

Socio-economic resilience



Background

Farmers are entrepreneurs that sometimes may feel that they are being managed in how to do their job as well as being piled under by rules and regulation. This may lead to growing displeasure, unhappiness and resistance amongst farmers at the expense of their relations with influencers, stakeholders, policy makers and society, who are often experiencing the same challenges. Approaches that encourage collaboration, discussion and working on perspectives that are carried more broadly can help to steer and reach multi-stakeholders' targets, wishes and desires. One such approach is called in the Netherlands the 'De Marke Model'. This model may serve as a basis, example or reference for similar approaches elsewhere.

How does the strategy work?

The agro-Innovation centre, 'De Marke' in the Netherlands, has developed a **model** that allows different stakeholders to work together on building a better future perspective. It does so by deviating from a typical top-down approach and applying a more effective steering model for sustainable agriculture.

'De Marke steering model' explained

The model is based on ideas and wishes from farmers to collaborate with a regional network of responsible parties. The network in this model consists of both public and private parties that have an interest in their surrounding or relevant rural area. They work in close cooperation with the farmers in the region. Such parties include dairy companies, banks and all levels of government (in Holland, government entities include the state, province, municipality and water board). Collectively such actors are termed the 'Markeraad', (the Marke council). Once the Markeraad has established itself, it was expanded with interested parties such as nature and environmental organizations.

Together with the farmers a **regional development plan (RDP)** is developed, in an open dialogue. The RDP sets targets on qualitative goals for several objectives: water, biodiversity, conservation agriculture and ammonia and nitrate emissions. Achieving the targets result in farmers receiving premia or rewards that have been predetermined for the targets achieved. In other words, the more targets achieved the greater the financial reward. This incentivises farmers to work on these targets as part of their self-determined **business development plan (BDP)**. In this manner the farmer decides themselves on the targets and pace that they wish to achieve. The implementation of the BDP is further supported by groups of such farmers cooperating in a network to share knowledge, insights and experience.

In addition to its role at steering the project, the council can take up other roles by facilitating farmers with knowledge (development), organization and communication. A graphical representation of the model is provided in Figure 1.



Figure 1: The De Marke model explores and aligns, develops opportunities on rural and regional goals in close co-operation with different stakeholders and interested parties.

Short word on De Marke, model and farm

De Marke model's name is associated with the research farm and agro-innovation centre of Wageningen University and Research. This is a dairy farm on dry, sandy soil with 85 dairy cows on a total area of 55 hectares. De Marke farm is mainly involved in promoting the adoption of the applied research investigated on the farm. One such project, *Koeien & Kansen*, 'cows & opportunities', is a collaboration with a network of 15 future minded dairy farmers that provides testing, evaluation and improvements to the Dutch dairy sector. De Marke collaborates with other knowledge institutes and dairy farmers across Northern Europe to design and test innovative research projects, particularly on nutrition and management.



Figure 2: De Marke farm in Hengelo, the Netherlands

Specific advice

Ensure that there is a regional implementation organization that facilitates the dialogue between the different parties (farmers and council). In addition, this more neutral party should keep an eye on the results achieved and compare them with the programme goals to determine the rewards and premia awarded to participating farmers.

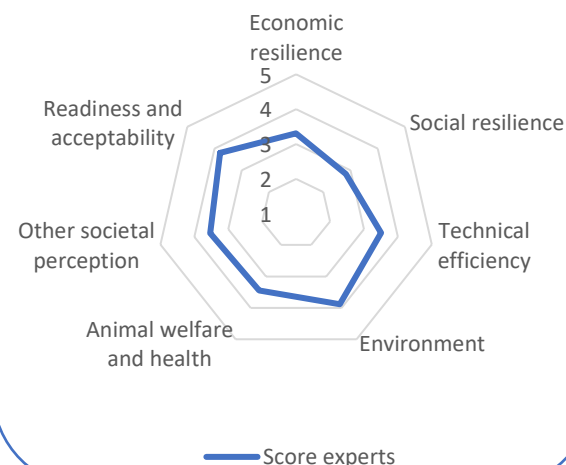
Positive features

1. Farmers' decisions are based on learning and development, rather than on controlling and enforcement.
2. Decision-making is based on mutual agreement, therefore has a strong support base.
3. There are clear incentives that motivate farmers to work on actual goals, increasing effectiveness leading to faster improvement of environmental targets, at a lower cost.
4. There is positive communication in an open dialogue.

Be mindful on these points

The process of working together with different stakeholders and interested parties with different goals, angles and perspectives may be time consuming. Parties should be open minded and strive for synergy as extreme targets are rarely achieved. In addition, the farmer ultimately decided, potentially disappointing parties with different or higher goals. Monitoring and assuring what's monitored is of the utmost importance to maintaining integrity and clarity. If this is not done adequately, the system may not withstand the resulting friction that occurs. Therefore, periodic collective evaluation of the policies is required to adjust, attune and (re)align, if necessary.

Assessment of method



Quote of the farmer:
 "Showing craftsmanship and taking efforts are rewarded!"

Sources: Vruchtbare Kringloop Oost, LTO Noord; <https://vruchtbarekringloopoost.nl/glb-pilot-ontwerp-regionaal-netwerksturingsmodel-markemodel/>
 Agro-innovation center De Marke: <https://www.wur.nl/nl/onderzoek-resultaten/onderzoeksinstituten/livestock-research/innovatiecentra-en-faciliteiten/de-marke/bedrijf.htm>