

# From green desert to a thriving landscape

## Western Peat Meadows, the Netherlands



Prepared by Sven Sielhorst of Wij.land for the "Investing in Landscapes: A Challenge for Finance Innovation, A Wealth of Opportunity," virtual event convened by the 1000 Landscapes for 1 Billion People initiative, Laudes Foundation, and IKEA Foundation on February 22, 2023.

# Western Peat Meadows Landscape Context

## *The Netherlands*

1. Description:
  - Primarily wetlands with characteristically Dutch grasslands, cows, windmills, dikes, water, etc.
  - Important habitat for meadow birds
  - Currently managed for dairy farming
  - Bordered by urban centers and significant economic activity
2. 125,000 hectares
3. Challenges:
  - Poor soil biology and high reliance on fertilizers
  - Reduced farmer income
  - Decreased soil water levels caused by systemic drainage
  - Spike in carbon emissions
  - Rise in the price of land means regenerative farmers are priced out



Figure 1. Map of the Western Peat Meadows

# Wij.land leads activities on the ground

1. Partners include **Wij.land** (landscape partnership), **Natuurmonumenten** (national partner), and **Commonland** (international partner)
2. Wij.land is a non-profit and leads the work in the peat meadow area together with a **network of 270 active farmers**, ecologists, scientists and many others on themes such as **grassland rich in herbs, sustainable soil management, and increasing biodiversity**. The group of participating farmers is growing steadily.
3. Active since **2016**
4. Vision is for a **healthy, biodiverse and resilient landscape** that creates ecological, economic and social value for future generations by restoring the **balance between agriculture and nature working hand in hand with farmers** for the future with passion and craftsmanship.

## Farmer-centered safe space for inspiration and learning





# Landscape synergies for impact at scale

- **Farmers are supported to test new concepts** in pilot projects, for example in the field of natural soil management, wet crops, biodiversity and closing cycles.
- Wij.land supports **deployment of successful pilots on a larger scale** and communicates learnings from farmer innovations through learning networks.
- An **innovation fund supports entrepreneurs** to develop viable businesses for landscape restoration or regenerative products and services.

## Situation 2020

Peat meadow landscape – mono function – (dairy) cattle farm



## Situation 2040

Peat meadow landscape – multi functional farm cherishing cultural history



Figure 2. Potential situation in 2040 vs 2020



Figure 3. Conventional and regenerative farming neighbours

# Landscape investment portfolio

Projects ready for funding or actively incubated:

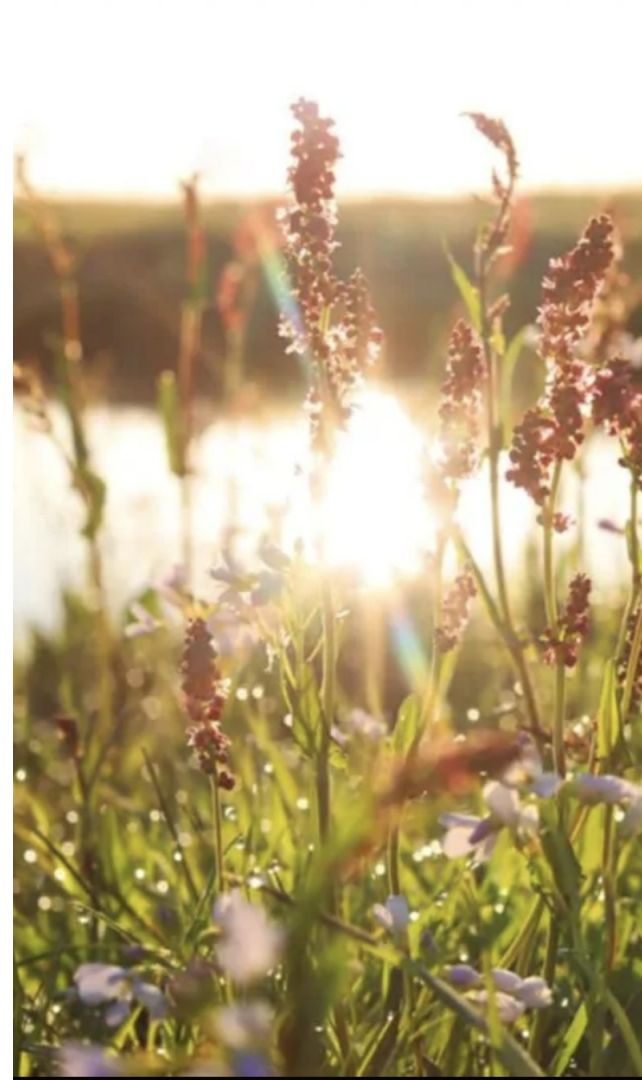
- Local regenerative businesses (such as Wilder Land, Grutto)

Projects already funded:

- Demonstration farms program
- Comparative farm cost-benefit analysis
- Set up/manage farmer learning network(s)
- Soil, grassland and other farmer learning programs

Financial instruments:

- Prototype carbon credits and methodology development for dairy farming on peat lands (Rabo Carbon Bank) next to other Payments for Ecosystem Services (through EU's CAP), such as water and meadow bird management
- Peat Meadow Fund (small grants); 2 funders committed
- Aardpeer: EUR 10M+ raised for land bank for long-term land-lease arrangements for regen farming and looking for donors and investors to scale



# Partners and supporters



**GIESKES · STRIJBIS**  
FONDS



**COMMONLAND**  
4 RETURNS FROM LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

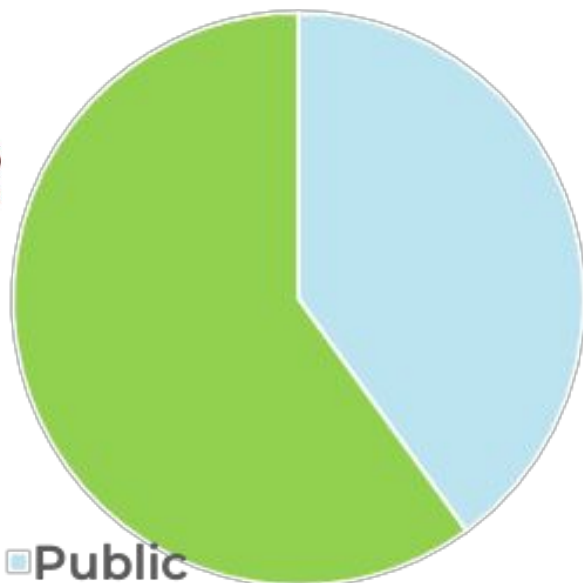
*Rabo Carbon Bank* 



**CONTRIBUTE**  
FOUNDATION



## Donors Split



Public  
Private (philanthropic)



Ministerie van Landbouw,  
Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit



Ministerie van Onderwijs,  
Cultuur en Wetenschap



provincie :: Utrecht



provincie  
**ZUID HOLLAND**



Hoogheemraadschap van  
**Rijnland**

# Financing needs

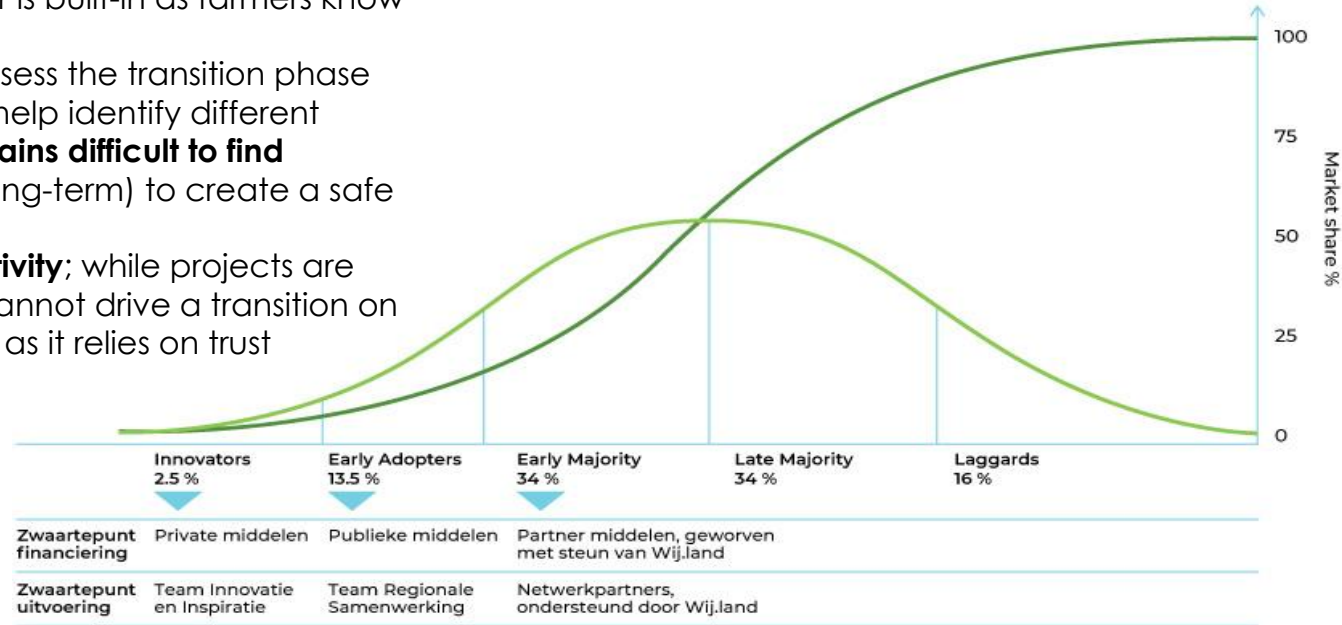
1. The main need is to finance multi-annual support of farmer support and the learning network, so that Wij.land can respond to their needs and opportunities regardless of whether there happens to be a project the farmers are participating in.
2. As such, long-term and unrestricted grant funding continues to be critical to ensure there is flexibility and continuity.
3. Seek 60:40 split between private (more flexible) and public (more project-based) grants funding to allow for agility and flexibility to respond to the needs of the landscape.
4. There is sufficient public and private capital available for investment and divestment, i.e., taking land out of production or transitioning it to incorporate more room for natural capital, but there is a lack of appropriate financing for the transition process to enable farmers to change their practices.

# Landscape Investment: Lessons Learned

1. There is a need for **flexible grant funding** (± EUR 15-30k) to farmers to take small steps on their farm. This rewards initiative and allows for entrepreneurship, trust, and de-risking of the farming transition (through Peat Meadow Fund).
2. Farmers are entrepreneurial but **need the time to shift and confidence** that it has a chance of succeeding. An exit policy for the funder is built-in as farmers know they rely on themselves.
3. Wij.land uses a model to assess the transition phase of farmers in its network to help identify different forms of funding, but it **remains difficult to find process funding** (flexible, long-term) to create a safe space to engage farmers.
4. **Transition is an ongoing activity**; while projects are temporary activities. You cannot drive a transition on a project- by-project basis, as it relies on trust based relations.

Figure below shows types of financial resources required by farmer preference:

1. Early innovators: private finance
2. Early adopters: public finance
3. Early majority+: partner resources with Wij.land





# wij.land<sup>4</sup>

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