SPRINT SUCCESS STORIES

CITIZEN CO-OPERATIVE LAND PURCHASING FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Land van Ons is a citizen cooperative in Netherlands that buys land through crowdfunding and rents it to farmers to undertake sustainable land management practices with the aim of restoring biodiversity and the landscape.

The initiative aims to transform 15% of Dutch farmland into biodiversity-friendly areas within ten years, fostering ecological balance and reducing the reliance on synthetic pesticides. Land van Ons collaborates with local farmers to implement sustainable practices, enhance soil health, and improve biodiversity, ultimately creating a scalable model for community-driven environmental stewardship.

THE CHALLENGE

- Declining biodiversity and deteriorating soil health caused by intensive agricultural practices in the Netherlands
- Loss of biodiversity due to monoculture and pesticide use
- Soil degradation from unsustainable farming practices
- Disconnect between urban populations and rural agricultural issues
- Financial barriers to land acquisition and sustainable farming transitions
- Scepticism and resistance to change among traditional farming communities.

MAIN OBSTACLES

- Extremely high land prices, driven by the dense population, high demand for agricultural and residential land and speculative investments makes it difficult to purchase land.
- Large-scale agribusinesses have significant financial resources, allowing them to outbid smaller, sustainability-focused initiatives, like Land van Ons.

BACKGROUND

- The initiative started in 2019 in response to the pressing environmental issues affecting Dutch farmland
- They believed a cooperative approach could empower citizens to take direct action in preserving and restoring the natural habitat
- By purchasing land and implementing sustainable farming practices, they aim to demonstrate the viability and benefits of biodiversity-friendly agriculture
- They seek to bridge the gap between urban and rural population, fostering a sense of shared ownership and stewardship over the land
- They aim to provide a scalable model that can inspire similar initiatives in other regions.

KEY OBJECTIVE

Land van Ons aims to purchase 15%, or 300,000 ha, of Dutch agricultural land so that is managed sustainably and restores biodiversity and the landscape.

HOW IT WORKS

Cooperative participants

- Each member pays an annual membership of €30 - €20 for the operation of the cooperative and €10 for m2 of land.
- To prevent speculation, participants can only sell their land ownership after 2 years.
- Members have the opportunity to visit one of the plots at least once a year
- They have access to a monthly newsletter and to inspirational and educational webinars
- All participants have an equal vote. Together, they approve the budget, as well as the annual accounts and have opportunities to

Land management

- Once land is purchased it is assessed and a land management plan for restoration is made
- Multi-year studies in collaboration with universities, research institutes and knowledgeable participants, offer evidence-based insights to guide land management practices and policy advocacy
- The cooperative pays for the land restoration and organises planting days for new crops
- Farmers rent the land and manage the plots based on the management plans.
- Farmers are offered guidance and training programmes on sustainable agriculture techniques
- Farmers receive financial incentives and support through grants, low-interest loans, or direct subsidies to implement biodiversity-friendly practices

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SUCCESS FACTORS

- Growing public concern about environmental issues and biodiversity loss
- The cooperative model enabled the pooling of resources from many individuals, making it feasible to collectively purchase and manage agricultural land
- Supportive national and EU policies promoting biodiversity and sustainable agriculture provided a favourable policy context.
- Advances in sustainable farming technologies and practices, along with a strong sense of community and interest in local food systems, motivated people to participate.
- Access to educational resources and expert knowledge on sustainable agriculture, coupled with crowdfunding platforms and financial mechanisms, facilitated the collection of funds from a large number of small investors

TRANSFERABILITY

- The approach of Land van Ons can be applied to other countries/regions with similar environmental challenges.
- Key factors for success include: community involvement, cooperative governance and strong educational components.
- There is already a similar initiative in Germany where the land is cheaper and therefore more land is easily bought.

Read more about Land van Ons here https://landvanons.nl/

RESULTS ACHIEVED SO FAR

- Acquisition of over 3 million square meters of agricultural land and initiated biodiversity restoration projects
- Engagement of over 28,000 participants.
- Demonstration of measurable improvements in soil health and biodiversity
- Stronger connections between urban and rural populations by involving city dwellers in rural land management
- Significant increase in public interest and participation in sustainable farming as a result of educational outreach.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Community engagement and buy-in are essential.** Active involvement of local communities fosters shared ownership and long-term commitment
- **Transparent governance is important.** Enabling members to vote on important decisions online ensures accountability and trust.
- **Ongoing education on sustainable practices**: Continuous learning equips the farming community to implement effective, environmentally friendly methods.
- **Collaboration with local farmers and all of their stakeholders is vital**: Success depends on strong partnerships with farmers and their networks, ensuring mutual benefit.
- **The power of volunteers**. Volunteers play a crucial role and can achieving a huge amount of work.

This factsheet was produced by Jane Mills, Countryside & Community Research Institute.

Research authors: Paula Harkes, Josselin Rouillard