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**Prepared By:** Marit van der Hoek

**Approved By:** Elizabeth Leonardi

**Report Highlights:**

On June 10, 2022 a report by the Dutch government on objectives for reduction of nitrogen greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in rural areas was released. It was followed by weeks of farmers protests in the Netherlands. This report gives a chronological presentation of the protests that occurred, their background, and the public and governmental responses to these protests. For additional information about the Dutch nitrogen reduction policies, please see the USDA FAS report: Government Presents National Program to Reduce Nitrogen Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Rural Areas, published June 21, 2022.

## 2022 Dutch Farmer Protests Against New Nitrogen GHG Emissions Reductions Policies

On June 10, 2022 the Dutch government presented a report with objectives for reduction of nitrogen greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.<sup>1</sup> The report contains a map with colors reflecting the reductions that are to be obtained per area in the Netherlands,<sup>2</sup> categorized in reductions of 12%, 47%, 58% and 70%.<sup>3</sup> In areas around [Natura2000](#) natural reserves, reductions of 95% and above need to be made. For additional information about the Dutch nitrogen reduction policies, please see the report: [Government Presents National Program to Reduce Nitrogen Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Rural Areas](#), published June 21, 2022. The Dutch provinces, and not the national government, will have to draw out the measures to accomplish these objectives before July 1, 2023.<sup>4</sup> In a subsequent press conference, Prime Minister Rutte made it clear that the Dutch agricultural sector will “look different” in the future,<sup>5</sup> or as the report stated: “there is not a future for all [Dutch farmers] within this approach”.<sup>6</sup> This gave occasion to the 2022 Dutch farmer protests.

Following the announcement of the report, several farmers on tractors protested in front of the home of the Dutch Minister of Nitrogen and Nature Policy, Ms. Christianne van der Wal. She met the farmers at her front door and had a dialogue with them. The farmers handed her a fictional dismissal letter,<sup>7</sup> but generally a police spokesperson called the atmosphere “easy-going”.<sup>8</sup> In the aftermath however, the fact the protest took place at the home of a politician was strongly condemned by politicians and the largest Dutch farmer organization (LTO) alike.<sup>9</sup> Minister Van der Wal later labelled the protest as “unpleasant”.<sup>10</sup>



Source: <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/nederland/artikel/5314441/boerenprotest-stikstof-minister-van-der-wal>

<sup>1</sup> See Report: [NL2022-0035 Government Presents National Program to Reduce Nitrogen Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Rural Areas](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2022/06/10/startnotitie-nplg-10-juni-2022>, p. 33

<sup>3</sup> The objectives show the Dutch government’s desired reduction of nitrogen GHG emissions in rural areas. These objectives are based on a model that calculated current nitrogen deposition in soils. The goal behind the plan is to reduce overall Dutch nitrogen GHG emissions by 50 percent by 2030. In addition, 74 percent of the Netherlands’ “Natura 2000” areas will have to be at “a healthy level” by 2030.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2022/06/10/startnotitie-nplg-10-juni-2022>, p. 52-53.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/mediateksten/2022/06/10/letterlijke-tekst-persconferentie-na-ministerraad-10-juni-2022>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2022/06/10/startnotitie-nplg-10-juni-2022>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.boerderij.nl/minister-van-der-wal-thuis-in-gesprek-met-demonstrerende-boeren>

<sup>8</sup> <https://nos.nl/collectie/13901/artikel/2432225-protesterende-boeren-voor-de-deur-bij-minister-van-der-wal>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.destentor.nl/veluwe/reacties-op-huisbezoek-bij-minister-van-der-wal-stop-daar-mee-je-zoekt-mensen-niet-thuis-op~a4beed65/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://nos.nl/collectie/13901/video/2432290-minister-van-der-wal-over-protest-bij-haar-woning-heel-onaangenaam>

## Organized Farmer Protest 2022

A large scale farmer protest had been planned before the report on the nitrogen reduction objectives had been released. The protest ended up attracting 60,000 farmers and 20,000 tractors took place on June 22, 2022 in Stroe in the province of Gelderland. Gelderland is one of the provinces hit hard by the plan.<sup>11</sup>



Source: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/06/22/boerenprotesten-a4134144>



The event received live coverage from broadcasters such as [NOS](#) and [Gelderland Broadcasting](#).

Source: <https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2022/06/up-to-40000-farmers-demonstrate-against-farm-closures/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.boerderij.nl/megaprotest-in-stroe-tienduizenden-boeren-op-de-been-tegen-stikstof>



The protest passed peacefully, although the sentiments of the farmers were underlined in speeches. Such as of the organizer of the protest, Bart Kemp from Agractie, saying: “A line has been drawn, the cup is full. The state is at war with the farmer’s republic. We will continue to strive until victory.”<sup>12</sup> He emphasized that he did not call for any illegal or punishable acts.<sup>13</sup>

Source: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/06/22/boerenprotesten-a4134144>

Former State Secretary of Agriculture Henk Bleker compared the farmer protest with protests against nuclear weapons in the eighties: “The feeling of back then is the feeling of nowadays: that they take away your rural area, your land, for a larger cause”.<sup>14</sup>

Source: <https://www.gld.nl/nieuws/7715093/kijk-hier-naar-de-protestactie-van-de-boeren-in-stroe>



Politicians from various opposition political parties attended the protest.<sup>15</sup> Spokespeople from three parties in the governing coalition (VVD, D66 and CDA) were invited, but the National Coordinator for Terrorism and Security (NCTV) advised them against going because their safety could not be

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/06/22/boerenprotesten-a4134144>

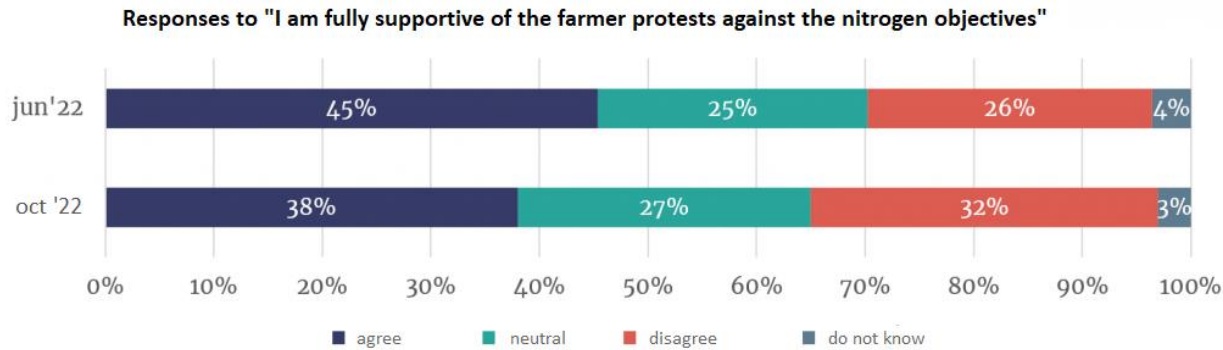
<sup>13</sup> <https://www.boerderij.nl/bart-kemp-agractie-protest-stroe-is-generale-repetitie>

<sup>14</sup> Id.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.boerenbusiness.nl/melk/artikel/10899156/blog-terugblik-op-boerenprotest-in-stroe>

guaranteed.<sup>16</sup> Against this advice, CDA Politician and Member of Parliament Derk Boswijk did however attend the protest,<sup>17</sup> as for him “it was not an option not to go”.<sup>18</sup>

On the same day, research was published showing public support for the farmer protests had grown: 45 percent of the Dutch population was said to be ‘fully’ supportive the farmer’s protests, as opposed to 38 percent in October 2021.<sup>19</sup>



Source: Adapted from <https://www.ioeresearch.nl/actueel/zorgen-over-stikstof-maar-ook-begrip-voor-boer/>

### Nitrogen Debate

The protest was followed by a debate about the nitrogen reduction objectives in the Second Chamber on June 23, 2022.<sup>20</sup> During the debate, Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, Mr. Henk Staghouwer was questioned about one of his responsibilities; offering prospects to farmers about their future in farming. The Minister of Agriculture had presented these prospects in a letter,<sup>21</sup> along the Minister of Nitrogen and Nature Policy’s nitrogen reduction objectives. But most political parties deemed the letter insufficient.<sup>22</sup> A motion was therefore put forward by all ruling parties (VVD, CDA, D66, ChristenUnie) as well as opposition parties Volt, SP, PvdA, PvdD, BBB, SGP and Omtzigt, asking the minister to provide a letter containing “all political choices for the future of Dutch agriculture and what the future prospects of farmers are in this regard” and “examples of future-proof agricultural business plans”, by September 20, 2022.<sup>23</sup>

Despite criticism on the exact execution and presentation, all coalition parties expressed continued support for the *goals* related to nitrogen reduction as presented by Minister Van der Wal, i.e. a national reduction of nitrogen depositions of 50% by 2030.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>16</sup> <https://nos.nl/artikel/2433639-sommige-kamerleden-na-waarschuwing-niet-naar-boerenprotest-anderen-gingen-toch>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gld.nl/nieuws/7715820/zo-verliep-het-massale-boerenprotest-in-stroe>

<sup>18</sup> <https://dvh.nl/binnenland/CDA-Kamerlid-Boswijk-in-Stroe-ondanks-negatief-advies-NCTV-27774659.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.ioeresearch.nl/actueel/zorgen-over-stikstof-maar-ook-begrip-voor-boer/>

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/plenaire\\_verslagen/kamer\\_in\\_het\\_kort/debat-over-het-stikstofbeleid](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/plenaire_verslagen/kamer_in_het_kort/debat-over-het-stikstofbeleid)

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven\\_regering/detail?id=2022Z11791&did=2022D24181](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2022Z11791&did=2022D24181)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.boerderij.nl/gele-kaart-voor-staghouwer>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/moties/detail?id=2022Z13026&did=2022D26870>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.boerderij.nl/geen-verandering-in-stikstofplannen>

## Independent Farmer Protests

After the nitrogen debate, farmers have continued protesting in independent local initiatives, not organized by protest organizations. According to Bart Kemp from Agractie the independent protests will likely continue “until farmers will be engaged in dialogues about workable solutions”.<sup>25</sup> Farmers have been going to their local town halls,<sup>26</sup> and tractors appeared in towns.



Farmers protested near or blocked roads,<sup>27</sup> and [in one instance speedways were blocked](#) with tractors and hay bales.

Source: <https://nos.nl/collectie/13901/artikel/2434347-dag-van-chaotische-taferelen-op-de-weg-door-boerenblokkades>

[Near the Netherlands' eastern country border](#), a few protests took place to spotlight the nitrogen policies of the Netherlands and Germany, which are perceived as diverging by some Dutch farmers. On a couple of occasions, [hay bales were set on fire](#) on the grass alongside highways.

Source:

<https://nos.nl/artikel/2434368-boeren-steken-hooibalen-langs-snelwegen-in-brand>



<sup>25</sup> <https://www.omroepbrabant.nl/nieuws/4107468/boeren-blijven-actievoeren-maar-hoe-dat-is-geheim-tal-van-ideeen-voor>

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. <https://www.gelderlander.nl/aalten/boeren-massaal-op-de-stoep-bij-gemeentehuizen-sluit-je-aan-en-spring-met-ons-op-de-trekker~a8fe07c3/>

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. <https://www.boerderij.nl/boerenacties-op-meerdere-plekken-in-nederland>



On June 28, cows were brought to feed in front of Parliament in The Hague to put a face to the reduction of livestock. The members of parliament voted that day on several motions that were brought forward during the June 23 nitrogen debate,<sup>28</sup> though the goals and objectives for the reduction of nitrogen GHG emissions were not changed during the voting.<sup>29</sup>

Source: <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/490253375/boerenprotest-met-koeien-op-stoep-tweede-kamer-welke-moet-ik-slachten>



Later that day, Dutch Prime Minister Rutte gave a press conference, noting that the right to protest is “a vital part” of the Dutch “democratic constitutional state”, and called “once again” on all farmers “to of course demonstrate if they wish to do so, but in a non-intimidating way, whilst not creating dangerous situations. This is crucial.”<sup>30</sup>

Source: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2434397-rutte-agressie-en-intimidatie-door-boeren-niet-acceptabel>

In the evening, a group of farmers on tractors again [went to the home](#) of Minister Van der Wal, though she was not home at the time. The police described the scene at some point as “unsafe” and later as “controllable”.<sup>31</sup> [Media reported](#) a police car was pushed, and straw and manure were left in the street. This protest was again condemned by politicians and the farmer organization LTO.<sup>32/33</sup> Prime Minister Rutte responded a day later, saying what is happening is “not acceptable”, and that a small group of farmers are “ruining it” for the rest and majority of the farmers, who do want to protest in a civilized way.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/stemmingsuitslagen/detail?id=2022P12525>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.bnr.nl/nieuws/politiek/10480374/onder-oog-van-boeren-stemt-kamer-stikstofbeleid-niet-weg>

<sup>30</sup> <https://nos.nl/artikel/2434397-rutte-agressie-en-intimidatie-door-boeren-niet-acceptabel>

<sup>31</sup> [https://twitter.com/POL\\_Gelderland/status/1541906362418044928](https://twitter.com/POL_Gelderland/status/1541906362418044928)

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/kamer-wil-debat-over-toenemende-agressie-onder-boeren~b364ff37/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.lto.nl/statement-lto-inzake-acties/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://nos.nl/collectie/13901/artikel/2434525-rutte-over-boerenacties-een-kleine-groep-verpest-het-voor-allemaal>



Media then reported farmers were planning large actions for Monday July 4, 2022, through not-centrally organized and independent protests, unrelated to farmer organizations.<sup>35</sup> Allegedly, farmers considered blocking airports and food distribution centers.<sup>36</sup> People were advised to work from home, and airports advised passengers come to the airport by train.<sup>37</sup> On the day of, no airports were impacted,<sup>38</sup> but 17 food distribution centers were blocked by tractors and trucks, although not all simultaneously.<sup>39</sup> The industry organizations for supermarkets and food service (known by its Dutch acronym CBL) issued a press statement saying the blockades were “unacceptable”, causing “unnecessary food waste” and “cause millions in damages” for the companies involved.<sup>40</sup>

Source: Adapted from <https://nos.nl/artikel/2435277-supermarkten-langere-blokkades-zijn-volstrekt-onacceptabel>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.boerderij.nl/oproep-4-juli-heel-nederland-plat>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.tubantia.nl/binnenland/boeren-roepen-elkaar-op-maandag-hele-land-plat-te-leggen-ga-naar-schiphol-maar-hou-het-neties~afddb05f/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://nos.nl/artikel/2434901-schiphol-roept-op-om-maandag-met-ov-te-komen-vanwege-boerenprotest>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.bnr.nl/nieuws/binnenland/10481172/liveblog-boeren-acties-stikstof-blokkades-schiphol-snelwegen-johan-remkes-farmers-defense-force-protosten-agractie-ito-betogingen-distributiecentra>

<sup>39</sup> <https://nos.nl/artikel/2435277-supermarkten-langere-blokkades-zijn-volstrekt-onacceptabel>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.cbl.nl/statement-cbl-op-blokkades-distributiecentra/>



Some of the blockades continued the next day, and in the following days also new blockades were started<sup>41</sup>, some of which were cleared by reasoning with the protesters, while in some cases, municipality emergency decrees were issued to order protesters to leave.<sup>42</sup> This did cause disruptions in some but not all supermarkets, for instance with regards to fresh produce and dairy.<sup>43/44</sup>



Source: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2435366-sommige-distributiecentra-weer-vrij-maar-andere-blokkades-hardnekkig>

The night of July 5, media attention spiked when the police reported they fired warning shots and targeted shots at a tractor at a protest in Heerenveen. The police declared there had been a “threatening situation”.<sup>45</sup> The targeted shooting was filmed and [the video](#) widely shared on social media. [Footage](#) shows the bullet hit at cabin height, but the 16-year-old driver was not hurt. The police arrested the 16-year-old driver that night, and released him the following day. On July 7, the Public Prosecution Service found that the driver had not committed any punishable offence.<sup>46</sup> The police did not provide further comments on the case, as it is awaiting the outcome of an independent government investigation<sup>47</sup> which is standard procedure when a police service weapon has been used.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>41</sup> E.g. on July 6, see <https://www.transport-online.nl/site/142405/opnieuw-boerenblokkade-van-distributiecentrum-jumbo-in-woerden/>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.distrifood.nl/159091/blokkades-supermarkt-dcs-gaan-tweede-dag-in>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.nhnieuws.nl/nieuws/305958/boerenblokkades-zorgen-voor-veel-lege-schappen-bij-jumbo-in-zwaagdijk>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.omroepwest.nl/nieuws/4600432/lege-schappen-door-boerenblokkades-nog-twee-pakken-melk-en-dan-is-het-op>

<sup>45</sup> [https://mobile.twitter.com/POL\\_Fryslan/status/1544434501648105480?xt=HHwWkIC-meO\\_9-4qAAAA](https://mobile.twitter.com/POL_Fryslan/status/1544434501648105480?xt=HHwWkIC-meO_9-4qAAAA)

<sup>46</sup> <https://nos.nl/artikel/2435756-16-jarige-jouke-niet-vervolgd-voor-trekkersprotest-heerenveen>

<sup>47</sup> <https://nos.nl/artikel/2435671-beschoten-boerenzoon-ik-wil-van-politie-weten-waarom-ze-dit-gedaan-hebben>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.politie.nl/nieuws/2022/juli/6/01-om-en-rijksrecherche-onderzoeken-incident-heerenveen.html>

On July 3rd, VVD politician Johan Remkes was appointed to lead talks between farmers and the government, starting preparations on July 13 and commencing in the second half of August.<sup>49</sup> The Dutch government stated these talks should be aimed at bringing the parties closer together.<sup>50</sup> Farmer organization LTO announced they therefore will not join these talks, unless any reshaping (in terms of goal, timeline and execution) of the proposed Dutch nitrogen policy can be discussed.<sup>51</sup> Before this announcement, LTO was already skeptical to join the talks because of Remkes' prior involvement as advisor to the government on the nitrogen issue,<sup>52</sup> publishing recommendations for the reshaping of nitrogen policy in 2020.<sup>53</sup> Later that week on July 7, the Dutch government and farmer organization LTO had a call about the farmer protests in the Netherlands with EU Commissioner for Agriculture Janusz Wojciechowski,<sup>54</sup> who declared “a serious an in-depth analysis of the presented postulates”.<sup>55</sup>



Source: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2437289-rutte-spreekt-weer-met-boeren-bezorgdheid-en-woede-overheersen-nog>

On July 13 and 18, Prime Minister Rutte visited two farms.<sup>56/57</sup> He said he could not take away the concerns and uncertainty of the farmers, but was there to listen to their sentiments, and that the nitrogen reduction objectives would not be changed, as “we are dealing with a judicial ruling<sup>58</sup>”.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>49</sup> <https://nos.nl/artikel/2435095-remkes-bemiddelaar-stikstofplannen-boeren-vinden-keuze-onzinnig>

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven\\_regering/detail?id=2022Z13864&did=2022D28614](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2022Z13864&did=2022D28614)

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.boerderij.nl/lto-wil-niet-met-remkes-praten-over-stikstof>

<sup>52</sup> Id.

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/06/08/niet-alles-kan-overal>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.msn.com/nl-nl/nieuws/Binnenland/europese-commissie-steunt-stikstofcompromis-met-boeren/ar-AAZkkSS?ocid=ob-tw-nl-758>

<sup>55</sup> <https://twitter.com/jwojc/status/1545054436317270017>

<sup>56</sup> <https://nos.nl/artikel/2437289-rutte-spreekt-weer-met-boeren-bezorgdheid-en-woede-overheersen-nog>

<sup>57</sup> <https://nos.nl/artikel/2436529-rutte-spreekt-boeren-over-stikstofbeleid-onzekerheid-niet-met-een-gesprek-weg>

Currently, the protests have slowed but several initiatives are still happening. Many people and groups have expressed opinions about how nitrogen GHG emissions can be reduced, such as for example from the technical innovation sector,<sup>60</sup> agricultural advising,<sup>61</sup> and the organic agricultural sector.<sup>62</sup> Also, according to media, if climate goals are reached, calculations show this would “greatly impact” remaining nitrogen reductions.<sup>63</sup>

The provinces of Drenthe, Gelderland, Limburg, Overijssel, Brabant and Zeeland do not agree with the proposed nitrogen policy – they clarified that though they do actually still want nitrogen reduction, they want to apply current regulation for drafting measures to obtain the reduction, and not the proposed nitrogen objectives. In this, some provinces have been voicing sharper criticism than others.”<sup>64</sup> However, the stance the provinces take is important, since the government has assigned the role of drafting, implementing, and executing the measures that will lead to reduced nitrogen greenhouse gas emissions as stated in the national nitrogen policy, to the provinces. Therefore, how the debate will continue this summer remains to be seen. Meanwhile, the protests are also now garnering international media attention.

#### **Attachments:**

No Attachments.

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<sup>58</sup> The judicial ruling referred to dates from 2019 and is described in [NL2020-0069 Dutch Parliament Approves Law to Reduce Nitrogen Emissions](#).

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.boerderij.nl/rutte-voert-emotioneel-gesprek-met-kritische-boeren-in-leusden>

<sup>60</sup> E.g. <https://fd.nl/bedrijfsleven/1443989/supermarktbaas-roept-kabinet-op-boeren-een-mestverwerker-te-schenken>

<sup>61</sup> E.g. <https://www.barneveldsekrant.nl/lokaal/opinie/837474/-opinie-stikstof-werk-aan-de-winkel-voor-iedereen->

<sup>62</sup> E.g. <https://www.trouw.nl/duurzaamheid-natuur/2500-boeren-komen-met-plan-om-landbouwcrisis-op-te-lossen-minder-stikstof-en-zonder-kunstmest~bf8bec53/>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/07/10/stikstofdoel-landbouw-kan-lager-a4136100>

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.boerderij.nl/ook-drenthe-keert-zich-tegen-stikstofkaart-kabinet>