

AN ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY OF DUTCH FARMER COLLECTIVES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Biodiversity-friendly farming requires spatially coordinated land use to effectively deliver landscape-scale environmental benefits such as biodiversity and other ecosystem services. This paper argues that addressing such coordination challenges requires a stronger integration of ecological, economic, and spatial perspectives within geographical science. Using the Dutch agri-environmental scheme (ANLb) as an empirical case, the paper examines the role of farmer collectives as an institutional innovation aimed at improving spatial coordination of conservation measures on privately owned farmland. Since 2016, these collectives have been responsible for coordinating agri-environmental management across regions, aligning farm-level decisions with landscape-scale biodiversity objectives. However, evidence indicates that spatial coordination remains insufficient to meet these objectives, limiting ecological effectiveness at the national scale. This ‘implementation gap’ is closely linked to economic and behavioral factors, including the voluntary nature of participation, misaligned incentives, and practical constraints at the farm level. The effectiveness of collective approaches depends on achieving sufficient scale and intensity of participation, supported by adaptive and spatially differentiated policy instruments. In conclusion, farmer collectives offer a promising pathway towards more effective landscape-scale biodiversity governance, but their potential depends on closer integration of ecological, economic, and geographical considerations in both research and policy design.



KEYWORDS

- Nature-inclusive land use
- Spatial coordination
- Farmer collectives
- Agri-environment schemes
- Collaboration

RESEARCH RELEVANCE

- Implementation gap in biodiversity conservation
- Farmer collectives bridge top-down policy and bottom-up action
- Economic and behavioural barriers limit effectiveness of farmer collectives

BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

van der Heide, C. M., & de Vries, F. P. (2026). An environmental economic geography of Dutch farmer collectives. *Journal of Geographical Systems*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10109-026-00507-5>

“Farmer collectives have the institutional capacity to coordinate conservation measures spatially, but achieving the scale and intensity required for biodiversity objectives remains challenging.”

