

The Dutch Rural Parliament 2011 - PlattelandsParlement 2011



On 12 November 2011 the fourth* Dutch National Rural Parliament took place in the Houses of Parliament in The Hague. More than 300 inhabitants from the countryside discussed specific themes and talked with Members of Parliament about actual policies for rural areas in the Netherlands.

What was going on at the Rural Parliament 2011?

The national and provincial governments are withdrawing policy making from the countryside. Municipalities are being allocated more tasks. With cut-backs in the near future, more and more responsibilities will be given to the citizens. These shifting responsibilities influence the way in which citizens and governments are associated. Also the question arises, who will take over the tasks? The Rural Parliament 2011 is playing in this field. Can groups of citizens find solutions for actual and potential problems and challenges of the countryside? Can the government offer the frameworks necessary to support community initiatives that can deliver prosperity?

Three themes were central: citizen participation, the decrease in the number of rural inhabitants and local sustainable energy. The selected themes are at the centre of attention in the countryside. In most of the preceding Provincial Rural Parliaments these issues were mentioned. In addition to these main points, other themes were discussed: how to involve youngsters, factory farming, nature conservation and participation, the European Agricultural Policy, and the role of housing corporations in the countryside. One workshop, organised for the foreign visitors from ten European countries, paid special attention to rural parliaments in Europe and their results.

Prior to the Rural Parliament, three advisory committees of prominent experts and experienced administrators published their advice on the three main themes. This advice was based on analysis of documents and interviews. In three workshops, the advisory reports were discussed and commented on. The results were given to the Members of Parliament. These MP's gave their reactions to the advice and the results of the workshops.

The advice and all the reactions are summarized in a report, which will be offered to the chairwoman of the Lower House in the Parliament. Later the Government will give a reaction to these papers and will send their answer to the Parliament. In a plenary session of the Parliament, points of view and policy will be determined. In the next two years, by monitoring

and talks in the Parliamentary Committees, the implementation of the policy solutions will be followed. This will also be a part of the preparations for the next Rural Parliament in 2013.

Already one solution has been agreed in the Parliament in December 2011: each year, for the next four years, € 250,000 can be spent on organising the Rural Parliaments and following up on the results of each one.

**The previous Rural Parliaments took place in 2005, 2007 and 2009.*