Towards a Future-Proof Livestock Sector and a Strong European Protein Strategy

Dutch priorities for the EU Vision on Livestock Farming and the European Protein Strategy

The Netherlands welcomes the European Commission's work on both the Vision for the Future of Livestock Farming and the European Protein Strategy. These are strategically important initiatives that can strengthen the resilience, sustainability and competitiveness of Europe's food and feed system. Both strategies must be ambitious and pragmatic, providing a credible roadmap for a livestock sector that is economically viable, animal-friendly, climate-smart and resilient, while unlocking the potential of alternative protein sources and circular feed systems.

In general: environment and sustainability

- Significant steps are being taken to make the Dutch livestock sector more sustainable and to further reduce emissions into the environment.
- A key step in this process is the introduction of enforceable, farm-specific emission standards for greenhouse gases and nitrogen by 2035
- In order to create a level playing field within the EU, it is important for the Netherlands that ambitious EU policy is introduced to reduce emissions (of greenhouse gases and other pollutants) into the environment. Future EU regulations must however provide sufficient room for livestock farmers to choose measures suited to their individual farms, so that they can decide how to make their businesses more sustainable.
- To reach climate targets, it is also important to have a harmonised system of rules to measure/calculate the effects of measures implemented at farm-level on the overall greenhouse gas emissions of the agriculture sector. This reduces uncertainty in Member States' national greenhouse gas inventories.

Animal Health: Prevention first

- The Netherlands considers the wide acceptance and application of preventive vaccination against specific infectious animal diseases, including avian influenza, as a priority. Vaccination in general is a safe and effective additional measure to prevent outbreaks. Vaccination should also be compatible with maintaining market access when trade safeguards are applied appropriately.
- The EU should actively pursue acceptance of the use of vaccination strategies in a Member State by third-country trading partners, so that preventive vaccination does not result in unjustified trade restrictions. The Netherlands is willing to take a leading role in building a coalition of Member States on this topic.
- Antimicrobial use in the livestock sector can be further reduced by keeping animals healthy and applying antibiotics in a targeted and prudent manner when necessary. The Commission should support practical biosecurity capacity-building at farm level.

Animal welfare: A level playing field

- The Netherlands is committed to humane livestock farming based on the intrinsic value & integrity of animals and also on ensuring good nutrition, good housing, good health, essential natural behaviors and positive mental state. This approach must be reflected in revised EU animal welfare legislation for farmed animals.
- The Netherlands supports phasing out cage housing for poultry and sows, with clear and enforceable timelines in revised EU legislation expected in 2026 and 2027.
- Higher EU standards must be accompanied by equivalent import conditions for animals and animal products from third countries. Without this, European producers face an unfair competitive disadvantage and there will continue to be conflicts with public morality regarding animal welfare. A coherent approach covering import requirements and enforcement is important. Any such approach must be in line with the EU's international obligations, including those stemming from the WTO.

- Benchmarking can be a tool that enables us to support developments in the field of sustainability (environmental, animal welfare and social) through the market. To this end, however, a clear link must be established between different participants in the supply chain, including the consumers.

European protein Strategy: Strategic autonomy

Today, 93% of soy imported into the Netherlands is used in animal feed. The Netherlands believes the Protein Strategy should rest on two pillars: feed and animal nutrition, focused on maximizing the use of organic residues, insects and innovation; and human consumption, promoting dietary shifts, legume cultivation and food innovation.

- The EU should stimulate cultivation and breeding of protein crops through CAP Strategic Plans and swiftly implement the NGT regulation to support more resilient varieties. Research and innovation could be supported through Horizon Europe (2021-2027).
- Valuable by-products should only be diverted to energy production if they cannot feasibly serve a higher purpose in food or feed supply chains. The Netherlands advocates for a prioritization framework under RED III placing food and feed above energy use for eligible by-products. To this end, the Netherlands calls for a hierarchy under RED III, ensuring that eligible by-products are prioritised for food and feed applications before being considered for energy use.

Insects and organic residues: Circular potential

- The Netherlands advocates for a dedicated legal category for insects intended for animal feed or technical uses, separate from conventional livestock. Currently, insects fall under the livestock category, which unduly restricts the types of organic residues that can be used as insect feed. A separate category would unlock significant circular potential.
- Research from Wageningen University demonstrates that currently prohibited organic residues, not for human consumption, are well-suited as substrates for insect farming of insects intended for animal feed or technical uses, provided appropriate feed safety measures are in place. The Netherlands calls on the Commission to request EFSA to assess which organic residues can safely be used as insect substrates for insects for animal feed or technical uses.
- The Netherlands also advocates for a targeted revision of the TSE feed ban regulations, in line with EFSA safety assessments, to allow processed animal proteins in feed for other animal species where safety is confirmed. The Netherlands is prepared to initiate a joint declaration at AGRIFISH to build Member State support for this reform.

Protein transition and crop cultivation

- The European Protein Strategy must include the consumption dimension. The Netherlands has set a national ambition of reaching a 50/50 balance between animal and plant-based protein consumption by 2030 and would welcome a similar orientation in the EU strategy, supported by EU-level consumption monitoring and efforts to make the food environment more sustainable (the places where people buy their food), for example by setting procurement requirements for plant-based products in the own food purchasing.
- Stronger supply chain collaboration on domestic cultivation of protein crops must be stimulated through CAP eco-schemes, research and innovation could be supported through Horizon Europe (2021-2027). World market prices currently make it difficult for European farmers to compete; value-driven chains and producer organizations are needed to create a sustainable market for locally grown proteins.
- The Netherlands is prepared to work with like-minded Member States, including Germany, France, Denmark and Belgium, to develop a joint position on protein feed regulatory reform and to share best practices through an EU-wide knowledge platform.