

Abstract

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The NL Certify Water Quality project – new approaches to ensure application of emission prevention techniques in practice

The evaluation in 2011 of the results of the Dutch Crop Protection Policy over the period 1998-2010 showed that in spite of the progress that was achieved in reducing the impact of pesticides, the ecological surface water quality still remained problematic. Frequently too high concentrations of pesticides were found in the measurements. In 2009 more than 50% of all measurements showed one or more pesticides exceeding the water quality norms. Explanations can be found in the behaviour of farmers, not always sticking to the rules, and maybe even more important in differences in criteria for allowance of pesticides and criteria for water quality (more severe). Whatever might be the cause, fact is that all involved stakeholders, working together during the last part of this policy period in the national agreement on sustainable crop protection (the so called covenant), agreed in 2011 on the necessity to reduce the incidence of exceedances of water quality norms. Their interests are different, but all of them want a more lasting solution for water quality problems via the pathway of ensuring that effective methods to reduce emissions of pesticides are implemented in different certification or regulation schemes, varying from private efforts in the supply chain to government regulations or environmental legislation. Therefore these stakeholders together financed the so-called Certify Water Quality project, that started in early 2012. The project brings together the group involved in the Farming with future project (Wageningen UR and DLV Plant) and CLM, a private research/consultancy firm.

The premise of the project is that there is sufficient knowledge of the problem itself, the emission pathways leading to the problem and the technical possibilities to reduce the emission losses in these pathways. This knowledge was gained over the last 10 years in a rather large portfolio of different projects. To reach the objectives the project takes the following steps: 1) establishing working groups of stakeholders in different sectors and regions in the Netherlands, 2) identifying the key problems (joint fact finding), 3) determining the major emission pathways, 4) drafting a list of possible measures to reduce the emission risks, 5) establishing which methods have broad support from the stakeholders, 6) exploring the possibilities to integrate these methods into existing regulations or private certifying schemes, 7) eventually preparing the technical paragraphs for the diverse instruments. The work has progressed through step 6. It is basically a selection process, selecting relevant measures, then selecting those with broad support and then selecting instruments that are suitable to host these measures. However, without the support and determination of the stakeholders and their subsequent acting in the agricultural network, solutions cannot be implemented. Stakeholder involvement and -management therefore is a crucial part of the project.