

Top Visionary

Re-rooting the Dutch Food System

Who We Are

This Vision is developed by scientists from Wageningen University and Research; representatives from three recently established farmer organizations (Toekomstboeren, Caring Farmers, and de Nieuwe Boerenfamilie); and environmental NGOs including the Foundation for Nature and Environment and the Centre for Agriculture and Environment and the Dutch Association of Biodynamic Agriculture.

The fourteen members of the team, who were all born and live in the Netherlands, are motivated by the belief that evolving the Dutch food system should be focused on creating the best future possible for generations to come.

The Challenge

A flat, small, and densely populated country, the Netherlands' agro-ecological location, unique governance structure, and rich history of trade earned this tiny country the position of number two global exporter of food (as measured by value) in 2017. This great success has led to environmental challenges in the Netherlands, a small country with intensely cultivated fields between bustling cities and suburbs. Recent studies show that the country has exceeded its share in nitrogen, phosphorus, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Unhealthy and unsustainable eating patterns have also become widespread in the Netherlands. Currently, only 16% of adults consume the daily recommended amount of fruit and vegetables, and they eat an excessive amount of red and processed meat. About half of all adults are overweight. Most of the food consumed in the Netherlands is imported, and over 275 pounds of edible food is wasted per person per year.

The Facts*

Unhealthy food is responsible for



of disease-related health costs in people in the Netherlands

6 billion euros Health care costs per year due to unhealthy food



*Citations available upon request

“To get to a safe and just food system, three things need to change. (1) We need to move from linear to circular food systems; (2) we need to reconnect people to their food; and (3) we need a new economy that goes beyond GDP and serves the planet and all its inhabitants.”

The Vision

for the year 2050

To shift one of the world's leading agricultural economies from an imperative of producing more to one of producing better, employing sustainable practices and technologies to safeguard resources, regenerate soils, and minimize environmental impact.

Our Solution

To effectively shift from the urgency of producing more food to the standard of sustainable and circular food production, we identified key actions needed for a successful future in which this Vision becomes a reality:

- We must increase integrated systems thinking across the food domain (policy, academia, production) by influencing policymakers and scientists to adopt the ideas and mindset of our Vision.

Widespread consumer behaviors must adapt to a better food system, including eating more seasonal foods, shifting to a more plant-based diet, and reducing food and nutrient waste. We will work with retailers and restaurants to make healthy foods more attractive and desirable (both in cost and presentation).

- We will launch the Food System Action Programme, consisting of events from workshops to cutting-edge experimental pilots, to increase shared knowledge and stakeholder consumer involvement.

- We will develop, define and implement a clear set of regional and environmental ceilings for stakeholders in food production to stay under for an ethical, social foundation for the food system.
- The paradigm and narrative must shift to a more holistic, nourishing and circular one over the next three years. We will promote our Vision to the general public to increase connections between consumers and citizens in the food system, as well as to garner support and encourage behavior change towards more conscious and sustainable food choices.
- We will promote the systemic transformation to a healthier and more sustainable food environment, including a transition to an economic system that supports circularity and provides the necessary incentives to promote healthier lifestyles and more conscious consumption. We will pave a path towards an economy focused on well-being instead of one that focuses exclusively on economic gain.