



The Fertile Grounds Initiative: A new way to close nutrient flows at regional level resulting in better agricultural productivity and less environmental losses

Christy van Beek, Niek van Duivenbooden, and Gert-Jan Noij
Netherlands (christy.vanbeek@wur.nl)

The threat of declining soil fertility levels is well known. Yet, and despite numerous efforts, we seem incapable of changing the current situation of sink areas in developed countries and depletion areas in developing countries. With negative consequences (i.e. loss in productive capacity and loss in environmental quality) in both areas. Moreover, due to globalization and urbanization nutrient flows become increasingly disconnected. Soil nutrient depletion cannot simply be compensated for with mineral fertilisers, for the following reasons:

- mineral fertilisers are often not affordable for smallholders and fertiliser subsidy systems are not always successful
- mineral fertilisers do not contain organic matter and therefore do not halt the degradation of the soil
- mineral fertilisers work best in combination with organic sources of nutrients (compost, farm yard manure, etc.)
- To halt soil degradation an integrated approach is needed, including reducing losses of nutrients and organic matter from soils at risk.

Presently, more actors are getting involved in reallocation of nutrients, especially in the energy and waste sector. Time has come for a new approach to bring together demands and supplies for nutrients. We therefore present the Fertile Grounds Initiative: a broker for nutrient supply and demand in the region.

The Fertile Grounds Initiative is based on the findings that:

- Organic and mineral nutrients are required for increased and sustainable production;
- Nutrients have a value and should be treated as such;
- Due to globalization and urbanization nutrient flows are ever more polarized between depletion and concentration areas;
- The demand for energy poses new threats and opportunities for nutrient management.

In the Fertile Grounds Initiative nutrient suppliers from the energy sector, waste management, fertilizer companies, etc. and demands for nutrients from farmers are brought together in a dynamic platform. This platform acts as a nutrient bank and integrates different sources of nutrients into high quality crop nutrition products. A capacity building programme ensures proper application of the nutrients and optimal use of on-farm nutrients.

To further shape our ideas of the Fertile Grounds Initiative you are cordially invited to become involved.