conclusions are from a scenario study commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture and published at the start of the year.

The ministry asked WUR researchers what would need to be done regionally to achieve the national targets for water quality, nitrogen and greenhouse gas emissions. The findings can be used to suggest options for the provincial authorities, which are currently working on 'area-specific plans' for achieving the national environmental targets for agriculture.

The report emphasizes that there are large regional differences in types of farms, nature

areas and the state of the soil. 'That means each area can help hit the nitrogen, water and climate targets in its own way,' says Edo Gies, a senior researcher in Dynamic Spatial Use at Wageningen Environmental Research. The peatlands in Zuid-Holland and Friesland for example can make a big contribution to the climate targets if the groundwater levels there are raised, which would mean less CO₂ being released through the oxidation of peat. In the Veluwe with its sandy soil, the main

potential gains lie in reducing nitrogen emissions from livestock farming.

The total package of measures will not be enough to achieve the targets in full. For instance, it will not be possible to meet the phosphate norms because of the release of phosphate that has already accumulated in the soil over the years.

According to the researchers, livestock farming in the Netherlands needs to become less intensive. 'The measures we investigated require farmers to make far-reaching changes,' says Gies. 'That is why we need their help in arriving at a new, less harmful kind of agriculture.'

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