

INVESTING TOGETHER IN OPEN SPACE



# 'The Flemish Land Agency, investing together in open space'

## Flemish Land Agency or VLM

The Flemish Land Agency, a Flemish government agency, is responsible for the organisation and management of the open space in Flanders. Furthermore, it contributes to shaping rural policy in Flanders. In execution of the manure policy, it works on a better water quality. Its field of activity comprises the rural areas and the peri-urban open space in Flanders.

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### Six times VLM in Flanders

The VLM belongs to the policy area Environment, Nature and Energy. Land development, Manure bank and Rural development are the core divisions of the VLM. In addition to its head office in Brussels, there is an executive department in each of the 5 Flemish provinces, for the execution of VLM projects. Through those six locations, the VLM is accessible for everyone in Flanders who wants to make use of its services.

## A wide range of activities

### 1. Organisation of a livable open space

*The Flemish Land Agency seeks to create a sustainable open space where it is good to live, work and recreate. On demand of and in participation with other partners, the Flemish Land Agency strives for a high - quality organisation adapted to the typical properties of the area, and taking into account the wishes of its partners and the locals involved.*

Open space is becoming increasingly scarce. There is a growing demand to protect, organise and manage it. Since its foundation in 1988, the VLM works on the organisation of open space. Over the years, the approach of the VLM has evolved. Whereas before the instruments such as land consolidation, land development and nature development stood central, today the VLM bases its approach on the strengths and needs of an area. On demand of its partners, the VLM

places the knowledge and experience of its employees at disposal. For every area, the VLM analyses which instrument will offer the best results, taking the demand and the area's identity into account. The VLM uses agro-environmental agreements as an instrument for an area-targeted organisation and management of the open space, with the farmers as its partners.

### A major role in ground mobility

The VLM has years of experience in land exchange. This expertise is now made available for other administrations and policy areas. The Sigmaphan, Doel, Port of Zeebrugge, the Ghent canal zone, ... : all these large-scale, strategic projects demand flanking measures for the owners and land users in those areas. The VLM cooperates with its partners through local land banks to propose measures for land exchanges and compensation. For example, the VLM helps farmers confronted with expropriation. The land bank of the VLM buys land and creates land reserves in areas where land exchanges are necessary. The Flemish Land Bank also centralises information about pre-emptive rights and purchase obligation.

## 2. Put rural policy on track and continue to inspire

*In cooperation with its partners, the VLM shapes the integrated rural policy. As instigator and catalyst of the innovation project for rural areas, the VLM uses its expertise, in consultation with all local actors in the region, and has a supporting role.*

The Flemish rural area is a fascinating and flourishing melting pot of agriculture, economy, spatial planning, nature, recreation, environment, tourism ... . In order to keep pace with all social developments, rural areas need impulses to make the most of their strengths and to develop all their functions at the same time. Only an integrated rural policy

can combine the strong points and initiatives of all policy areas and management levels. The VLM initiates that rural policy and assists in shaping it. The VLM confers with rural partners and works on partnerships, in order for everyone to take responsibility for the development of a livable and high-quality rural areas.

### VLM and Europe

For Europe, the life quality in rural areas is also a priority: the European Union invests plenty in stimulating the development of European rural areas. The VLM takes part in numerous European projects and develops international networks. The VLM follows European regulation closely and actively seeks European (co)financing possibilities for rural projects in Flanders. The VLM helps shape the Flemish Programme for Rural Development (PDPO). The VLM makes a valuable contribution to the development of the Flemish interpretation of European rural policy.

## 3. Actively guiding towards sustainable agriculture

*The VLM contributes to meeting the environmental targets set in the Nitrates Directive, by actively guiding the farmers, stimulating them to practice sustainable agriculture and monitoring a correct implementation of the manure legislation. By means of agro-environmental agreements, the VLM stimulates land users towards a sustainable management of open space.*

Through the execution of manure policy, VLM works on a better water quality. By realising the objectives of the Nitrates directive, participating in executing the ammonia reduction programme and creating an environmentally safe and affordable manure processing, the VLM is working on a sustainable solution of the manure problem. The VLM offers advice to the farmers and sensitises them to environmental

issues. Communication and sensitization are major tasks for the VLM employees. A targeted and well-organized control is the last step of this broad sensitizing approach. The VLM also contacts farmers to inform them about and incite them to conclude agro-environmental agreements. The VLM farm planners provide customized solutions for farmers who want to integrate nature conservation in their farming practices.

### From quality customer service towards full partnership

The farmer, being the most intensive user and manager of open space, is one of the main partners of the VLM. The VLM supports farmers in their nature and landscape care, and simultaneously supports the towns. The VLM continuously strives for a better and integrated customer-service.

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