



Promoting a Diversity of Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural Practices

Policy Brief

The Netherlands

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Promoting a Diversity of Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural Practices

"The future of agriculture depends on diverse hands, minds, and methods working together for a thriving, sustainable countryside."

"Diverse farming is resilient farming—especially when we recognize the knowledge and leadership women bring to the field."

Executive Summary

The Netherlands' agricultural sector faces mounting environmental, social, and market pressures. Traditional monoculture models are proving increasingly unsustainable.

Despite the Netherlands' reputation for agricultural innovation, female farmers and rural entrepreneurs remain underrepresented and under-supported in national policies targeting inclusive and sustainable agriculture. While many women lead groundbreaking ecological, social, and economic innovations, existing CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) and NSP (National Strategic Plan) mechanisms insufficiently recognize or target their specific contributions.

Diverse farming approaches—including agroecology, biodynamic farming, permaculture, and multifunctional agriculture—offer pathways toward more resilient, sustainable systems.

However, these approaches, often led by women, remain structurally under-supported in national and European funding frameworks. CAP and CSP must intentionally nurture a wider range of farming models if rural economies and ecosystems are to remain viable in the future.

This policy brief recommends advancing inclusive, sustainability-centered farming by strengthening gender-responsive CAP measures, expanding training and access to regenerative and agroecological practices, and providing structural support for multifunctional farm models, many of which are spearheaded by women.

The Challenge

- 🏠 The Dutch agricultural sector faces pressing environmental and social challenges, including nitrogen crises, biodiversity loss, and rural demographic shrinkage. Yet, innovation pathways led by women—such as regenerative farming, community-supported agriculture, and multifunctional farms combining care, education, and production—remain marginalized.
- 🏠 Current CAP and NSP frameworks focus heavily on technical modernization and scale enlargement, with insufficient attention to sustainable, community-oriented, and gender-inclusive practices.
- 🏠 Existing advisory services and funding programs rarely tailor support toward smaller, multifunctional, female-led farms despite their significant contributions to environmental stewardship, rural vitality, and social cohesion. The dominant policy focus remains on technical innovation within industrial farming rather than on systemic transformation toward diversified, multifunctional, and regenerative models.
- 🏠 Women leading these innovations encounter multiple barriers: limited eligibility for subsidies, land-use regulations that fail to recognize multifunctionality, and an advisory system heavily geared toward large-scale, single-sector operations.
- 🏠 Without targeted support, diverse farming will remain niche, and rural sustainability goals will falter.

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Policy Solutions

At national and provincial level

- 🏠 **Introduce CAP sub-measures specifically targeting multifunctional, sustainable, and female-led farms**, ensuring dedicated funding windows and simplified application processes.
- 🏠 **Fund pilot projects and living labs** showcasing diverse, sustainable farming systems, with special emphasis on female-led initiatives.
- 🏠 **Expand advisory and training programs** on regenerative, biodynamic, and agroecological practices, prioritizing female farmers and rural entrepreneurs as primary recipients.
- 🏠 **Integrate gender equity objectives explicitly into environmental and rural sustainability goals** of CSP measures and LEADER programs.
- 🏠 **Encourage flexible provincial land-use policies** allowing multifunctional activities (e.g., care farms, educational farms, food forests) as legitimate farming operations.
- 🏠 **Invest in gender-responsive extension services** that not only provide technical advice but also empower women to develop leadership skills and resilient farm businesses.
- 🏠 **Enhance visibility campaigns** highlighting female-led sustainable farming as a model for future agriculture.
- 🏠 **Establish knowledge-sharing platforms** that connect practitioners of diverse farming with researchers, consumers, and policymakers.



- Provide financial incentives and risk-sharing tools** for farmers transitioning toward diversified production systems.
- Develop **training programs** focused on the business models of diversified farming, targeting young and female farmers.

Practical Tips at local level

- Local land use plans may unnecessarily restrict certain types of farming
- Use land policies to make land available for new entrants close to build-up areas
- Invite key players to town and village halls to facilitate networking

Supporting Evidence & Best Practices

- Dutch examples: Regenerative cow farming by female-led farms in remote rural areas shows clear environmental and business viability, yet struggles with access to tailored technical support and subsidies.
- CSA models: Community-supported agriculture initiatives, often co-led by women, promote soil health, biodiversity, and social cohesion but rarely receive structural CAP support despite proven sustainability impacts.
- In FLIARA 200 female innovators have been interviewed. Fact sheets produce information on how their work has developed. **Dutch biodynamic farms** successfully integrate education, food production, and biodiversity enhancement yet face disproportionate bureaucratic hurdles in accessing public funding.
- Community-supported agriculture farms** demonstrate market resilience and high consumer loyalty, yet lack recognition in traditional agricultural policy frameworks.
- French and German CAP Strategic Plans** increasingly recognize agroecology as a priority area for public support, providing examples for the Netherlands to follow.

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Conclusion & Call to Action

The Netherlands must urgently integrate gender responsiveness into its agricultural sustainability policies. Promoting inclusive and sustainable agricultural practices means:

CALL TO ACTION:

- Acknowledging and financially supporting women's innovations in regenerative and multifunctional farming.
- Reforming CAP and NSP interventions to be truly inclusive.
- Investing in a new generation of diverse rural innovators—regardless of gender—who prioritize environmental stewardship, social resilience, and economic viability. Embed support for diversified models at the heart of agricultural and rural development strategies.
- Actively target female-led farms and businesses advancing multifunctional and sustainable farming.
- Remove legal, financial, and cultural barriers that favor monoculture dominance

A thriving countryside depends on fostering the full richness of its agricultural imagination.

Without these changes, the Netherlands risks missing its environmental goals and deepening gender gaps in rural leadership and innovation. A fair and sustainable agricultural future requires full inclusion now



Further Reading

FAO (2018). Gender and Rural Advisory Services Assessment Tool

www.fliara.eu

[Innovators - FLIARA Project](#)

[Ambassadors - FLIARA Project](#)

Silvia Sivini, Annie Roos, & Irene Leonardelli. (2024). D.3.3: Women-led Innovations in Agriculture and Rural Areas, Lessons Learned Report and Fact Sheets on Female Innovations. FLIARA. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14045390>

Platform Multifunctional Agriculture (Netherlands).

About FLIARA

The project is on a mission to create a more sustainable future by highlighting the role of women in agriculture and rural areas. FLIARA will boost understanding of the needs and challenges facing women leading innovative environmental and rural development practices in EU farming and rural areas.

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Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

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