

# Capacity building for a collective approach



# Drivers of the Dutch cooperatives

- Although a formal position under the Dutch AE scheme is lacking, Dutch cooperatives have been strongly expanding and developing since the early 1990s:
  - now some 150 cooperatives, mainly associations, between 1,000 and 130,000 ha in size
  - their joint working areas covering almost half of the countryside
  - many of them developed a broad range of RD activities
- Common 'drivers':
  - 'resource problems': biodiversity or landscape in decline, need for collective approach. Idem for economic fragility of farming: collective marketing of public goods.
  - common enemy: conservation organisations buying farmland
  - farmers' autonomy: an organisation 'of their own' is better trusted than an 'unreliable' government.
  - existing local initiatives and respected leadership

# Perspectives of a collective approach in the EU

- Dutch government is now investing in professionalising the cooperatives. Including some upscaling the Paying Agency will have to deal with some 60 instead of 15,000 applications.
- Many member states, farmers and regions are not yet ready: no added value, lack of cooperative spirit, lack of regional implementation capacity...
- However, many inspiring examples. And Community-based or "Leader-like" approaches are getting more and more common.
- Not one blueprint for cooperation: from informal cooperation to a formalised collective as a final beneficiary



# Do's and don'ts (1)

- Choose your 'common enemy', or positively: your 'common self-interest'. E.g. sustained access to agri-environment budgets through effective management of cross-farm species and habitats. Or: reduction of implementation costs / increased scheme efficiency.
- A collective approach is not a target in itself and will only work with adequate local support. If this is lacking, a good alternative is to elaborate a regional plan which all individual contracts have to comply with.
- Determine whether you (a) wish to become a legal entity and opt for the position of 'final beneficiary' under the new agri-environment scheme, or (b) are aiming at cooperation for a stronger regionally targeted agri-environment plan.



# Do's and don'ts (2)

- Choose a logical scale of cooperation using geographical an/or landscape borders, close enough to land managers. Build on existing cooperation between farmers and/or regional organisations. If the scale is too large, part of the advantages will disappear (the 'rule of 150'?).
- Define the most adequate composition of the cooperation: farmers only or broad-based?
- Develop a shared vision on the region's future
- Determine the scope of the cooperation: all RD themes, all agri-environment issues or only the ones that exceed farm level (birds, green corridors, water)?



# Do's and don'ts (3)

- Secure effective guidance. The collective should ensure sufficient guidance to its members, either by its statutes, by its contracts or by its position in the scheme.
- Guidance requires selectiveness. Tackle the 'free riders problem': do not allow a combination of collective and individual approaches in the same area.
- If the cooperative is a final beneficiary and also performs the scheme administration, it should develop solid procedures and GIS facilities. Dutch pilots show this can be done, but a professional approach is required.
- Attract motivated board members, respected ambassadors and professional staff
- Organise the knowledge required, bridging practice, science and policy, and share with your colleague cooperatives
- Invest in communication

