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Enhancing farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement

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Synopsis:

The Green Tripartite Agreement, launched in June 2024, aims to address Denmark's environmental challenges by converting agricultural land to natural habitats and improving the quality of Danish waters. Given that agriculture takes up nearly 60% of Denmark's land area and significantly impacts ecosystems, farmer participation is crucial for the agreement's success. However, voluntary participation alone has proven insufficient in past initiatives. The thesis answers the research question: **How can farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement be enhanced?** Through the use of 14 interviews within the case-study area of Limfjorden, the thesis identifies "openings" and "closures" for participation in relation to farmers' ability, willingness and support to participate. Further, strategies for farmer participation are presented. The reflections have led to recommendations for enhancing farmer participation and include reducing bureaucratic closures, simplifying rules, improving communication and increasing administrative support. Ultimately, fostering trust, clear dialogue, and practical incentives are essential for achieving both environmental goals and active farmer involvement.

Preface

This thesis was written in the period of 4th of February to 28th of May 2025 and investigates enhancing farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement through the case of the Local Tripartite Limfjorden. This is the culmination of five years of studies - two of which within the Master's program in Environmental Management at Sustainability Science - which has allowed us to expand our fields of knowledge and develop our skills and competencies.

The thesis has taught us about the complexity of implementing political agreements in practice, while being both intrigued and, at times, frustrated. This thesis marks the end of this journey, and we look forward to applying five years of studies to future problem-solving.

The target audience of this thesis are municipal planners and local committee members in charge of implementing the Green Tripartite Agreement, interested in understanding what factors affects farmers' participation in such agreements.

We would like to thank our supervisor, Sara Bjørn Aaen, for her enthusiastic discussions, valuable guidance and support throughout the process of writing this thesis.

Additionally, appreciation is extended to the interviewees for sharing their knowledge and contributing to lying the foundation of this thesis. This includes committee members of the Local Green Tripartite Limfjorden: Henrik Dalgaard (Chairman, Local Tripartite Limfjorden), Leif Gravesen (Chairman, Fjordland), Thorkild Kjeldsen (Vice chairman, DN), Jes Lunde (Aalborg Municipality), Niels Erik Christensen (Randers Municipality), Finn Thøgersen (Holstebro Municipality) and John Vangsgaard (Struer Municipality) in addition to Susanne Mortensen (Limfjordsrådet's Secretariat). Additionally, we would like to thank all interviewed farmers for sharing their experiences and perspectives on the subject.

Citations within this thesis follows the Harvard Referencing System (Author, Year). If no publication year is available for a source, 'n.d.' (no date) is used in its place. The full source reference can be found in the Bibliography. When square brackets [ ] appear within a quotation, it indicates that the authors have added words to clarify or provide context. All maps and pictures between chapters within this thesis is made or taken by the authors.

Aalborg University, May 28, 2025

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Danish Summary

Begrebet om planetære grænser fastsætter et *"sikkert råderum for menneskeheden"* ved at definere kritiske grænser for Jordens systemer og processer (Rockström et al., 2009). Landbruget er en væsentlig drivkraft bag overskridelsen af flere af disse grænser, især hvad angår biodiversitet og biogeokemiske kredsløb som fosfor- og kvælstofkredsløbet (Campbell et al., 2017). Derudover har ændringer i arealanvendelse og intensiv dyrkning haft betydelig indflydelse på miljøet. I Danmark optager landbruget 59,5 % af det samlede landareal, hvilket understreger sektorens dominerende rolle i både arealanvendelse og miljøpåvirkning (dst, 2021). Især de seneste 50 år har intensiverede dyrkningsmetoder ført til udfordringer som itlsvind i vandmiljøet og tab af biodiversitet (Emmerson et al., 2016).

På baggrund af stigende politisk fokus på iltsvind, biodiversitetstab og klimaforandringer blev Den Grønne Trepartsaftale indgået den 24. juni 2024. Aftalen skal adressere disse udfordringer gennem en omstilling af landbrugsarealer og -praksis, så de stemmer overens med nationale og internationale miljømål. Aftalen har blandt andet til formål at:

- Bidrage til Danmarks klimamål om 70% reduktion af CO_2-udledning i 2030 og klimaneutralitet i 2045.
- Forbedre økosystemer i indre og ydre dansk farvand i overensstemmelse med EU's Vandrammedirektiv.
- Skabe mere plads til naturen, forbedre grundvandsbeskyttelse og biodiversitet samt genetablere naturlige levesteder gennem konvertering af landbrugsjord til naturtyper som moser, enge, ådale og hede.

Tidligere forskning har vist, at frivillig deltagelse fra landmænd i natur- og klimaindsatser ikke har været tilstrækkelig til at opfylde eksisterende miljøkrav, herunder Vandrammedirektivet. Den Grønne Trepartsaftale er et ambitiøst forsøg på at konvertere 390.000 hektar landbrugsjord til kulstofrige jorde og skov, samt ændre landbrugspraksis for at reducere miljøpåvirkningen og fremme biodiversitet. Aftalen indeholder både frivillige og regulerende elementer, men landmændenes vilje og evne til at deltage er fortsat afgørende for at opnå de ønskede resultater inden for tidsrammen. Litteraturen peger på, at der stadig mangler viden om de praktiske udfordringer i implementeringen og samspillet med komplekse politiske og administrative strukturer.

På denne baggrund undersøger dette speciale, hvordan landmændenes deltagelse i Den Grønne Trepartsaftale kan styrkes, så Danmark kan nå sine mål for omstilling af landbrugslandskabet og reduktion af miljøpåvirkningen fra landbruget. Specialet tager udgangspunkt i følgende forskningsspørgsmål:

> **Hvordan kan landmændenes deltagelse i Den Grønne Trepartsaftale styrkes?**

Specialet anvender kvalitative interviews med landmænd, medlemmer af den lokale trepart i Limfjorden og administrative repræsentanter. Analysen anvender teorien om "Environmental Behaviour of Farmers", som fokuserer på tre nøglefaktorer: landmænds vilje og evne til at omstille sig samt samfundsmæssig støtte (Westerink et al., 2024). Begreberne "openings" og "closures" bruges til at identificere og forstå de faktorer, der påvirker deltagelsen.

Analysen peger på, at:

- Mange landmænd har grundlæggende mulighed for at deltage, hvis det giver mening for dem økonomisk og praktisk.
- Usikkerhed om regler, økonomi og kompensation udgør væsentlige barrierer.
- Landbrugsjordens sammensætning og muligheden for jordfordeling er afgørende, men hæmmes i øjeblikket ofte af bureaukrati og manglende administrative ressourcer.
- Misinformation og manglende tillid til myndigheder og videnskabelige fakta kan skabe barrierer.
- Tid er en kritisk faktor: For lange processer kan hæmme deltagelsen, enten ved at dræne engagementet eller ved at udelukke reel inddragelse.

På baggrund af specialet indsamlede empiri og analyse anbefales det:

- At aftalens rammer hurtigts muligt færdiggøres, og der skabes klare rammer og fremtidsperspektiver for deltagelse, så usikkerhed reduceres.
- At bureaukratiske barrierer fjernes, og regler forenkles, især for at lette jordfordeling og mindske administrative byrder.
- At der sikres tydelig, tidlig og løbende kommunikation med landmændene, hvor både videnskabelige fakta og praktiske forhold adresseres for at opbygge tillid og modvirke misinformation.
- At der investeres i øget administrativ kapacitet, herunder flere ressourcer til Jordfordelingskontoret, for at effektivisere processerne og støtte landmændene bedst muligt.

For at styrke deltagelsen er det afgørende at anerkende landbrugets dobbelte rolle: både som årsag til miljøudfordringer og som en vigtig aktør i løsningen heraf. Ved at adressere både praktiske barrierer som bureaukrati, lange sagbehandlingstider og komplekse regler samt de mere motivationsmæssige forhold, kan myndigheder og planlæggere skabe rammer, der fremmer frivillig deltagelse og sikrer, at aftalens mål nås. Og ikke mindst: Husk kaffe og wienerbrød til dialogmøderne – det fremmer den gode samtale og konstruktiv dialog!!

Abbreviations and Terminology

Table 1. Abbreviations introduced in the thesis in alphabetical order

Abbrevation	Description
AES	Agri-environmental schemes
AECS	Agri-environmental climate schemes
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CO_2e	Carbon dioxide equivalent
DN	Danmarks Naturfredningsforening
FM	Fininasministeriet
FVM	Miniseriet for Fødevarer, Landbrug og Fiskeri
KEFM	Klima- Energi- og Forsyningsministeriet
KL	Kommunernes Landsforening
L&F	Landbrug og Fødevare
MGTP	Ministeriet for Grøn Trepart
NNF	Fødevareforbundet
NST	Naturstyrelsen
PFA	Politisk forum for arealudtag
SGAV	Styrelsen for Grøn Arealomlægning og Vandmiljø
VOS	Vandoplandsstyregruppe
WFD	Water Framework Directive
ØM	Økonomiminsteriet

Table 2. Terms used in the thesis

Term	Explanation
Agreement	"The agreement" is always referring to the Green Tripartite Agreement
Conversion plans	(Danish: Omlægningsplaner) Converting agricultural land
Farmer(s)	A person who owns or operates a farm. This term is used as an overall term for farmers and their agricultural business. Both large and small size business
F-gases	Fluorinated gases
High-lying soil	Elevated soil in the landscape and is typically located in far distance from watercourses
Land exchange	(Danish: Jordfordeling) Exchanging/swapping pieces of land between two or more people
Low-lying soil	Soils on lower grounds and is typically located in close proximity to a watercourse
Land conversion	To convert the use of the land to something else eg. from farmland to nature
Peat soils	(Danish: Lavbundsjord) carbon rich soils

Contents

1 Introduction

The concept of planetary boundaries, introduced by Rockström et al., 2009, establishes a *"safe operating space for humanity"* by defining critical boundaries for Earth system processes. The fundamental concern underlying this framework is that human activities could trigger environmental changes, ultimately jeopardising human existence (Rockström et al., 2009). Agriculture is a driver in pushing Earth beyond several of these safe planetary boundaries, particularly affecting biosphere integrity (biodiversity) and biogeochemical flows involving phosphorus, nitrogen cycles (Campbell et al., 2017), land use and land use change (Calvin et al., 2023). The agricultural sector requires stronger involvement in efforts to reduce climate change and environmental impacts, as it currently contributes negatively to environmental health through multiple pathways. These include greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, soil degradation, serving as a major factor in biodiversity loss, and contributing significantly to water pollution (Wąs et al., 2021). This environmental pressure from agriculture has become particularly pronounced the last 50 years, where intensive cultivation practices have increased, leading to current challenges including eutrophication and biodiversity loss (Emmerson et al., 2016). Within the European Union (EU), two central policies and strategies have been implemented to address these agricultural sector challenges. The EU Green Deal strategy, specifically its 'Farm to Fork' component, aims to reduce negative environmental impacts from the agricultural sector by enhancing more sustainable food systems (Wąs et al., 2021, Pedersen et al., 2024). Complementing this initiative is the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which targets climate change mitigation, natural resource protection, and biodiversity enhancement (European Commission, 2025, Wąs et al., 2021). Together, these strategies establish ambitious objectives for the EU's agricultural sector, including emission reductions, biodiversity protection, rural community support, pesticide usage reduction, improved food quality, and enhanced water quality (Hasler et al., 2022). The CAP serves as the primary policy framework for designing both mandatory and voluntary schemes throughout the EU (Hasler et al., 2022). Cultivation practices in Danish agriculture contribute with approximately 70% of land-based nitrogen emissions, while natural soil leaching accounts for about 20%, and point sources including treated wastewater discharge and industrial output is 11.5% (Miljø- og Fødevareministeriet, 2019). The agricultural sector occupies 59.5% of Denmark's total land area, with forests covering 13.39% (2021 data) (dst, 2021), highlighting the sector's dominant role in land use and environmental impact. With rising political focus on eutrophication of Danish waters, biodiversity loss, and climate change, the Green Tripartite Agreement has been introduced to target these challenges (MGTP, 2024a). However, the agreement's success fundamentally depends on effective implementation and farmers' participation in converting both land use and agricultural practices to align with established environmental targets in this agreement.

Problem Analysis 2

This chapter presents the problem area of this thesis, as being farmers' participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement, arguing the relevance of the this research area and the research question and further examines the research field in a state of art on existing literature.

2.1 Agreement on a Green Denmark

On June 24, 2024, the Danish Government, Landbrug & Fødevarer (L&F), Danmarks Naturfredningsforening (DN), Fødevareforbundet NNF, Kommunernes Landsforening (KL), Dansk Industri and Dansk Metal entered into the Agreement on a Green Denmark (the Green Tripartite Agreement) (MGTP, 2024a). Subsequently, on November 18, 2024, the Danish government (Socialdemokratiet, Venstre, and Moderaterne), together with Socialistisk Folkeparti, Liberal Alliance, Radikale Venstre and Det Konservative Folkeparti, reached an agreement on a political framework to create the necessary conditions for implementing the initiatives outlined in the Agreement on a Green Denmark (MGTP, 2024b).

The agreement focuses on the Danish State's climate goals for 2030 on a 70% reduction of CO_2e being emitted to the atmosphere, and the goal to reach climate neutrality by 2045. The agreement also seeks to improve aquatic ecosystems in line with the Water Framework Directive set out by the EU, make more room for nature, facilitate improved conditions for groundwater protection and biodiversity and restore natural habitats by targeting and restoring agricultural lands, converting them back to habitats like peatlands, meadows, river valleys, and heathlands (MGTP, 2024b). This agreement is intended to be the long-term foundation for a transformation of Denmark's nature and the food and agricultural practices (MGTP, 2024a).

To achieve the agreement's goals, this involves taking carbon-rich farmland out of production, implementing a CO_2e tax on livestock, enhancing afforestation, and intensifying climate technologies and emission-reducing measures (MGTP, 2024b). The agreement also aims to expand protected nature in Denmark by 2030 to 20% of the land area (MGTP, 2024b). To achieve the agreement's objectives, a total of 390,000 ha is set to be converted from former farmland into peatlands and forests. Specifically, 140,000 ha of drained cultivated carbon rich peatlands (including buffer zones) is set to be restored by 2030 to reduce CO_2 emissions. 250,000 ha of forests is set to be established by 2045, including 80,000 ha of private owned untouched forest (Non-commercial logging conservation area (Naturstyrrelsen, n.d.)), 10,000 ha of near-urban untouched state owned forest and 10,000 ha of near-urban state owned forest (MGTP, 2024b).

The Green Tripartite Agreement introduces a world-first CO_2e tax on agricultural emissions, targeting livestock, peatland use, liming, and F-gases. This tax aims to incentivise emission reductions and fund environmental initiatives. For farmers, this means potential financial burdens unless they adopt emission-reducing practices (e.g. biochar storage, reduced fertiliser use) (CONCITO, 2024b). To offset costs and drive change, the agreement allocates 43 billion DKK for land conversion, afforestation, and nature restoration (MGTP, 2024a). For landowners, the agreement offers opportunities to diversify income streams through nature and climate based initiatives but may also reduce agricultural revenue if productive land is withdrawn (CONCITO, 2024b).

2.1.1 Agreement implementation

The implementation phase of the agreement is brief and all parties in the agreement acknowledge that its implementation is both comprehensive and extensive and must be put into practice in a timely manner(MGTP, 2024a). The establishment of the Ministry for Green Tripartite (MGTP) marks the first step towards its realisation. Additionally, it has been agreed that the implementation process should be regularly reviewed and continuously adjusted based on ongoing dialogue, allowing for necessary modifications as needed (MGTP, 2024a). Figure 2.1 outlines the implementation timeline and key requirements within the agreement framework.

Figure 2.1. Timeline of the main implementation requirements of the Green Tripartite Agreement. The timeline does not include all goals. Own figure adopted from KL, 2025 and Boddum, 2025

Notable targets include the conversion of 140,000 ha of carbon-rich peat soil and the establishment of 250,000 ha forest. These targets are to be achieved concurrently

with anticipated and ongoing regulatory measures, including a CO_2e tax and nitrogen regulations. In areas where voluntary land conversion alone does not meet nitrogen reduction targets, regulation will address the remaining need for action. Consequently, the first two years of the agreement will be based on voluntary principles, followed by regulation (MGTP, 2024b).

In 2025, the primary objective is the development of detailed land conversion plans. Twenty-three local tripartite committees, each with a deadline in December 2025, will create local land conversion plans. These committees will engage in comprehensive discussions and coordination to translate the national goals outlined in the Green Tripartite Agreement into local strategies. Figure 2.2 is illustrating the geographical distribution and boundaries of the local tripartites across Denmark, defined by their representative catchment area.

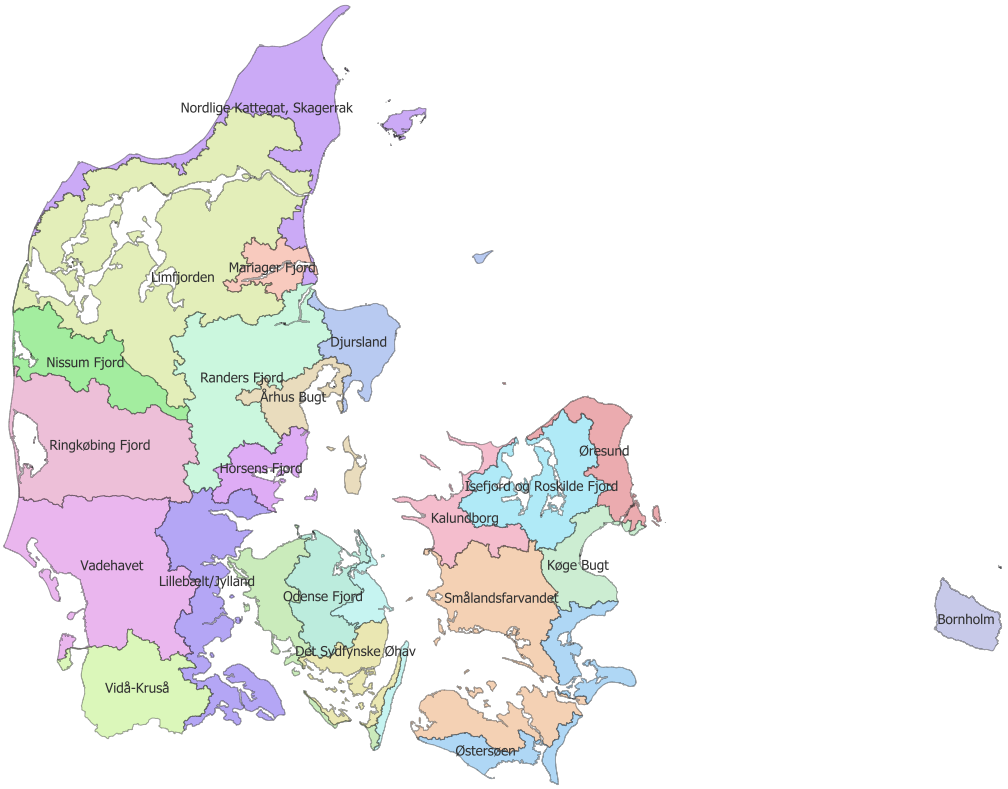

Figure 2.2. The twenty-three local tripartites

The local committees' collaborative efforts will focus on appointing which agricultural land located is to be converted to peat soils or forest, thereby minimising the need for extensive regulation. These land conversion plans rely on voluntary participation, why municipalities cannot require farmers or others to participate (KL, 2024). In Denmark, Grundloven (the Danish Constitution) states that *"The right to property is inviolable"* (Grundlovens §75 stk. 1, n.d.). Therefore, landowners are not obligated to comply with local committee appointing of their land. However, expropriation is possible if required by the public good, conducted according to law, and with full compensation provided (Grundlovens §75 stk. 1, n.d.). In essence, this implies that the local tripartite committees are tasked with identifying land for conversion that is in line with achieving the agreement's targets.

Subsequently, farmers or landowners can either approve the proposed conversion of their land, potentially receiving alternative land through land exchange or financial incentives (subsidy), or to refuse, thereby potentially becoming subject to future regulatory measures, the farmer or landowner can thereby participate voluntarily or refuse.

Municipalities are responsible for ensuring the implementation of the local land conversion plans and facilitating agreement within the local tripartite committees. While collaborative decision-making is emphasised, municipalities retain authority in final decisions (KL, 2024). Each local tripartite committee consist off representatives from key stakeholder groups, ensuring diverse perspectives and shared responsibility. Specifically, each committee must include:

1-2 representatives from each municipality within the local area
1-2 representatives from the local agricultural organisation
1-2 representatives from the local nature conservation organisation
1 representative from Naturstyrelsen (KL, 2024).

This setup acknowledges the significant transformations required of the agricultural sector and provides a transitional period for actors involved to adapt (KL, 2024). The voluntary strategy focuses on encouraging landowners to participate in various land conversion initiatives that align with the agreement's environmental targets. By emphasising collaboration rather than coercion, the agreement seeks broader acceptance from the agricultural community while still making progress toward environmental objectives (KL, 2024) (Mindegaard, 2024).

The MARS planning tool, officially released in January 2025, facilitates project screening for farmers and municipalities while offering a national overview of progress toward established goals. As of May 21, 2025, the national status is as follows: Nitrogen target: 14% reached (1,839 tons out of a 12,959-ton goal). Peat soil target: 40% reached (56,741 ha out of 140,000 ha, with 2 projects finished out of 460 applied). Afforestation: 0% of the goal achieved (1,701 ha out of 250,000 ha) (SGAV, 2025). The agreement's targets are still far from being met, which makes farmer participation a crucial contribution toward achieving them in time.

2.1.2 Debates surrounding the Green Tripartite Agreement

The agreement implies that farmers and landowners should convert land voluntarily, according to the agreement's objectives in order to avoid regulation. The agreement enables that farmers and landowners can apply through project funding and convert their land through different methods and schemes. The agreement's initial reliance on voluntary landowner participation, incentivised by economic schemes, have been widely criticised given Denmark's history of ineffective voluntary programs designed to enhance agricultural sustainability. Critics emphasise that voluntary measures adds uncertainty regarding the achievement of the agreement's key objectives, particularly the reduction of nitrogen emissions and to the EU Water Framework Directive deadlines for coastal water quality (Mindegaard, 2024).

Critique on technological solutions as focus

Organisations such as CONCITO and Green Transition Denmark (Rådet for Grøn Omstilling) have expressed criticism that the agreement prioritises maintaining the existing agricultural structure and emphasises technological solutions rather than fostering systemic change. They argue that voluntary measures provide insufficient incentives for transitioning to sustainable, plant-based food production and reducing intensive livestock farming (CONCITO, 2024a) (rgo, 2024). Green Transition Denmark further argues that while the agreement offers significant financial incentives, these may not be enough to drive the necessary large-scale transformations. Consequently, there is scepticism towards whether voluntary participation will achieve the necessary emission reductions and land use changes within the short implementation time frame (rgo, 2024).

Furthermore, Organic Denmark criticises the agreement for favouring traditional farming over organic options(Mindegaard, 2024). Further, the agreement relies on unproven technologies, such as methane-reducing feed, biochar and the feed additive Bovaer, where Animal Protection Denmark calls it a 'missed opportunity,' saying it ignores animal welfare. This is due to the assumption that farm animals can produce more by increasing the agricultural output from individual animals without sufficiently considering the animals' well-being. The agreement's goals to expand 'protected nature' from 15% to 20% is questioned by The Danish Biodiversity Council as the current definition of 'protected nature' is seen as problematic as it includes areas like highways and industrial sites and they estimates that only 1.6% of Denmark's land area and 1.9% of Denmark's sea area truly meets the criteria for effective protection (Biodiversitetsrådet, 2023).

Criticism of land conversion based on voluntarism

Jensen, 2024, environmental director at Landbrug & Fødevare (L&F), argues that voluntarism works and creates the framework for the best results. The best and long lasting solutions are created if they build on the voluntary participation from landowners, and he rejects the assumption that landowners do not want to contribute and take responsibility, and highlights that there has been applied for the restoration of 56.200 ha carbon rich peat soils in 2024, a result of the Agricultural Agreement from 2021 (FVM, 2021). From those working with large land conversion projects with peat soils, there is a consensus, that large projects that define how we will use our land in the future are best created based on local initiative and broad involvement of landowners and local communities. Forcing something upon people leads to nothing but conflict. The focus should instead be on how to ensure that the authorities responsible for implementing the projects have the right resources (Jensen, 2024).

Tingstrøm, 2024, head of department at DN, acknowledges that while many farmers are applying for carbon rich peat soil restoration initiatives, the overall progress is too limited and slow. A voluntary green structural transformation of Danish agriculture would be the ideal solution. However, reality demonstrates that this approach has been ineffective, with our biodiversity, marine environment, animal welfare, drinking water, and climate bearing the consequences. Tingstrøm, 2024 states, *"hope for voluntary agreements is not a strategy"*, and robust instruments are necessary, including targeted nitrogen regulation, stricter limits on nitrogen leaching from fields, and an ambitious, uniform CO_2e tax to

drive the green transition in agriculture. While DN supports voluntary agreements that prioritise citizen involvement and local interests, they emphasise the need for guaranteed transition. Experience proves that voluntary agreements alone are insufficient (Tingstrøm, 2024).

2.1.3 Synthesising main challenges with the Green Tripartite

The perspectives presented above emphasise a tension surrounding landowners' and farmers' voluntary participation in Denmark's green transition. The viewpoints reveal an uncertain effect of voluntary mechanisms in achieving the goals of the Green Tripartite Agreement. The voluntary participation mechanism, therefore, remains a dispute and unpredictable factor in Denmark's pursuit of its green transition objectives. Summarising the presented arguments, local initiative and broad involvement of landowners, farmers and local communities are crucial for successful implementation and long lasting transition. The urgency of environmental challenges necessitates an understanding of the mechanisms that drives voluntary participation of landowners and farmers which is this thesis' problem area. The following section explores the known literature and current scientific knowledge on how voluntarism, landowners, farmers, communities and environmental policies interact.

2.2 State of the Art on Voluntary Participation in AES

The aim of this state of the art (SOTA) review is to explore current knowledge and the most up-to-date research on the use of voluntarism in agri-environmental schemes (AES) within agriculture in Europe and Denmark. The SOTA presents the key drivers and barriers influencing farmers' willingness to participate in these schemes. AES is a relevant focus because it shares similarities with the Green Tripartite Agreement in Denmark as focus is on voluntary participation. This review is based on an analysis of 21 peer-reviewed research articles. The purpose is to develop a clear understanding of the existing knowledge regarding farmers' willingness to engage in environmental and nature-focused agreements. The section covers identified drivers and barriers to farmer participation in AES with an EU focus, followed by a Danish context on implementation on environmental legislation.

2.2.1 Drivers of participation in AES in the EU

Environmental knowledge as a driver

Knowledge, information access, and prior experience significantly impact farmers' willingness to adopt environmental farming practices. Research shows that farmers with higher understanding of biodiversity are more likely to participate in Agri-Environmental-Climate-Schemes (AECS), particularly when provided with evidence-based information about environmental benefits. Addressing farmers' misconceptions through targeted information can substantially increase enrolment in voluntary AES (Czajkowski et al., 2021, Frondel et al., 2012).

Some farmers demonstrate inherent environmental consciousness, implementing nature-friendly practices regardless of financial incentives due to their pre-existing knowledge about conservation importance. Communication about adoption rates among agricultural communities plays a crucial role, as social norms significantly influence participation

willingness. Additionally, farmers with previous experience in AECS demonstrate higher likelihood of continued participation across multiple European countries including Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Poland, and Sweden (Siebert et al., 2010, Kuhfuss et al., 2016, Hasler et al., 2019).

Collective social factor as a driver

Farmers' willingness to participate in AES is often influenced by social dynamics. The literature shows that 'social nudges' (knowing that others are participating) can significantly increase enrolment, as farmers are encouraged by the actions and approval of their community (Kuhfuss et al., 2016, Dessart et al., 2019). Social influence also brings status and recognition, further motivating participation (Dessart et al., 2019). However, the effect of social nudges may be context-dependent; for instance, Massfeller et al., 2022 found that social influence was less effective in promoting biodiversity conservation practices than in encouraging reductions in pesticide and water use, possibly due to the connection with private funds associated with the reductions in pesticide and water use.

This can further be supported by Mills et al., 2017 arguing that farmers' willingness to engage in environmental projects is shaped by influences at multiple levels: the farm, the community, and society. At the farm level, individual perspectives and family dynamics - especially input from family members on larger farms, play an important role in decision-making. At the community level, attitudes are shaped by reference groups and social norms, with messages from within the group having a stronger impact than those from outside the group.

At the societal level, farmers' environmental behaviours are influenced by their perceptions of public and consumer expectations, as well as their understanding of broader societal concerns (Mills et al., 2017).

Farm advisors play a crucial role in promoting voluntary environmental actions, such as wetland creation, by informing and motivating landowners and building trust through strong relationships (Geranmayeh et al., 2024). This aligns with the importance of community-level support in fostering participation (Mills et al., 2017). Additionally, generational change at the farm level, such as when younger farmers take over, can create opportunities for adopting new environmentally beneficial practices, though outcomes depend on the values and goals of the new generation (Westerink et al., 2024).

Flexibility as a driver

Findings by Siebert et al., 2010 and De Krom, 2017 shows that within a conservation program, the farmers were more willing to participate in nature conservation on arable land if the land continued to have the status of arable land, as this would give the farmer more flexibility to reverse actions if wanting to do farming on the land in the future.

2.2.2 Barriers to participation in AES in the EU

Farm typology as a barrier

Westerink et al., 2024 identifies four distinct farm typologies: high production, low-cost farming, nature combined, and farmer-and-nature integrated. There is also a significant variation in both the intensity of farming practices (intensive vs. extensive, based on production per ha) and in how farmers relate to the identified typologies. These typologies were used to assess the willingness and ability of farmers to participate in implementing more species rich grassland in combination with livestock farming. A key finding was that high production farmers experienced barriers to implement more species rich grass to their production, as the milk amount of milk decreased and was of worse quality. Further, the transition from this intensive farming style to a more nature integrated practice would require a turn around of production and also a need for acquiring new knowledge. Farm typology in relation to farmer participation have also been investigated by Wittstock et al., 2022, Hasler et al., 2022 and Wittstock et al., 2022 and their results argue that large farms are more likely to participate in AES, and livestock farmers (who typically have a larger share of grassland) are more likely to enrol than crop farmers, who tend to focus on high production yield. In addition, Franzén et al., 2016 did research on wetland creation identifying a difference in organic and conventional farmers. The results shows that organic farmers and farmers that applied environmental considerations in their production, did not have a higher willingness to create wetlands compared to conventional farmers. Importantly, Westerink et al., 2024 and Hasler et al., 2022 acknowledge that not all farmers see themselves reflected in the predefined categories, and many operate with a mix of motivations and practices. This misalignment can make AES feel less accessible or relevant, reducing the likelihood of widespread adoption.

Community as a barrier

Barriers to participation in AES can arise from both coordination challenges and social dynamics. In Sweden, creating wetlands is often hindered by the need for consensus among multiple landowners in drainage associations, leading to lengthy processes and coordination difficulties, whereas working with a single large landowner presents fewer obstacles (Geranmayeh et al., 2024). These findings emphasise that community-level influences, such as lack of coordination and limited social support, can significantly impede farmer engagement in environmental actions (Mills et al., 2017).

Financial barriers

Financial barriers are an obstacle to farmers' participation in AES, as low compensation relative to the costs of participation makes these programs unattractive, especially for production-oriented farmers who risk losing income or yield when converting land to conservation purposes (Czajkowski et al., 2021, Hasler et al., 2019, Dessart et al., 2019, Massfeller et al., 2022).

Additionally, farmers perceive a risk of not meeting environmental requirements and therefore not receiving financial remuneration (the amount of payback or compensation that the farmers will get for doing a change), further discouraging participation, while those with less strong economic positions may be more willing to join AES for the stable

income they offer, depending on the scheme type (Czajkowski et al., 2021, Hasler et al., 2019, Dessart et al., 2019, Massfeller et al., 2022).

Barriers to environmental progress in EU agriculture policy

Findings by Hasler et al., 2022 and Geranmayeh et al., 2024 show that the dominance of income support in EU agricultural policy, combined with the voluntary nature and administrative complexity of AES, creates significant barriers to environmental progress, highlighting the need for long-term financial and technical support to motivate sustained farmer participation (Hasler et al., 2022, Geranmayeh et al., 2024).

2.2.3 Danish experience of implementation on environmental legislation

Looking beyond the EU perspective the next section focuses on a Danish setting, presenting several studies on poorly implemented environmental policies and explore the lessons that can be drawn from them.

Research on Danish environmental policy implementation distinguishes between formal (legal, regulatory) and practical (on-the-ground) implementation (Bourblanc et al., 2013, Dieperink et al., 2012). While formal implementation is well-studied, practical implementation, crucial for real-world impact, remains less explored (Bourblanc et al., 2013). Jacobsen et al., 2017 suggests that combining mandatory and voluntary measures ("sticks" and "carrots") increases the likelihood of achieving environmental goals in agriculture, ensuring that voluntary actions are backed by enforceable requirements if necessary.

Implementing the EU Water Framework Directive

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) exemplifies ambitious EU environmental policy with complex implementation challenges, especially regarding nutrient pollution from agriculture (Wiering et al., 2020). Wiering et al., 2020 shows that the effectiveness of WFD implementation is shaped by national governance models. In Denmark, a "hybrid model" blending regulatory measures and incentives is used to address nutrient run-off. The study underlines the importance of tailoring policy instruments-regulations, subsidies, knowledge exchange to local contexts and governance structures. Successful implementation depends on balancing voluntary and mandatory approaches and ensure clear funding and responsibility structures.

Pesticide-Free Buffer Zones

The introduction of pesticide-free buffer zones in Denmark aimed to reduce pesticide run-off but faced significant barriers to farmer participation (T. Christensen et al., 2011). Key obstacles included insufficient compensation for income loss, high transaction costs (e.g. paperwork, monitoring), and non-monetary factors such as professional pride, tradition, and distrust of authorities. The study found that flexibility in contracts, free assistance, and shorter, more easily terminable agreements could improve participation. Importantly, farmer motivation is multifaceted, influenced by farm and farmer characteristics (e.g.,

financial status, attitudes) and broader social and contextual factors. Thus, policy design must address both economic and social dimensions to be effective, as identified in the state of the art on European literature.

Afforestation Initiatives

Madsen, 2003 explored private landowners' motivations for afforestation, finding that financial incentives are generally effective, especially among production-oriented landowners. However, motivations vary: amenity (convenience) oriented landowners may plant trees regardless of subsidies, while agricultural producers are more responsive to financial support. This suggests that while economic incentives are important, policies should also account for landowner values and the degree of attachment to agriculture. Differentiated approaches may be necessary to engage diverse landowner groups (Madsen, 2003).

Nature Conservation in Private Forests

Boon et al., 2010 investigated forest owners' willingness to set aside productive land for conservation. Financial compensation increased willingness for most owners, particularly larger and younger (especially female) landowners, though some remained unmoved or even less willing. The study highlights that motivation is not solely financial; authoritative measures, capacity building, symbolic incentives, and education can also play a role.

Research Question 3

Previous research has demonstrated that voluntary farmer participation in nature and climate initiatives has proven insufficient to achieve compliance with existing policy frameworks such as the Water Framework Directive. Denmark's latest major policy incentive, the Green Tripartite Agreement, represents an ambitious attempt to convert 390,000 ha of agricultural land into carbon-rich peat soils and forests while modifying agricultural practices to reduce environmental impact and promote biodiversity. Despite the Agreement's incorporation of regulatory measures, farmer and landowner willingness to participate remains a crucial factor in achieving timely reductions according to established targets. While existing literature has identified various barriers and drivers influencing farmer participation in environmental initiatives, current literature reveals knowledge gaps regarding practical implementation challenges and their interaction with the complex policy and regulatory structures accompanying the Green Tripartite Agreement. Therefore, this thesis aims to investigate how to enhance farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement to meet the timeline and targets for transforming Denmark's agricultural landscape and reducing agricultural environmental impact. Consequently, this thesis addresses the following research question:

> ***How can farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement be enhanced?***

To answer the research question, this thesis concentrates on the Limfjord region as its case study area, which is described in the following chapter. The thesis specifically focuses on farmers rather than landowners in general, as agricultural operators manage 59.5% of Denmark's total land area (dst, 2021) and is therefore important for achieving nitrogen reduction targets outlined in the Green Tripartite Agreement. The thesis is guided by the following two sub-questions, which also serve to structure the analyses:

1. What openings and closures for participation can be identified and how can these be addressed to facilitate farmer participation?

2. What strategies are in place for the implementation of the agreement, and how do they target farmer participation?

Sub-question 1 introduces the terms 'openings' and 'closures' to the thesis and are used throughout the first analysis. 'Openings' refer to potentials in the surrounding structural landscape relying on time, as openings occur and disappear by time. On the contrary, 'closures' refer to conditions that hinder participation based on surrounding structures

and timing. This thesis adds on to these terms to include farmers' willingness, ability and support to enhance participation. This is described in detail in Chapter 5.

Research Design 4

The chapter presents the theory of science and research design of this thesis and further presents the case area Limfjorden and the use of case study scoping the research area.

4.1 Theory of Science

This thesis is based on phenomenological research shaping the use of theory, methods and consequently the results and conclusions of the study. In phenomenology, the world is build of phenomena and is based on how people relate to these phenomena in their surroundings based on previous experience with that phenomenon (Jørgensen, 2022). The thesis is shaped around the phenomenological ontology as focus is on understanding how farmers relate to what already exists and how they relate to the conversion of their land. This thesis investigates farmers' perception of the agreement and their opportunities for participation. As the world is build on phenomena this influences how the world can be observed and how it is possible to gather data of the world. This is the thesis' epistemology.

With the phenomenological epistemology of this thesis, there is an acknowledgment that there is a need to understand individual motivation and perceptions of farmers in order to be able to enhance participation in the agreement. In order to gain knowledge on farmers' understanding, interpretation and views on the Green Tripartite Agreement, it is necessary to get in-depth knowledge by talking to people through interviews.

4.2 Research Design

The elements of the research design and the structure of this thesis are illustrated in Figure 4.1. The research question is addressed using a qualitative data collection approach, based on interviews as method. The thesis uses abductive reasoning which means that rather than testing predetermined hypotheses or building theory solely from observations. This abductive research approach involves an iterative process of moving between the collected empirical data and conceptual frameworks to develop the most compelling explanations (Stewart, n.d.).

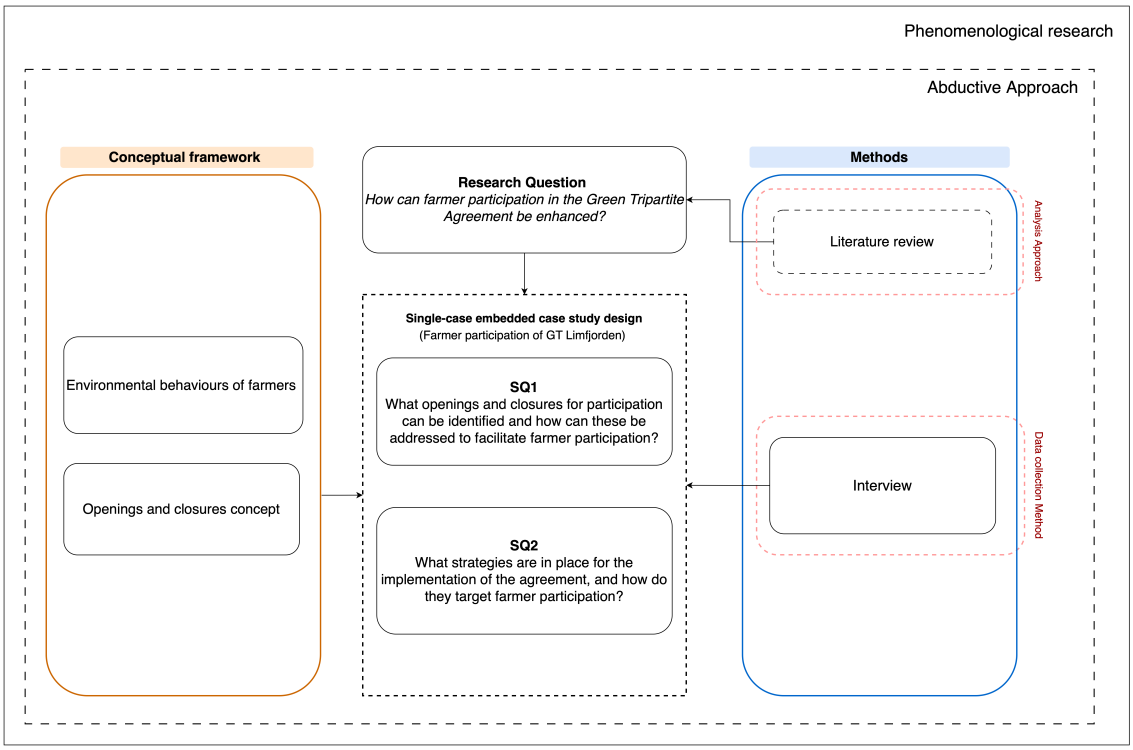

Figure 4.1. The research design of this thesis.

The research design also visualises the conceptual framework of the thesis. It is a conceptualisation of two concepts, which, combined, is the conceptual framework of the research design and is the lens from which the study is seen. This design seeks to answer the thesis' research question: *How can farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement be enhanced?*. The Research question is supported by two sub-question, each capturing elements needed in order to address this question. The first analysis, guided by the first sub-question: *"What openings and closures for participation can be identified and how can these be addressed to facilitate farmer participation?"* It explores the rationale behind farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement, seeking to understand how to facilitate openings and overcome closures. Identifying these dynamics supports the main research question by clarifying what is to be addressed to enhance farmers participation. The second analysis, guided by the second sub-question: *"What strategies are in place for the implementation of the agreement, and how do they target farmer participation?"*, examines the implementation strategies of the Green Tripartite Agreement. It specifically assesses how these strategies support farmer participation and identifies any potentially missing or misaligned approaches that could hinder engagement. This imply evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of existing strategies in enhancing participation. While this second analysis is not as directly structured by the conceptual framework, both the 'Environmental behaviour of farmers' and 'Opening and Closures' concepts inherently consider surrounding structures, as discussed in Chapter 6. Since final implementation has not yet occurred, it is important to assess the current proactive and reactive strategies in targeting farmer participation. This evaluation will guide efforts to enhance participation and thereby support the research question.

4.3 Case study of the Local Tripartite Limfjorden

This thesis focuses on the case of the Local Tripartite Limfjorden, a geographical area located around the Limfjord in the north-west of Denmark. 25% of the agreements goal on 140,000 ha of carbon rich peat soil is located within the case area of the Local Tripartite Limfjorden (Limfjordsrådet, 2025a) why this case is chosen due to the significant changes that have to happen in the agricultural sector around the Limfjord (Wielandt, 2025). According to Dalgaard, 2025, chairman of the local tripartite, this area faces the largest challenges in reducing nitrogen, as a lot of agricultural land will have to be taken out. Further, this case is the largest of the 23 local tripartites, with 18 municipalities organising the overall conversion plans together. In addition, this local tripartite is chosen, as the group members are situated around Aalborg, easing the data collection process. The geographical area of the Local Tripartite Limfjorden is defined by the water catchment area leading water to the Limfjord, illustrated on Figure 4.2.

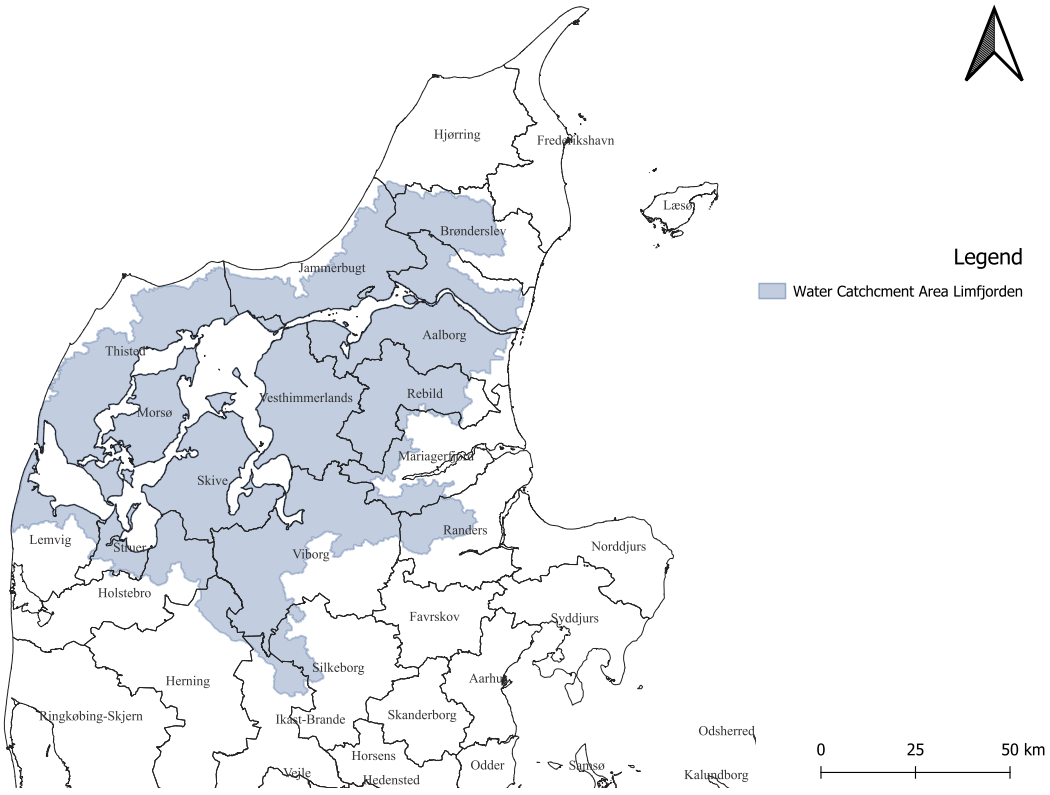

Figure 4.2. The blue area illustrates the water catchment area of Limfjorden and outlines the thesis' case area.

The Local Tripartite Limfjorden aims to restore the fjord's ecological health (Limfjordsrådet, 2025a) by converting agricultural land and reducing nitrogen discharge (Limfjordsrådet, 2025b). The target is a 2,803-ton nitrogen reduction, with at least 1,537 tons from land conversion (Limfjordsrådet, 2025a). This represents a 21% reduction from the 13,298 tons currently entering the Limfjord annually from land-based activities (Windolf Vandmiljø, 2021). Current planned projects account for a 399 ton reduction, leaving 2,404 tons remaining to be cut (SGAV, 2025). Map 4.3 illustrates the case area, showing nitrogen retention values that indicate the soils ability to retain nitrogen before it reaches the fjord.

This layer, released in May 2025, is crucial for planning, as converting areas with high retention values maximises nitrogen reduction (Højberg et al., 2025). Consequently, areas like Skive Fjord, Nissum Fjord, Halkær Bredning, and Hjarbæk Fjord are prioritised for land conversion due to their high nitrogen retention potential (Wielandt, 2025).

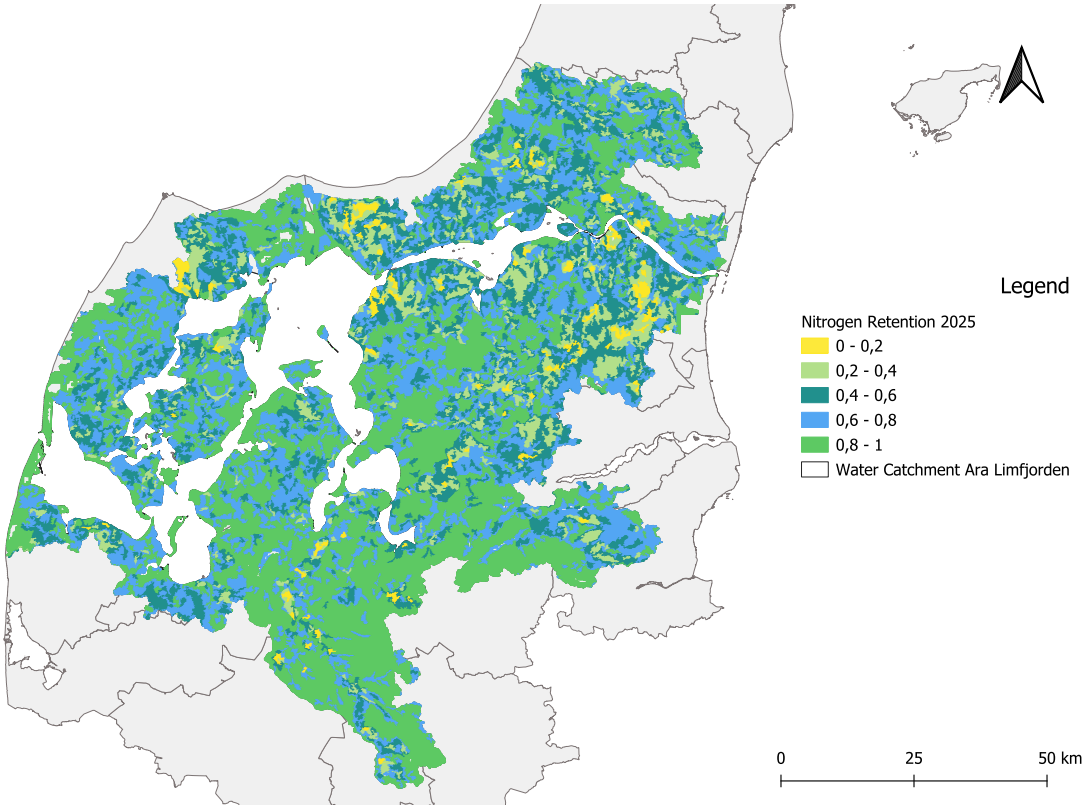

Figure 4.3. Nitrogen retention in the case area. Yellow areas (0–0.2) represent zones where land conversion has the least impact on reducing nitrogen discharge to the fjord. In contrast, bright green areas (0.8–1) indicate zones with the highest nitrogen retention potential if converted.

A significant obstacle delaying the development of effective local municipal conversion plans has been the lack of access to the nitrogen retention map (Dalgaard, 2025, Lunde, 2025, Vangsgaard, 2025, N. Christensen, 2025 and Mortensen, 2025). This map, crucial for understanding nitrogen retention and refers to the natural removal of nitrogen as it travels from fields through drainage and groundwater to water bodies. Due to its spatial variability and the inability to measure it directly, models are used to describe retention patterns. Although the retention map was published on May 1st, 2025, during this thesis period (geus, 2025), its late arrival is still criticised by the aforementioned committee members for shortening the planning time frame.

This case study is a single-embedded case study of the Local Tripartite Limfjorden, as the analysis includes multiple units or entities within a single geographical area, providing a geographical delimitation of the thesis (Scholz and Tietje, 2002, Yin, 2014). The rationale for choosing this single-embedded case study is that it represents a common case Yin, 2014. Although the farmers in Limfjorden are facing significant changes in land management and experiencing a shift in how farming can be practised, the case is not considered extreme. This is because such changes reflect broader trends within both the agricultural sector but

also other sectors, which is increasingly expected to contribute to the green transition and support nature restoration. Therefore, this case offers insights into typical challenges and responses that are likely to be relevant in similar contexts across the sector.

In using a single-embedded case study, it is assumed that the findings from this specific context can be analytically generalised to similar cases (Yin, 2014, Flyvbjerg, 2006). The research question focuses on factors influencing farmers' participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement within the Danish agricultural sector. The results may be applicable to similar contexts, such as the 22 other local tripartites, where farmers face similar conditions and decisions around participation. These findings can also inform other settings where voluntary participation from farmers is central. The conclusions may support the development of policies and practices aimed at promoting voluntary environmental actions, especially in situations where local collaboration and individual motivations intersect with broader regulatory pressures.

Organisational structure of the local tripartite

The local tripartite committee consists of 18 municipalities and four organisations: the Danish Society for Nature Conservation (DN), Agillix, Fjordland and the Danish Nature Agency (NST) as visualised on Figure 4.4. Together, the members of the Local Tripartite Limfjorden decide what areas will be included in the overall conversion plans. Each municipality creates individual conversion plans which are discussed in the Local Tripartite Limfjorden with the aim of doing holistic planning for the entire area and assess if the local goals will be reached. The Local Tripartite Limfjorden operates with well-established governance structures for nature projects in the area, facilitated by the Limfjordsråd and its secretariat, as illustrated in Figure 4.4. Since 2007, the Limfjordsrådet has actively supported coordination and cooperation among the 18 municipalities connected to the Limfjord, primarily focusing on improving the fjord's environmental condition (Limfjordsrådet, n.d.). This has been achieved through initiatives such as the establishment of wetland projects designed to reduce nitrogen discharge into the fjord. These projects have historically relied on the voluntary participation of landowners and farmers. The Limfjordsråd's role has encompassed coordinating these projects with the municipalities and mediating in the event of conflicts (Mortensen, 2025).

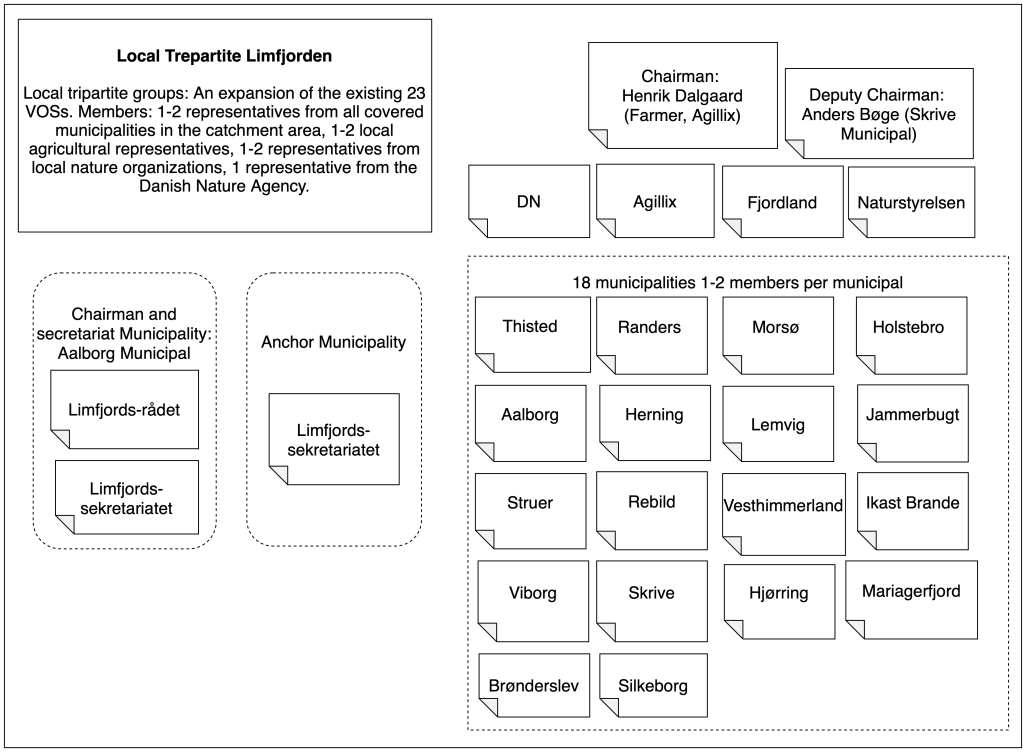

Figure 4.4. The organisational structure of Local Tripartite Limfjorden.

The introduction of the Green Tripatite Agreement brings political momentum and allocate funding, facilitating project development and land exchange (Gravesen, 2025). Among the members of the Local Green Tripartite Limfjorden committee, there is broad acceptance of the agreement between the local members; Dalgaard, 2025 (Chairman), Lunde, 2025 (Aalborg Municipality), Gravesen, 2025 (Fjordland), Thøgersen, 2025 (Holstebro Municipality), N. Christensen, 2025 (Randers Municipality), Vangsgaard, 2025 (Struer Municipality), and Kjeldsen, 2025 (DN, Aalborg). Also supported by Mortensen, 2025 from Limfjordsrådet's Secretariat, who states that there is a proactive and enthusiastic mindset actors in the agreement.

The initial prioritisation is focused on outlining areas for land conversion on maps to reduce nitrogen discharge. Achieving the target reduction of 2803 tons of nitrogen (N. Christensen, 2025). Mortensen, 2025 (Limfjordsrådet's Secretariat) notes that the impact will vary across municipalities, with some potentially minimising the conversion of high-quality agricultural soil, while others will inevitably need to include such land.

The upcoming Danish Municipal and Regional Council Elections on November 18, 2025, also is an relevant factor to include. Dalgaard, 2025 raises concerns that the Green Tripartite Agreement could be used as a campaign in the beforemath of the election, why it is important to get the plans approved before a new city council takes effect (Dalgaard, 2025).

Conceptual Framework 5

This chapter presents the conceptual framework of this thesis, which is built upon two core concepts: 'Environmental behaviour of farmers' by Westerink et al., 2020 and 'Openings' and 'Closures'. With the phenomenological ontology in mind, the concepts are selected to address the research question by understanding farmers perception of the phenomena and implementing the agreement to enhance farmer participation. A phenomenological approach is also consistent with existing research on farmer participation, which describes the phenomena shaping participation mechanisms. This chapter presents and conceptualises the two concepts in relation to this thesis.

5.1 Environmental behaviour of farmers

Westerink et al., 2024 argue that *"changing farming practices at a large scale can only be achieved when for farmers all three behavioural conditions of willingness, ability and support are met, and when governance takes into account heterogeneity in farming"* (Westerink et al., 2024, P. 2).

Figure 5.1 illustrates the willingness, ability, and support framework, demonstrating how these concepts interact to facilitate change within the agricultural sector. This framework also offers solutions when one or more of these factors are diminished. The concept originates from the work by Westerink et al., 2020 and Westerink et al., 2024 and is done in the context of dairy farmers in the Netherlands with a focus on species-rich grassland and more biodiversity. This concept does not capture how farmers actually act or what impact that behaviour has, and does not identify the connection between these arrangements and farmers' actions. Instead it is focusing on the surrounding mechanisms that the farmer is affected by (Westerink et al., 2020). This is why the concept applies to the phenomenological theory of science well.

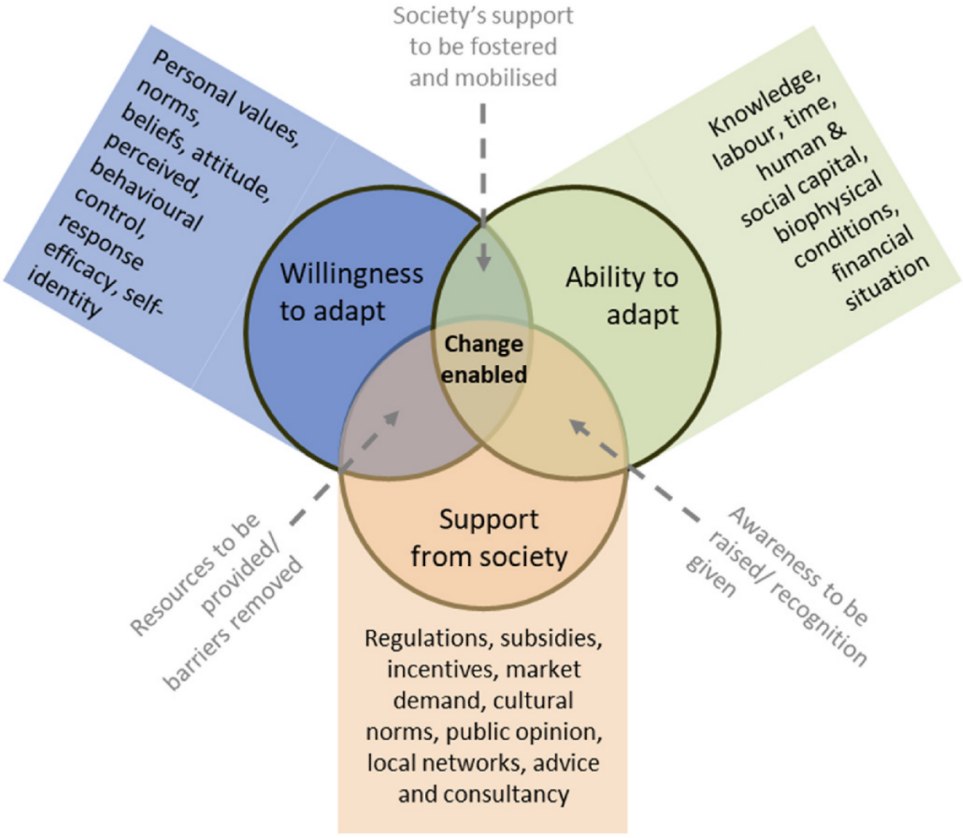

Figure 5.1. Environmental behaviour of farmers by (Westerink et al., 2020).

5.1.1 Willingness to adapt

The concept *willingness* includes the factors: personal values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, perceived, behavioural control, response efficacy, and self identity, which collectively determine the desirability of a given choice. Values that are important to a majority of farmers are self-determination, family farm succession and care. Beliefs involve convictions about the effectiveness of actions. Personal norms, which guide their behaviour, are tied to the farmer's self-perception of being a 'good farmer', and this perception differ from farmer to farmer - e.g. the importance of having well maintained fields. Attitudes towards nature can range from being in harmony with nature or to fear nature. Motivations, determining a certain choice can include the satisfaction of competitive interaction with neighbours (Westerink et al., 2024).

5.1.2 Ability to adapt

The concept *ability* is the feasibility of a choice and can include elements of the farmers resources such as knowledge, labour, time, human and social capital, biophysical conditions and financial situation with economy (labour, income, costs and debts) being the overriding limits to what farmers can do. Farmers' flexibility is often limited if the farmer is heavily financed or limited by physical constraints like land availability and location. Farm characteristics, including landscape, soil, water conditions further shape their options. Farming systems also play a role; intensive farmers typically face greater challenges in

integrating biodiversity compared to extensive farmers. Farmers often prioritise their belief in their own ability (perceived control) over what is actually possible. Likewise, it is their perception of risk or opportunity, not the actual risk or opportunity, that determines if they see changes as an option (Westerink et al., 2024).

5.1.3 Support from society

The concept *support* includes regulations, subsidies, incentives, market demand, cultural norms, public opinion, local networks, advice and consultancy. Support is therefore the surrounding initiatives and governance structures that can support farmers' ability and/or farmers' willingness to change. Market demand and subsidy schemes, supporting ecosystem services, biodiversity and food production can motivate and enable farmers to adopt new approaches. Regulation can deliver a clear guide for farmers or require them to act, and can contribute to their willingness, however, regulation can also discourage farmers to take action themselves. The public's and peers' opinion can affect farmers in a discouraging or encouraging way. Social capital within local networks is acknowledged as an important resource for the farmer. Farmers advisors also influence the farmers' attitude and knowledge. Financing through banks or crowd funding, and further favourable land lease terms, can affect the decision towards adopting more biodiversity (Westerink et al., 2024).

Within the concept, if one or several of the categories (willingness, ability or support) are missing, then supplementary governance arrangements are needed within the policy framework (private and public) (Westerink et al., 2020). The concept further provides solutions if one of the concepts are low: *"When willingness is low, awareness must be raised and recognition given to behaviour that is appreciated. When ability is weak, resources must be provided and barriers removed. When a farmer is both willing and able, but support is lacking, society's support must be mobilised and fostered"* (Westerink et al., 2024, P. 3).

5.2 Openings and Closures concept

In this thesis, the concept of openings and closures are used to understand the context of enabling or hindering participation for farmers in the Green Tripartite Agreement. The concepts of openings and closures adds on to the similar concepts of barriers and opportunities. These, however, differ, as barriers and opportunities are often more individualised and actor centred. Openings and closures introduce the aspects of surrounding structure and time.

The definition of the concepts 'Openings' and 'Closures' in this thesis derive from Vasström, 2013 and Nielsen et al., 2019 in particular. However, the concepts are adapted to this thesis by expanding the scope of openings and closures to the "Environmental behaviour of farmers" framework presented by Westerink et al., 2020 to offer complementary insights. The following subsections present the concepts of openings and closures, and the connection to the concept of environmental behaviour of farmers by Westerink et al., 2020.

5.2.1 Openings

Openings represent potentials or opportunities within a planning process such as the Green Tripartite with focus on the surrounding structural landscape and the concept of time which allows an individual to take action Vasström, 2013. This means that at a certain time there might be a better opening to do something than other times. Openings are not necessarily actions themselves, but rather conditions or circumstances that create possibilities. Identifying openings aide to understand the factors that enable participation as new possibilities for enhancing participation emerge Nielsen et al., 2019. The concept 'Openings' differs from using potentials, as there is a potential that the farmers we are investigating would do something, but there is also a potential that they would do something completely different. By identifying openings in participation it enables discussion on how to support these identified openings.

5.2.2 Closures

Closures represent barriers, challenges, or constraints that hinder or restrict participation within a planning process. Like openings, they are not necessarily actions but rather conditions that hinder participation based on surrounding structures and timing (Vasström, 2013). The factor of time illustrates that at a certain point of time, there are circumstances that affect the possibility to participate or not. By identifying closures in participation in relation to the implementation of the Green Tripartite Agreement, it enables discussion on how to address the identified closures.

5.3 Conceptualisation

The concept of *willingness, ability and support* serves multiple functions in this thesis. First, it guides the methodological design by providing a structured approach to examining farmers' participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement and guides the questions in the interview guide. Second, it establishes an analytical framework through which we can interpret the collected data. Third, it offers a foundation for developing practical recommendations to mobilise solutions based on research findings. The concept shapes the methodological choices and structures the data collection approach. In this thesis, we use an abductive research strategy (see Chapter 4), where the *willingness, ability and support* concept serves as conceptual foundation. This approach allows to move between theory and empirical data, continuously enhancing the theoretical understanding as new insights emerge (Stewart, n.d.).

Relating the concept terms: 'openings and closures' to 'willingness to adapt', 'ability to adapt' and 'support from society', the two frameworks are supplementary and used in combination to address the research question. By combining the concepts through the lens of 'environmental behaviour of farmers', the methodological approach is framed, and by applying the concept of openings and closures, areas for improvement can be identified to enhance farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement.

Methods 6

This chapter presents the methods used for data collection, methodological considerations and the thesis delimitations. This chapter presents the methodological considerations regarding literature review and interviews, as the main data collection method including preparation, conduction and analytical approach.

6.1 Literature Review

To shape the research and present the state of the art on implementation of environmental agreements, a semi-systematic literature review has been conducted. Generally, literature reviews are used to map out existing literature within the field of study by identifying, collecting, and synthesising knowledge to justify the research question (Snyder, 2019). The semi-systematic literature review's contribution to a study is described by Snyder, 2019 as: "*the ability to map a field of research, synthesise the state of knowledge, and create an agenda for further research or the ability to provide an historical overview or timeline of a specific topic*" (Snyder, 2019, P. 335). To ensure that the literature review is precise and to ensure validity, the following sections outlines the design, conduct and analytical phases of the literature review as presented by Snyder, 2019.

Designing the literature review

Prior to conducting the literature review, key terms relevant for the problem were brainstormed by searching for grey literature by actors of the Green Tripartite Agreement and the media. These terms included: "voluntary", "land use change", "regulation", "evaluation", "farmer", "environment", "agri-environmental schemes", and "policy". To widen the terminology, explorative search was done by using the AI-tool "Perplexity" and its deep search function. This resulted in large and broad search terms that needed to be scoped. To make sure the relevant terms were used, and at the same time avoid the risk of relevant articles being excluded from the search, every term was checked to ensure relevance in the database 'Web of Science'. This was done by removing synonyms that did not yield any hits in the search databases. The result from this process was the search string: *"Agri-Environmental Schemes" AND voluntar* OR "free will*" OR willing**. Boolean searching (AND/OR) is used to broaden and refine the literature search, and truncation is applied to allow for multiple word endings, as the terms often appear in varied forms. The term 'Agri-Environmental Schemes' used in the literature search also yielded results related to 'Agri-Environmental Climate Schemes'. From 2014, the factor of climate was included into the agri-environmental schemes changing the term to agri-environmental climate schemes (AECS) with the aim of covering practise within climate change, water,

soil and biodiversity aspects (Hasler et al., 2022). As a mix of articles have been used in the literature review, both terms have been used when conducting the state of the art of the thesis.

Conducting the literature review

To conduct the literature review the databases: Web of Science, Scopus and ProQuest were used. These databases were chosen to ensure a wide range of possible articles from different backgrounds, as each database differ and all of them are large and recognised databases for conducting literature searches (Clarivate, n.d., Elsevier, n.d., ProQuest, n.d.). The process of conducting the literature is illustrated on 6.1 below.

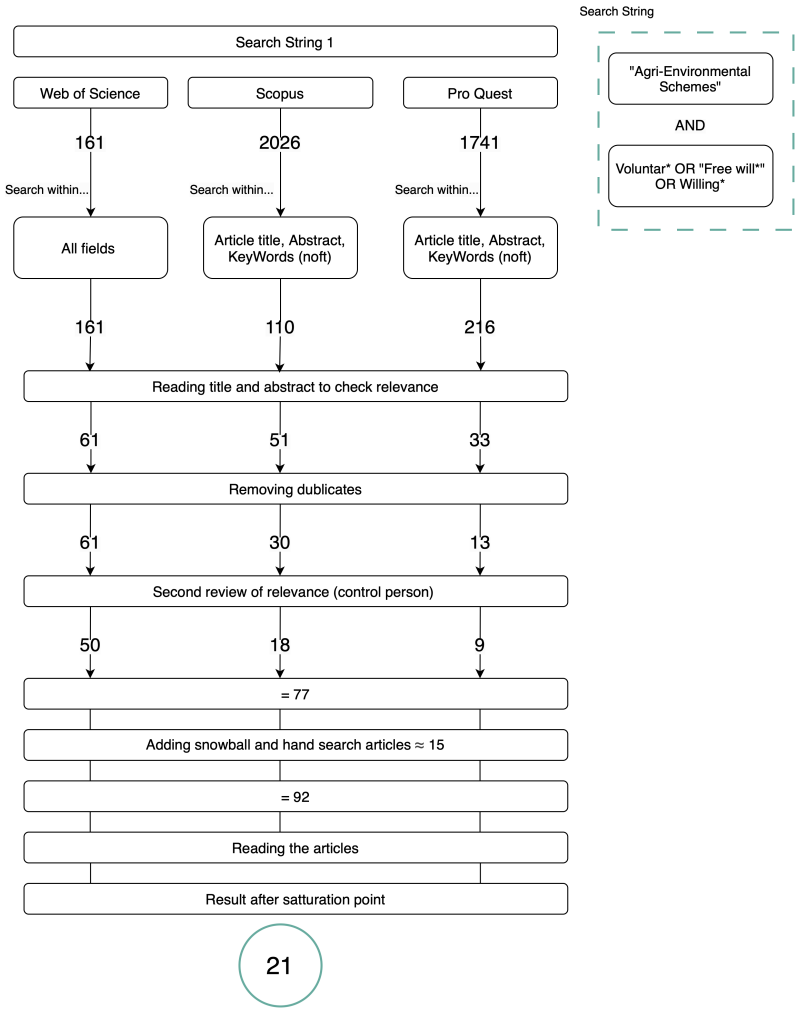

Figure 6.1. The process, exclusion criteria and results by conducting the literature review.

By using the search string it resulted in 161, 2026, and 1741 articles from the databases. To narrow the number of results, "noft" was applied for results in Scopus and Pro Quest to scope the results, enhance relevance, and ensuring that these terms were used as a central part of the articles. "Noft" is a scoping mechanism meaning that the term has to appear in either the article's title, abstract or keyword or in all of them. After the scope was added, titles and abstract of the articles were read to check their relevance within the scope of this thesis. While reading it became clear that there were multiple duplicates which needed to

be removed. Lastly, a second review of relevance was done by a control person to delimit the amount of articles.

To ensure relevance, several inclusion criteria were made. The inclusion criteria included that the articles must take point of departure in a Global North setting, written in English, Danish or Norwegian and all years of publication were included. These inclusion criteria were used to take cultural aspects into account to be able to apply results to a Danish context and all years of publication to gain knowledge on the dynamics and changes in voluntary participation in agri-environmental schemes. The inclusion criteria proved important to align the goal when assigning databases.

By using the inclusion criteria and "noft" as scoping followed by removing duplicates and two reviews of relevance, the literature review resulted in 77 articles from the search string which were read as explained in the following section.

Analysing the literature review

The total of 77 articles from all databases combined were gathered in one Excel-sheet and categorised into 7 categories based on geography. The categorisation was made as an additional scoping strategy to begin by reading articles in a Danish setting, then a Nordic and European setting and lastly a global setting and make notes of main results from the articles to synthesise in the state of the art. Because initial search results in a Danish setting were limited, snowballing was applied to locate further Danish literature by using the "cited by" option as well as the reference lists of the most relevant articles. After reading several articles, academic saturation was reached as new articles did not present any new concepts or relevant information (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). This resulted in 21 articles relevant for the purpose of the literature review.

The condensed knowledge of reviewing the literature is the foundation of the state of the art presented in Section 2.2.

6.2 Interviews

The main data collection method for this thesis is through interviews in the form of semi-structured interviews. This qualitative data collection method is effective for in-depth exploration of complex phenomena through the participants' experiences and perceptions (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2022) and enables collecting data investigating farmer participation within the Green Tripartite Agreement. The semi-structured interviews consist of predetermined questions and allows the interviewee to shape the flow of information and to ask clarifying questions (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003).

Conducting interviews is a recognised method for investigating farmers' viewpoints on the implementation of an agri-environmental scheme as the Green Tripartite Agreement. These type of studies have been conducted for decades as illustrated in the in the state of the art in Chapter 2.2 which includes the introduction of pesticide-free buffer zones as investigated by T. Christensen et al., 2011 and afforestation initiatives investigated by Madsen, 2003. The interviews are presented in three phases including: preparation, conduction, and analysis of the interviews

6.2.1 Preparation

As Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003 highlights, interviews inherently involve pre-assumptions and understandings about a topic, distinguishing them from casual conversation. This necessitates awareness of these pre-assumptions and understandings to mitigate their influence on interview design and execution. From a phenomenological perspective, it is therefore necessary to be aware of one's own pre-assumptions but also acknowledge the interviewees experience and knowledge when answering questions. This practice is crucial to ensure that the phenomenon under investigation is approached as it appears to the participant, rather than being filtered through the researcher's lens. Thus, the pre-reflections made prior to the interviews serve as an understanding of phenomena in their essence.

Drawing on the existing literature identified in the state of the art on voluntary participation in AES and the thesis group members' background in environmental science, we acknowledge several pre-assumptions. Firstly, we assume variations between the interviewees perceptions of nature and their opinion on the agreement in general: that not all farmers have the same opinion. Secondly, we recognise the variation of the farmers' production types (e.g., organic, extensive, intensive, plant, cattle, pig) would likely contribute to diverse perspectives, which is why we aim for a diverse sample size. These pre-assumptions derive from academic research on farmer types and their relation to and perception of nature as argued in the state of art Section 2.2.2.

At the time of data collection, the Green Tripartite Agreement has not yet been fully implemented locally, and no projects have been completed. Therefore, interviewee responses is based on a synthesis of their prior experiences with nature and climate-related projects, similar to the expected projects under the Green Tripartite, alongside their personal convictions and expectations regarding the agreement's potential outcomes, recognising that the responses reflect a prospective, rather than retrospective, evaluation of their own participation in Green Tripartite Agreement (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). This poses a potential concern in relation to the validity of the conclusions, as farmers are asked to reflect on how they believe they might act on the implementation of the Green Tripartite Agreement based on previous experience with nature initiatives. The responses are therefore not drawn directly from experience with the agreement, and the responses reflect speculation and/or assumption about future outcomes.

In preparation, semi-structured interview guides were developed (see Appendix A). To operationalise our conceptual framework, the interview guides were structured accordingly. Therefore, this framework both informed and delimited the scope of research. Following the first interviews with Farmers A & B, the interview guides were revised and refined to enhance clarity and relevance to the main research question and the conceptual frame. The semi-structured nature of the interview approach also facilitates the exploration of emerging themes and allows supplementary questions beyond those explicitly outlined in the interview guides.

Prior to conducting the interviews, publicly available information regarding each interviewee and their respective organisations was collected to minimise the potential for misaligned questions and enhance the relevance of the interview content.

Selecting interviewees

Farmer interviewees were identified through two strategies, including references from an agricultural consultancy and social media outreach through the Facebook group NOFFF (No Farmers, No Food, No Future). The two strategies aim to achieve a diverse representation of how the agreement is perceived across the agricultural sector. Contact was established via phone calls. A total of 6 farmers were contacted and interviewed. The Green Tripartite Agreement implies that people who own land in general should engage in the agreement and convert land. However, contact was only established with farmers and not landowners in general as nitrogen discharge derives mainly from agricultural practices, which pollutes surrounding water bodies and is one of the targets of the agreement as described in Chapter 3. Farmers were also chosen as a group of interest as they are all subject to the same legislative, regulatory, and subsidy frameworks, with variations depending on farm type. This allows for generalisation within the group, making it possible to draw up conclusions. However, it is acknowledged that regardless of land size, all landowners have the possibility to reject a project that includes their land.

Members of the local Green Tripartite Limfjorden, the committee responsible for politically negotiating the local agreement and represent diverse organisations, possess valuable insights into past experiences, the preconditions for the local agreement, and the strategies employed to promote voluntary land conversion in the Limfjord area Because of their knowledge and influence on implementation, this group has been selected for interviews. Participants were identified through Aalborg Municipality's website (Aalborg Kommune, 2024) prioritising geographically diversity and people with a farming or nature background to narrow down the amount of interviews to be conducted. Individuals with backgrounds which where considered less relevant to the thesis, such as school teaching, were excluded. Contact was established through email and a total of 14 local members were contacted and 8 responded that they were willing to give an interview. 3 members replied after some time after the other interviews were held and it was decided not to go through with these interviews, as the saturation point was met and no new perspectives emerged. Consequently, a total of 8 interviews with members of the local tripartite committee were conducted.

Farmers were not chosen randomly; initial contacts to an agricultural consultant recommended individuals potentially willing to participate. To mitigate potential bias and increase the diversity of perspectives, additional participants were identified through NOFFF, targeting farmers who were less positively inclined toward the agreement. Despite this effort, the sampling approach may still have favoured individuals with particular viewpoints or relationships, thereby affecting the reliability of the findings. A more randomised sampling method could have improved the representativeness of the sample, however it was difficult to locate farmers in this way.

6.2.2 Conduction

Interviews where performed in person or online. It is often more informative to conduct interviews in person, however it is also time consuming (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). A total of 10 interviews where performed in person, prioritising to meet with farmers at their farm, except from one farmer where it geographically made more sense to conduct the

interview online. The in-person interviews allow for in-depth conversation and reduces the risk of poor online connections. This also allowed for field exploration and farm production insights at cow stables also providing context to the interview. Some members of the Local Tripartite Limfjorden were also interviewed in person according to their preferences. Online interviews where conducted via Teams and allowed the group to perform several interviews at the same time, improving the efficiency of data collection. All interviews where conducted in Danish and recorded with consent from the interviewees. Throughout the interviews, empirical saturation was reached, where little to no new knowledge was collected.

The interviews were conducted in two rounds, each with a different focus. In February, two exploratory interviews with Agillix and Hjørring Municipality were carried out to help define the thesis focus and help identifying and scoping the problem. The explorative interviews are presented in Table 6.1.

The second round of interviews was the actual data collection of the thesis and conducted in April 2025. Table 6.2 lists the committee members of the Local Tripartite Limfjorden in addition to the interview with Susanne Mortensen from Limfjordsrådet's Secretariat. These interviews are considered expert interviewees as they hold in-depth insights into agreement implementation, strategies and experience from the Limfjord region. Table 6.3 lists the interviewed farmers all anonymised. Anonymising the farmers helps reduce reluctance to share information, as it may encourage more openness, and the barrier is considered minimised.

As the interviews were semi-structured, this allowed the interviewer and interviewees to deviate from the interview guide when perspectives relevant for the thesis was introduced. With one hour sat aside for each interview, and with the amount of questions, this structure of interviews proved valuable in terms of collecting relevant data but also optimistic in relation to addressing all the questions. Some interviewees provided short and concise answers, making it possible to address all the questions. There were also interviewees who were thorough in answering the questions and also deviating from them. This meant that it was not possible to ask all of the questions and some were sorted out. This means that there are insights provided by some interviewees which are not possible to discuss in relation to the other interviewees, however, this is argued to be of incremental impact on the results, as the same primary openings and closures were identified.

The sample size of 14 interviews does not represent the entire agricultural sector. The empirical basis for this thesis consists of interviews with six farmers from the Limfjord region whom are not also politically involved. While this sample offers valuable insights into the dynamics and phenomena, it does not constitute a complete representative sample of all Danish farmers. As such, the findings should be interpreted as indicative providing depth, rather than definitive. All interviewees were men, reflecting the gender composition of the Danish farming community, which is predominantly male. However, the exclusion of female farmers may have limited the diversity of perspectives captured in the study. Including women could have provided additional or alternative insights, potentially enriching the analyses. Further, the the data from the interviewees their perception of the truth and not necessarily the objective truth.

Table 6.1. Interviews: organisation, position, name of interviewees or number and date of conducted interview

Explorative interviews, Total: 2				
Organisation	Position	Name/number	Date	Appendix
Hjørring Municipality	Administrative employees at Team Nature	Bodil Porsbøl Jacobsen and Magrete Aakjær Christiansen	20.02.2025	A.1.4
Agillix	Head of Environment	Søren Hoff Brøndum	20.02.2025	A.1.5

Table 6.2. Interviews: organisation, position, name of interviewees or number and date of conducted interview.

Committee members of the local Tripartite Limfjorden, Total: 8					
Organisation	Position	Name	Online/in person	Date	Appendix
Aalborg Municipality	City council politician and farmer	Jes Lunde	In person	8.04.2025	A.1.1
DN, Aalborg	Vice chairman	Thorkild Kjeldsen	Online	09.04.2025	A.1.1
Struer Municipality	City council politician, consultant and farmer	John Vangsgaard	Online	9.04.2025	A.1.1
Holstebro Municipality	City council politician and farmer	Finn Thøgersen	Online	15.04.2025	A.1.1
Randers Municipality	City council politician and farmer	Niels Erik Christensen	In person	15.04.2025	A.1.1
Local Tripartite Limfjorden	Chairman and farmer	Henrik Dalgaard	In person	16.04.2025	A.1.1
Fjordland	Chairman and farmer	Leif Gravesen	Online	23.04.2025	A.1.1
		Non committee member			
Limfjordsrådet	Consultant	Susanne Mortensen	Online	24.04.2025	A.1.3

Table 6.3. Interviews: organisation, position, name of interviewees or number and date of conducted interview.

Farmers, Total: 6					
Name/number		Online/in person	Production type	Date	Appendix
Farmer	A	In person	Conventional, cows: milk	02.04.2025	A.1.2
Farmer	B	In person	Conventional, cows: meat, pigs	02.04.2025	A.1.2
Farmer	C	Online	Conventional, cows: milk	18.04.2025	A.1.2
Farmer	D	In person	Conventional, pigs	18.04.2025	A.1.2
Farmer	E	In person	Organic, cows: milk	22.04.2025	A.1.2
Farmer	F	In person	Conventional, cows: milk	23.04.2025	A.1.2

6.2.3 Analysing

All interview recordings were transcribed using OneNote to be time efficient. All transcriptions underwent a manual check before using quotations, ensuring reliable data. All 14 interviews (explorative interviews not included) were coded according to themes selected prior based on the conceptual framework. New codes were added during the coding process to include valuable data that was not entailed in the theoretical framework, emphasising an abductive approach to interview coding. This resulted in a total of 78 codes, however not all were used. All coded data was collected in Excel to gain an overview of all quotes in relation to their corresponding code and the person stating the quote. Some quotes proved irrelevant for answering the research question and were left out. All relevant quotes identified through the coding process were translated to English and used in the analysis.

When processing the data and categorising it by using a coding system, there is a risk of some points being left out due to the amount of codes and the amount of collected data. It is argued that this risk does not affect the results of the thesis, as all codes where looked through, all interviews have been listened to by the group members and there was a clear idea of what the interviewees' focus was on.

6.3 AI Tools and Their Application

The generative AI tools *ChatGPT*, *Perplexity*, and *Research Rabbit* were used in conducting this thesis in accordance to AAU guidelines (University, n.d.). ChatGPT was exclusively applied for language-related purposes, including grammar correction and aiding in the translation of interview quotes from Danish to English. Perplexity was used during the literature review to suggest synonyms using its "deep search" function. Complementing Perplexity, Research Rabbit was also used as a snowballing technique during the literature review to gather additional academic literature.

All AI-assisted outputs, including transcriptions, synonym suggestions, and translations

were critically evaluated and carefully verified by the group members before inclusion in the thesis. The integration of these AI tools provided significant resource optimisation. While AI assistance can potentially impact learning outcomes, we found that the initial transcription outputs of interviews often contained inaccuracies. Therefore, all interview sound files were re-listened to ensure that no data was lost or the output was misunderstood. This critical review process ensured the quality of our data and analyses.

Using AI for these specific tasks allowed us to save considerable time, which then could be reallocated to deeper analysis and critical reflection.

Openings and Closures for farmer participation 7

This chapter analyses the openings and closures for farmer participation within the Green Tripartite Agreement, applying the Ability, Willingness, and Support framework detailed in Chapter 5. This chapter addresses the first sub-question: *What openings and closures for participation can be identified and how can these be addressed to facilitate farmer participation?* The chapter is structured according to the conceptual framework, with identified openings and closures based on the interview data from 14 interviews detailed in Chapter 6. Each subsection concludes with a summary of findings. In order to frame the context of the analysis, the chapter begins with an overview of the current status of the agreement's implementation to establish the necessary context for the reader.

7.1 Ability to Adapt

Farmers' ability to adapt or participate in projects under the Green Tripartite Agreement is limited by farmers' previous experiences with nature related initiatives, farmers' human and social capital, biophysical conditions, farm characteristics, and financial situation. These factors are part of determining the likelihood of a farmer participating and should not be understood directly as a farmers' willingness to participate but as the constraints and possibilities the farmer has. This section explores farmers' ability to participate with a focus on openings and closure and how to address or facilitate these in order to enhance participation.

7.1.1 Previous experience with nature projects

Previous experience with similar nature projects can shape farmers' ability to participate. An opening for participation in the agreement is created when previous experiences with nature and climate initiatives are perceived as being successfully implemented, whereas a closure for participation is created when negative experiences are present. Some farmers have already engaged in other environmental or climate projects why these experiences shapes their perspectives and potentially affect their participation (Farmer A, 2025, Farmer B, 2025, Farmer E, 2025, Farmer F, 2025).

Positive experience with state-led land purchases with repurchase options can create openings to participation by reducing farmer workload and encourage engagement. Farmer E, 2025 shared a positive experience with a wetland project 7–8 years ago, where he voluntarily sold land to the State, and the State carried out the project and allowed him to repurchase the land for a lower price. Now the land is used for grazing. He emphasised

the benefits of voluntary involvement, saying it is better to influence the project than have it forced (Farmer E, 2025).

There is also a closure when past experiences have proven to be difficult and progress has not succeeded. Mortensen, 2025 (Limfjordsrådet's Secretariat) emphasises several examples around Limfjorden where wetlands have been created using the same voluntary principles as the Green Tripartite, where even if 90% of landowners agree, a single refusal can stop the entire project. Mortensen, 2025 states that *"mentally, it [voluntarism] makes sense (...) but in practice, it is terribly difficult and slow"*. This shows that there, already before the Green Tripartite, are different factors such as difficult land exchange, regulatory approvals hindering progress and might make participation for farmers more difficult since few project succeeded.

Previous experience with wetland creation projects where legislation have been a closure, as legal restrictions can prevent projects from succeeding. Thøgersen, 2025 (Holstebro Municipality) emphasises that *"about one-third of the projects were not finished"*. One reason was that some of the areas that would be flooded are protected natural habitats, where alterations are prohibited by law, such as land protected under §3 of the Nature Protection Act (Naturbeskyttelsesloven), which may not legally be flooded (Miljø- og Ligestillingsministeriet, 2019).

Another negative experience that can create closures for participating is the experience Farmer A, 2025 had when he wanted to create a mini-wetland project. The result was that he was advised not to participate since the pollutant measurements were too low, and he would risk not receiving any financial support from the project. This highlights the need for more flexible and holistic evaluation criteria that recognise long-term and cumulative environmental benefits beyond current conditions. However is the rationale for this rejection that subsidies should target the most polluting areas, where these mini-wetlands will have an actual effect.

7.1.2 Biophysical conditions

There are several factors related to the biophysical conditions on and around a farmer's land that influence their ability to adapt to the implementation of the Green Tripartite Agreement. For some farmers, these conditions can act as closures for their possibility to join the agreement, while they are openings for others.

One potential closure to participation, highlighted by Farmer C, 2025, is the concern that afforestation in certain areas could disrupt or damage the subsurface drainage systems of adjacent agricultural land. This potential negative impact on surrounding farmland acts as a distinct disincentive for farmers in such areas. This concern is well-founded, as about half of Denmark's farmland is artificially drained with buried pipes to maintain arable conditions, and the integrity of these systems is critical for both current and surrounding land use (DCA, 2024). If drainage is disrupted by tree roots or lack of maintenance, not only does the newly afforested land become wetter, but so do upstream fields, potentially making them uncultivable. Farmer C, 2025 highlights a potential crucial practical risk which is a potential closure for participation: *"some fields have these large main pipes that drain huge areas and move water from large regions. And if you now start planting forest*

in many fields that are very waterlogged, and then all the roots end up growing into those drains, then you could essentially risk that the fields behind them [in the catchment area] cannot be cultivated because the water cannot get away. (...) Who is suddenly going to go and dig through a forest to fix those drains?" (Farmer C, 2025).

A potential closure for participation is highlighted by Gravesen, 2025 (Fjordland), that emphasises the economic and operational value of well-drained, high-yielding land, where he points to: *"High-yield areas that are waterlogged areas but have good drainage, which are just as good agricultural land as high land [land that is elevated in the landscape], they would be sorry to let go of this land. And then they would want similar land close to their farm, and if that cannot be found, then you potentially have a landowner who will not participate. It is a big challenge"* (Gravesen, 2025). The loss of productive, well-drained land is not easily compensated, especially if equivalent land is unavailable nearby. Furthermore, there is a risk of eliminating the opportunity to buy the neighbouring farmers' land if it also gets too wet. The reluctance to participate grows when farmers perceive a risk of losing valuable assets without adequate replacement or compensation.

Thøgersen, 2025 adds a forward-looking perspective, acknowledging that increasing rainfall and flooding are making some areas progressively less viable for cultivation, which is a closure for future farming if not handled well, but an opening and an argument as to why land should be exchanged now: *"Considering the amounts of rain we experience, there are some areas that are often flooded and difficult to cultivate. And if we look a few years ahead, it will only get worse, and the land will become worthless. So, if we could exchange some land around now, it would be an advantage"* (Thøgersen, 2025). Failure to consider these physical factors risks both farmer disengagement affecting farmers' ability to participate and potentially having unintended negative impacts on agricultural productivity and landscape hydrology.

Land Exchange

The possibility of removing high-quality land from production creates uncertainty that discourages farmer participation, creating a potential closure, emphasising the need for clear conversion plans early in the process (Lunde, 2025). Land exchange is a strategic solution, involving that farmers give up parts of their land in return for other areas, ideally located near existing farmland (Lunde, 2025). Farmer participation is fundamentally determined by land characteristics, including elevation, soil texture, and farm size. An opening for participation is when farmers have low-lying land, that is difficult to cultivate because these areas often present economic and physical challenges for the farmers to cultivate (Farmer B, 2025, Farmer E, 2025). On the contrary, a closure for participation is when farmers have high-lying, productive land, they find participation economically and environmentally unfeasible, due to the good production conditions on these lands (Gravesen, 2025, Thøgersen, 2025).

An opening for farmer participation is the fragmented nature of current land distribution presents opportunities for improvement through collective land exchange. As one farmer noted, *"one neighbour has two football fields of agricultural land in the middle of another farmer's land, and I have three right next to them"* (Farmer B, 2025). The Green Tripartite Agreement enables large-scale collective exchanges that can consolidate

fragmented holdings and remove poor-quality land while motivating participation.

The perceived value and quality of exchanged land serves as crucial factors of farmer participation, if land is unproductive this is and opening, if the land is of high quallity, it is an closure. Farmer B, 2025 emphasise the importance of strategic land removal, with one stating: *"is it not just about removing the areas that serve no real purpose - just take out the worst parts?"* (Farmer B, 2025). This perspective aligns with observations by Mortensen, 2025 (Limfjordsrådet's Secretariat) that *"if it is just about removing unproductive land, most farmers will not mind, especially if they get replacement land. The problem comes when good land is taken and there is no nearby land to replace it, which seems unavoidable"* (Mortensen, 2025). However, resistance emerges when high-quality land is affected without adequate compensation, as acknowledged by farmers who recognise they *"will have to take out some areas that I will probably be unhappy about"* (Farmer B, 2025). Participation of farmers requires that they receive replacement land that is suitable for agricultural use and located in proximity to existing farmland.

Land exchange especially impacts farmers with livestock operations who depend on their fields for feed production. Reducing available land area forces farmers to decrease animal numbers, resulting in lower income and potential difficulties servicing loans, and thereby being an closure. As Dalgaard, 2025 (Chairman) *"there are some who are dependent on cultivated land because they have invested in livestock production. They need to secure something to maintain balance in their production"*(Dalgaard, 2025). Farmer A, 2025 recognises this balance, stating that *"it is a balance. The land has value - not just in terms of money, but also in terms of production"*. Lunde, 2025 (Aalborg Municipality) acknowledges the economic stakes, warning that *"if the farmer can see that the cattle can no longer exist because he cannot get any land exchange and he cannot make ends meet, then he might choose to say no"*.

7.1.3 Farmers' Financial Situation affecting their ability

This section concise knowledge from the interviews and draws an overall picture on the dynamics and importance of private economy focusing on the financial institutions' role in farmers' ability to participate.

Farmers' financial institutions contribute to the adoption of new practices by providing access to loans for investments in machinery, stable facilities, and land. These institutions can act as either openings or closures depending on various factors such as the farmer's financial situation, loan size, business practices, land composition, and the foreseen market trends. Gravesen, 2025 (Fjordland) emphasises a closure where newly established farmers, who typically lack the financial resources and credit access of more established farmers, may face greater influence from financial institutions regarding how their business should develop.

In summery, it is a closure if the financial institution determines not to approve of a project as it is a circumstance that the farmers cannot control. On the contrary, financial institutions can create openings based on the individual farmer's economy and trend in the market. This influences farmer's ability to participate and is independent of the farmer's wishes or willingness to participate. The financial institutions' opinions may not

always align with the farmer's opinions, however, due to the expected financial institutions financial stake, they might also be attentive to, and responsive to, political priorities and the general direction of societal development (EIFO, 2024).

7.1.4 Summary of findings: Farmers' ability to participate

Table 7.1. Identified openings and closures in relation to ability to participate.

Openings	Closures
- Previously positive experiences with nature initiatives	- Previously negative experiences with nature initiatives
- State-led land purchases with repurchase options	- Legislation preventing nature to change status (§3 in the Nature Protection Law)
- If the farmer has low-lying and low quality soils and low production soils	- If the farmer have high-lying and high quality soils
- Future increase in rainfall making some areas less viable for farming anyway	- Concerns on the divert consequences on surrounding farmland, due to flooding if drains are destroyed
- Land exchange	- No available exchange land close to the farm
- Good private economy and relation to their financial institutions	- Less good private economy, depended on financial institutions opinions
- Fragmented current land distribution	- Negative effect on harmony between livestock production and land

Farmers' ability to participate in the Green Tripartite Agreement in the Limfjord region is determined by a combination of factors, such as their previous experience with nature initiatives, their land composition and financial situation. Especially land exchange is creating openings for participation as it acts as motivation to exchange land that is far away, of poor quality in relation to agricultural production, and/or consolidating fragmented land to a larger piece of land Consequently, the openings and closures to participation are highly individual and dependent on the specific context of each farm. Assessing the collective ability of all farmers in the study area is not possible, however, planners must be aware of these individual limitations within a project area affecting the farmers ability. Context specific planning approaches that address the specific context of individual farmers are therefore important for fostering farmers ability to participate in the agreement. While farmers' ability to participate is a crucial factor, their willingness is influenced by a distinct set of considerations. Even if the capacity to engage exists, a lack of willingness can still hinder participation. Therefore, the following section explores the openings and closures related to farmers' willingness to participate in the Green Tripartite Agreement.

7.2 Willingness to Adapt

This section explores farmers' willingness to participate, considering the influence of their personal values, norms, beliefs, and attitudes. It identifies openings and closures affecting their participation, specifically examining how their willingness is influencing their participation. Here, openings and closures are both the structural factors affecting willingness and the farmers' personal norms and beliefs.

7.2.1 Personal factors influencing participation

A closure potentially influencing farmers' willingness to participate can be their strong attachment to their farms,as emphasised by N. Christensen, 2025 (Randers Municipality), where this is especially relevant if the farms have been passed down through generation since there are feelings and history attached to the farms. If a generational farm would have to cut down to a minimum or close down entirely due to the Green Tripartite, this might be life changing for the family (N. Christensen, 2025). This is supported by Lunde, 2025 (Aalborg Municipality) who argues that there are strong emotions involved and he emphasises that it is important that the process with communicating with the landowners happen in a respectful manner to facilitate participation and ensure that people can see themselves in the process. Farmer B, 2025 agrees, that there are emotions involved and that there are old, oral and unwritten agreements, and traditions tied to the land, which can be difficult for a person from the municipality to understand or know about. Therefore, it is crucial to be in dialogue with farmers to understand the emotional significance of the land to facilitate participation.

Personal values, norms and beliefs

This section focuses on farmers' norms and beliefs in relation to willingness based on how nature and climate is perceived. Farmer A, 2025 and Farmer B, 2025 are the two farmers of the interviewees who have done most projects and nature initiatives on their land.

A feeling of responsibility is an opening for participation and is the reason why Farmer B, 2025 converts parts of his land. He addresses fellow farmers when he states: *"when managing such large areas as Danish farmers do, there is also a responsibility that comes with it"*, emphasising that it is necessary for farmers to act.

A closure can be if farmers believe that there is no need for additional nature in Denmark. Farmer D, 2025 agrees that nature is needed but he also states: *"what is wrong with a wheat field? There is an abundance of insects in such fields — they are crawling all over the place"* (Farmer D, 2025). This illustrates his perception of nature as also being a field of wheat, misaligned with the agreements target on more nature as not being agricultural lands.

Another closure is distrust of the data provided in the agreement and personal believes that farming is not the reason for pollution in the Limfjord. Farmers' willingness thereby affected by their conviction in relation to facts and numbers presented as augmentation and legitimisation for the agreement, as Farmer D, 2025 expresses a general scepticism toward the agreement, requesting factual evidence that agriculture is the primary cause of pollution and eutrophication in the Limfjord. Here, mistrust towards facts can influence the farmers' willingness as their personal beliefs do not align with the presented data.

These personal beliefs that farmers are not polluting, can be a closure towards farmers' willingness to participate, particularly in discussions of eutrophication in the Limfjord, there is a lack of agreement regarding the attribution of responsibility for the fjord's ecological status. Farmer D, 2025 along with Farmer A, 2025, Farmer C, 2025, and Farmer F, 2025 discuss the influence of nitrogen discharge from Danish farmers in relation to pollution from wastewater treatment plants. Farmer F, 2025 states *"I cannot help but*

reflect on the fact that the water coming from my fields looks so clear and clean, especially when compared to the state of the fjord. It makes you wonder what else is being discharged into it. And then you start looking at the wastewater treatment plants. I believe that if they bear part of the responsibility, then so should we — but I just do not think it is fair to place all the blame solely on us farmers" (Farmer F, 2025). This emphasises his personal beliefs on what is causing pollution in the Limfjord and that while acknowledging that farming does have an impact, it is not that simple and nuances are missing.

In contrast, Kjeldsen, 2025 (DN) is in no doubt that farming is the primary reason for eutrophication in the Limfjord: *it has been demonstrated that the lack of life in our fjords is closely linked to the substantial nitrogen contributions from cultivated land. This connection has been well established for a long time, yet there are still those who attempt to shift the blame onto wastewater treatment plants and other sources* (Kjeldsen, 2025). These contrasts emphasise people's beliefs based on their field of work and personal values, being a farmer and dependent on their land in relation to nature conservation. As stated in the theory chapter, there are several factors influencing personal values and beliefs. This includes experience with former nature and climate initiatives in addition to interactions with neighbours and the media.

A closure for participation can be hobby farmers wanting land close to home. This is emphasised by (Gravesen, 2025) (Fjordland): *"resistance may just as likely come from someone owning a small, inherited 2,000 m^2 plot, who wishes to retain it"* This quote refers to hobby farmers who might not have much land but who have emotions connected to the land and does not have any other land to take out instead. Further, it also shows the interconnectedness between willingness to adapt and ability to adapt, as there are biophysical conditions constraining a hobby farmer with a small area in combination with the high value that the land might have on a personal level.

7.2.2 Voluntary participation

The agreement is founded on voluntary participation of farmers, which is why farmers' willingness to participate and the associated factors influencing willingness is important for the success of the voluntary implementation strategy in the agreement. The voluntary approach is a well known practice in nature and climate initiatives with poor results as identified in the state of art in Section 2.2. Kjeldsen, 2025 (DN) comments on DN's view of the voluntary approach in the Green Tripartite Agreement: *"We are somewhat sceptical about whether the voluntary approach will work this time, because there have been many previous agreements that have been voluntary that have not been successful"* (Kjeldsen, 2025). However, Kjeldsen, 2025 is positive that the goal might be achieved with voluntary participation this time because there has been allocated a large sum of money, as farmers are not going to give their land away or receive a smaller amount of money than what the land is worth. This section focuses on willingness to participate through the lens of voluntarism and the openings and closures that enable and/or hinder this.

Eagerness to get started on projects in relation to nature and climate initiatives is an opening for participation as Thøgersen, 2025 (Holstebro Municipality) states: *"The farmers are not being passive — on the contrary, they are eager to get started, to be able to deliver and reach the goal. Quite a few farmers have reached out and asked, 'Is something*

happening? Can we create wetlands here?' People are ready to get going". Farmer B, 2025 has a positive attitude towards participating in the agreement and has a statement to farmers in general *"you just have to be careful not to become a grumpy old man. Remember to look at the opportunities instead of only seeing the limitations"* (Farmer B, 2025).

Emphasising an opening for participation, Farmer E, 2025 shows confidence in farmers' capacity to adapt and achieve the goals voluntarily and further acknowledges that farmers have realised that the Danish Government is serious about the green transition in the agricultural sector and thereby states *"The Green Tripartite needs to be solved. We have managed with so many other things before, so I believe we can do it now as well. In general, I think we are good at adapting"* (Farmer E, 2025). This shows willingness to meet the new political agenda.

A closure is if the implementation could lead to some farmers being unable to continue their agricultural practices. Farmer C, 2025 emphasises this: *"Whether I will participate or not depends on where the land is located in relation to my farm. If it is situated in a way that does not bother me, then I can be open to going along with it voluntarily. But if it does not — if, for example, they ruin my property from a logistical standpoint — then they will have to buy the whole thing, and I will have to move somewhere else"* (Farmer C, 2025). This statement emphasises the context specific nature of implementing the agreement but also that farmer willingness is linked to their ability and the type of land they have as well. This farmer's statement reveals a conditional openness to the agreement, highlighting that logistical implications and potential disruption to his existing farm operations are important considerations in his decision to participate voluntarily.

This underlying scepticism regarding the long term viability of a purely voluntary approach is reflected in the concerns raised by farmers during the interviews. Lunde, 2025 (Aalborg Municipality) points out that while many wetland creation projects have been initiated, their implementation has progressed very slowly relative to the level of ambition. He marks this slow pace primarily to the Danish Parliament's decision to base the strategy on voluntarism, avoiding expropriation as the default solution. As a consequence, the refusal of even a single landowner to participate can bring an entire project to a halt. Lunde, 2025 also highlights that it is not always large, professional landowners who block progress, sometimes it is small landowners, such as those with just one ha of land who wish to keep horses near their homes. These individual choices, can sometimes prevent a project from moving forward.

Farmer D, 2025 for instance, predicts potential closure once the agreement is fully intended to be implemented, where he states a fear that the initial enthusiasm for voluntary participation may decrease when the practical realities and broader impacts of the Green Tripartite become apparent. Further Farmer D, 2025, states *"I think that once it really gets going, they will realise that it does not work — it is too drastic an intervention. It is not just farmers, but also related industries that are affected."* Farmer C, 2025 also expresses concern about the fact that their 'no' will not be respected, *"But I can hear that those who say no still end up being forced into it. Especially with those wetland projects. If you don't do it voluntarily, then you're forced to do it anyway."* This shows that some feel that the agreement is not that voluntary after all.

7.2.3 Summary of findings: Farmers' Willingness to participate

Table 7.2. Identified openings and closures in relation to willingness

Openings	Closures
-Voluntary aspects of the agreement	- Personal belifes about who is polluting
-Acknowledging the agreements as a serious policy initiative	- Distrust in facts
- "We are good at adapting" mindset	- Hobby farmers wanting land close to home
- Sense of responsibility	- Generational farms with a strong personal attachment to the land
- Eagerness to get started with projects	- Logistic implications
	- Some farmer have to close down
	- Reality check when implementation start

Farmers' willingness to participate is shaped by individual beliefs and values regarding nature and climate initiatives. The data indicates that willingness is highly individualised, influenced by external factors such as information distribution and personal elements like their perception of nature, if the farmers do not believe that farming is the reason behind e.g. eutrophication or biodiversity loss, it is difficult to persuade them into engaging in nature initiatives. Further, emotional attachments to their land, particularly in generational farming is also a personal element influencing their willingness. Understanding these factors are crucial for planning processes and, most importantly, for developing targeted information communication strategies to engage farmers whose beliefs may not initially align with the agreement's objectives. Willingness is also dependent on the perceived impact of the agreement on their production and family life. Acknowledging these concerns and developing sustainable solutions that respect both nature and farming communities may foster greater willingness to participate. Closures to willingness is identified as strong emotional attachment to place and farm (e.g. in generational farming) and a lack of trust in the facts presented to legitimise the agreement's objectives can act as closures. Openings for willingness is identified as a sense of responsibility and the perception of being able to contribute positively to societal requests for change can enhance farmers' willingness to engage. Even if ability and willingness to participate exists, a lack of support from society can still hinder participation. Therefore, the following section explores the openings and closures related to the surrounding society's effect on farmers participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement.

7.3 Support from Society

As the final component of the Ability, Willingness, and Support framework, societal support plays a crucial role in shaping farmer participation. This section investigates how the broader societal context either facilitates openings or creates closures to farmers' participation and further focuses on the influence of economy, networks, communication, bureaucracy on farmers participation.

7.3.1 Economy

Economic factors, including financial institutions, market demands, subsidies, and regulations, shape farmers' decisions when evaluating the costs and benefits of engaging in projects under the Green Tripartite and adapting their business practices. As Farmer F, 2025 simply frames it, *"Economy determines a lot"* (Farmer F, 2025). The following two sections explores these economic arguments impacting farmers' financial situations according to openings and closures towards farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement.

Subsidies

An economic tool, used in existing agri-environmental schemes and to be used in the Green Tripartite, is subsidies (i.e. economic rewards and support when practising a more environmentally conscious production) used to affect and change farm practices in a certain direction. Within the discussion of governance/policy strategies, the balance between subsidies and regulation can be difficult and can differ according to personal interests. Subsidies is argued to be an opening for farmer participation, as most farmers emphasise the preference of using subsidies as a measure, as explained by Farmer C, 2025: *"I think they should try to boost it [subsidies] instead of just run people over, because as we also talked about, it is not just a job, there are also many families who live there, livelihoods, and many generations, why they should proceed with caution instead of just running people over [with regulation]"*. This is supported by all farmers interviewed in this thesis.

Lunde, 2025 (Aalborg Municipality) highlights the principle of equality in the Danish Public Administration Act (Forvaltningsloven), so what is offered to one farmer, must also be offered to others, however, the different subsidies measures can have different relevance:

> *"some who are in a situation where a one-time compensation payment to reduce their debt is absolutely right for them, while others are thinking more about 'well, I will be here for another 25 years,' and they might be more interested in how the ongoing finances can work out in the changed farming method they will have"* (Lunde, 2025).

Further, Farmer A, 2025 argues that *"I really would have hated if we had to receive a subsidy. That would mean control and regulation"*. This implies that they have strong reluctance toward government subsidies because the farmer associates them with loss of autonomy, increased control from authorities and thereby affecting their land management options.

In relation to this, a closure for participation is the uncertainty about the subsidy design is making it difficult to anticipate effects which creates risks (Lunde, 2025). The final subsidy design expected in the agreement will affect farmers differently, depending on their financial situation, business strategy and financial partners or institutions. The Green Tripartite Agreement allocates 40 billion DKK to the Danish Green Area Fund (MGTP, 2024b), representing a significant opportunity to implement well-designed subsidy programs.

The farmers interviewed in this thesis identified land exchange as their primary preferred strategy for participation. Compensation for land removed from agricultural production was regarded as a secondary option, whereas the provision of subsidies was viewed as the least desirable approach. Their participation could depend on factors including administrative subsidy simplicity to ease the need for control and recognition of diverse financial situations.

Regulation

The regulation is found to serve as both an opening and a closure towards farmer participation, depending on the perspective. The regulations embedded within the Green Tripartite Agreement, is expected to be CO_2e taxes and nitrogen regulations, which aim to facilitate the timely realisation of the agreements' objectives. However, it is relevant to consider whether these specific regulations might also unintentionally generate concern or resistance among those affected. This regulatory approach distinguishes the agreement's objectives from previous agreements, which is why this particular method has not been seen previously. Consequently, the implementation consequences of these regulations remain somewhat hypothetical.

The reception of these regulations varies among stakeholders as farmers tend to view them as a closure due to being regulated, whereas politicians see them as an opening since it is a necessary instruments for driving timely change. It is difficult to draw a clear conclusion, as reality is more nuanced and context specific. The following sections on CO_2e tax and nitrogen regulation highlights the complexities of regulation as a measure.

The preference for "carrots over sticks" expressed by farmers in this thesis suggests that well-designed subsidy programs could be seen as a opening for efficiently achieving lasting environmental improvements in agricultural businesses rather than regulatory approaches. Despite regulation, voluntary participation is necessary as farmers become engaged and take ownership in the projects which can create better solutions rather than being regulated. As Dalgaard, 2025 (Chairman) states: *"it is much better to be a team player and share good stories and tell others to join"* emphasising that farmers should not wait for regulation. Regulation can be a tool meant to incentivise farmers to make changes.

CO_2*e tax on livestock*

The CO_2e tax, is from some of the farmers perspectives, seen as an closure, complicating their business turnover (Farmer C, 2025). The upcoming CO_2e tax is introduced with the agreement, and is affecting farmers with animal production (With the 60% deduction, meaning that the farmers are only to be taxed of 40% of their total emissions, why CO_2e tax rates will be 120 kr/tonne in 2030 and will increase to 300 kr/tonne in 2035 (MGTP, 2024b)).

This assumption is further supported by Farmer D, 2025 who is a pig and crop farmer also expecting a CO2e tax if not reducing to under the 60% deduction rates:

> *I have just roughly calculated that I will have to pay just under a million in that tax. I mean, last year I lost one million. I will never, ever be able to pay that. And I am certainly not the only one who will not be able to pay that. And then*

we cannot pay the bills, and then we go bankrupt. (Farmer D, 2025)

This emphasises a great concern towards the agreement's use of tax as a regulation measure. In order to reduce CO_2e emissions and thereby reduce tax rates, technologies have been introduced. A mandatory technology which has already been implemented is Bovaer (cow feed additive reducing methane formation in the cow's stomach). In relation to the implementation of Bovaer, Farmer C, 2025 shares concerns: *"several people have experienced a significant decrease in the amount of milk produced per cow, and the cows are unwell, just generally unhealthy cows and reduced production"*. The negative effect from the decrease in milk production has not been possible to confirm in any found studies, however, the negative stories, as presented here, can potentially create a resistance towards agri-climate technologies in general and reduction in milk production will have negative economic impact on profit, thereby also farmers' debt settlement and investments. Changing practice or potentially face closing down, is the options provided by the regulations, depending on the individual farmer economy and conditions.

Farmer E, 2025 expresses a sense of cautious optimism regarding the CO_2e tax, acknowledging the opportunity for proactive engagement rather than facing imposed mandates. He states, *"I am happy that it is an agreement where something has been done so that we can influence the regulation – we can take action – instead of them saying: 'you have so and so many cows, you have to pay this tax' – that would have been annoying, then I could not do anything to change it. The way they are doing it is better, because if you implement climate measures, you will not be burdened as heavily by a* CO_2 *tax"*(Farmer E, 2025). This suggests a preference for a system that motivate environmental and climate-friendly practices and allows farmers agency in adapting to new rules.

Nitrogen Regulation

Nitrogen regulation, that will be introduced in 2027, aimed at improving the water quality of the Limfjord, proposes limiting fertiliser use either in selectively sensitive areas or collectively. Based on the collected data on the farmers' attitudes and concerns towards nitrogen regulation, it is argued that for some farmers this will be a closure due to the prospect that some will not be able to grow crops in certain places, however, at the same time, the regulation will potentially also be seen as an opening since it pushes for participation. The following highlights arguments and concerns which, if addressed, may encourage more voluntary participation and consent, thereby easing the planning process.

Farmer C, 2025 highlights the disproportionate impact based on farm size and the extent of affected land: *"if it is an area of one or two ha, fine. But if half of your property suddenly can not be fertilised, then you are stuck. Then they might as well buy the whole property, because then it is ruined"*, illustrating the disproportionate economic impact of geographically specific regulations. This "all or nothing" scenario highlights how targeted regulation on a significant portion of a farm's land can potentially impact the entire property. Similarly, (Farmer D, 2025) states: *"in places like out here, where there is very poor farmland, if my nitrogen quota is cut by 10-20%, I will not be able to grow a damn thing out here,"* emphasising the vulnerability of farms operating on marginal land. Even seemingly moderate percentage reductions in nitrogen quotas can have severe consequences for productivity on less fertile soil. On the other hand, the nitrogen regulation

will contribute to phase out less productive agricultural land, leading to more efficient and sensible agricultural production in Denmark, and meeting with the agreements targets.

The prospect of collective nitrogen regulation introduces the theme of shared responsibility, yet simultaneously raises concerns about equitable burden-sharing. If the goal of the amount of nitrogen discharging to the Limfjord is not reduced by 2,803 tons N, the nitrogen regulation will affect all farmers regardless if some have made measures to decrease the amount of nitrogen entering watercourses, and therefore can be seen as a collectively burden. The design and scope of the nitrogen regulation is still unknown at this point, creating uncertainty (Mortensen, 2025). The consequences are highlighted by Thøgersen, 2025 (Holstebro Municipality): *"if the low land areas do not succeed with the nitrogen reduction, then a collective regulation will not only cover the poor low-lying agricultural land, but then regulation will also cover the good high land, consequentially turning good farmland into fallow land, or it will affect the yield"*. The consequence, as Thøgersen, 2025 notes, could be the unproductive fallowing of fertile land or significant yield reductions, impacting the overall agricultural output within the Limfjord area. While the intention of collective regulation is to incentivise widespread adoption of nitrogen reducing practices, it risks affecting efficient farmers on higher-quality land due to the non-compliance of others.

Dalgaard's metaphor of the "nitrogen hammer" illustrates how the regulation can create an opening for participation since non-participation can result in financial penalties: *"If there are some who do not want to participate and move things forward, then they will be subject to a tax"* (Dalgaard, 2025). This emphasises the necessary power of regulation as a tool for achieving environmental goals. However, he emphasises the importance of dialogue: *"There are just some who need to be talked to a bit more, and we will have time for that when we get around to making the [project] plans"* (Dalgaard, 2025). By "plans" in this regard, Dalgaard, 2025 refers to long-term planning, not limited to the preparation of conversion plans by the end of 2025. There is recognition that while regulation can ensure compliance, fostering understanding and voluntary participation may lead to more sustainable and less disputed outcomes. N. Christensen, 2025 supports this sentiment, stating: *"It is better through voluntary action than regulation, because then we can protect the areas where we can have robust food production. We cannot do that if we get collective regulation. So in that way, our entire food production will be worse off if it is regulated collectively"*. This preference for voluntary action stems from a concern that a potential collective regulation, by imposing uniform regulation, fails to account for the diverse conditions and production capacities across different farms, potentially undermining overall food production efficiency. Dalgaard, 2025 further notes that nature and agriculture need to be separated, instead of adding measures to agriculture production that has no true environmental effect, he argues that it should become easier to be a professional farmer now that farmers give land back to nature, again focusing on simplifying compliance. This is supported by Farmer F, 2025: *"You have to be careful not to completely take their [farmers] breath away"*, implying that one should avoid overwhelming or discouraging farmers to the point of giving up (Farmer F, 2025). However, the urgency implied by the agreement also means that farmers must act to remain in business.

Mortensen, 2025 (Limfjordsrådet's Secretariat) provides further perspectives that bridges the tension between voluntary compliance and regulatory enforcement and shows that:

"Farmers' reactions to regulation depend on how strict the regulations are and how drastic the consequences will be". She references to potential protests: *"if the consequences for many become that they might not be able to continue running their farms, then I am curious to see if tractors will drive to Christiansborg again"* acknowledging farmer resistance if livelihoods are threatened. However, Mortensen, 2025 also recognises the closure of the Green Tripartite being solely base on voluntary principles: *"with the experience so far, with purely voluntary measures, if the authorities want to live up to the goals, then experience shows that you cannot reach the goal solely through voluntary action"*. This practical assessment supports the balanced model of incentivised voluntary participation while maintaining regulatory consequences for non-compliance: *"we will go as far as possible in a good, voluntary way. And then there might be a consequence if we will not get there"* (Mortensen, 2025). Insights by Mortensen, 2025 particularly emphasises the importance of finding a balanced approach that recognises both the necessity of regulation and the legitimate concerns of the agricultural community. Therefore, the nitrogen regulation can both be seen as a closure and an opening for participation, depending on the farm's economic and production situation.

As implementation continues, careful attention to the scope, timing, and distribution of regulatory impacts will be essential to achieve the environmental goals in the Green Tripartite while also ensuring the future of farming.

The carrot and stick approach is a crucial, yet debated, strategy for engaging farmers. While it aims to balance political objectives with practical implementation, its effectiveness is hindered by undefined parameters for both "carrots" and "sticks". Interviewees generally agree this mixed approach is necessary to encourage voluntary participation. However, until the specifics of these incentives and deterrents are clarified, farmers are left to speculate whether to participate without understanding the risks or benefits, pausing the action (Mortensen, 2025, N. Christensen, 2025, Thøgersen, 2025). Mortensen, 2025 emphasises this foundational challenge: *"the problem is that neither the carrot nor the stick is clearly defined yet."*

When considering the regulatory landscape in general, Farmer C, 2025 expresses a strong aversion to top-down forceful implementation of regulations, highlighting the potential for resentment and early retirement among established farmers. His perspective emphasises the importance of considering the psychological and emotional impact of regulatory changes on farmers, particularly those with a long history in the profession. He states:

> *"I think that if they come at you like a bulldozer, or if they come and force it upon you, then I just think it will feel like your pride is being trampled on, somewhere along the line... they will just keep going until this comes into effect and then farmers stop because they just cannot be bothered, and it is a shame that you are dismantling all that production instead of developing it".*

The fear is that an overly aggressive approach could lead to a loss of valuable experience and a contraction of agricultural output, counteracting the intended goals of sustainable development.

This section highlights the delicate balance policymakers must strike when introducing new

agricultural regulations. While creating mechanisms for farmer involvement can foster participation, the manner of implementation - as well as the perceived impact on farm viability, land use, and the use of forceful approaches — are critical factors in ensuring a smooth and ultimately successful transition toward more sustainable farming practices.

Land prices and compensation

Land prices and compensation can serve as either an opening or a closure for participation. If farmers are not receiving the proper price or compensation for land sales, this will be a closure for farmer participation. Contrary, fair land price and compensation is an opening for participation, further elaborated in the following.

A potential closure towards participation if the farmers does not receive full compensation for the loss of land, it is seen as Kjeldsen, 2025 (DN) highlights the importance of market mechanisms in determining land transactions: *"The market price should dictate what the land costs. A farmer will not sell their land for less than what it is worth, but the State should also not pay more than what it is worth. There is a balance there"* this is also supported by all interviewed farmers (Farmer A, 2025, Farmer B, 2025, Farmer C, 2025, Farmer D, 2025, Farmer E, 2025 and Farmer F, 2025).

Further supported by Farmer C, 2025 who shares his concerns in relation to fair compensation, and emphasises the financial loss incurred when productive land is taken out of production:

> *"If you have a field you are used to growing crops on for your animals, and it suddenly becomes fallow with flowers. Then a field that provides a yield suddenly becomes worth nothing. The land taken out of operation becomes worthless, and I think the land still in use just becomes much, much more expensive. I think that makes it even harder for young people to get started".*

Supporting the perceived "unfair" land price compensation as a closure, Farmer E, 2025, links willingness to participate directly to economic fairness: *"If I am forced to give up land, and I do not receive full compensation for it, I probably will not voluntarily agree and say 'yes' right away. I will probably wait and see what happens. I have bought and paid for the land, so it would not be reasonable not to receive the proper compensation"*. Farmer C, 2025 also insists on fair, field-specific compensation to avoid financial ruin as an opening for him to participate personally.

Lunde, 2025 points to a closure for farmers to even consider to participate, where there still is uncertainty of how the compensation of the consequences with the nitrogen hammer will be. The farmers will be faced with a risk of not getting fair compensation if they have to reduce amount of Nitrogen used on the field. He illustrates with a scenario where a farmers use of Nitrogen will go from 200 kg N per hato 50 kg N per ha. This then lead to lower yield, and thereby the land might fall in prices. As Lunde, 2025 explains, *"... the farmer might have bought land for 225,000 DKK/ha, and when the nitrogen regulation drops, the farmers land might only be worth 70,000 DKK/ha"* On the other hand, he further describes that other areas might be allowed to use the same amount of nitrogen or more, and this

will then make those land prices increase in value. This emphasises the financial position farmers could face if the nitrogen regulation will be uncompensated.

Farmer B, 2025 recommends that: "They have to buy entire properties and then divide the good land from it to use in land exchange. They cannot just buy 15 hq from me; then I will have to pay capital gains tax on it, go back and forth with DLR Kredit A/S [Danish mortgage credit institution], and settle accounts with them, which I would never agree to. It can be difficult regarding loans to start taking land out; there will also be a lot of issues with property tax, capital gains tax, and other hassles" (Farmer B, 2025). This supports that for farmers, participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement is to a large extend an economic decision.

Economic uncertainty and missing guaranties

Clearer incentives and long-term assurances could be important to promote investments, including more sustainable investments, for the agreement's successful implementation, demonstrating why economic uncertainty may be perceived as a closure. According to Farmer D, 2025 economic uncertainty surrounding the Green Tripartite Agreement hinders agricultural investment and he calls for more "carrot and guarantee" mechanisms, emphasising that incentives and assurances are necessary to foster confidence and engagement among farmers. Due to the lack of clarity about the agreement's impact, is Farmer D, 2025 further stating: *"I certainly will not build for 20 million, if I might be out tomorrow"*. This uncertainty affects investment as farmers fear future restrictions, outweighing potential benefits.

Lunde, 2025 (Aalborg Municipality) agrees with these concerns, pointing to uncertainty about how existing support schemes and regulations will interact with the new agreement: *"But it is unclear to me, at least for now, how well it connects to the existing regulations that usually apply in that area. Will those also apply in this context? I do not know. So, there are some uncertainties, and I would really like to have that overall view before I go out and meet with the landowners"*. This lack of clarity about future support and the integration of current subsidy schemes contributes to a climate of hesitation and risk aversion among farmers and advisors.

N. Christensen, 2025 (Randers Municipality) adds another layer to the uncertainty by highlighting the challenge of resources at municipal level:

> *"The finances may not have fully followed through to the municipalities from the Danish Parliament. The municipalities then have to prioritise those resources for the Green Tripartite Agreement, and for example, in Randers Municipality, we don't have any money. I mean, we have Nordic Waste and many other things we spend a lot, a lot, a lot of money on, so that's the challenge – it will be a challenge to reach the goal".*

This suggests that even if national policies are ambitious, the absence of clear financial flows and resources at the municipal level can hinder implementation on the ground.

Dalgaard, 2025 emphasises the need for farmers to adapt to ongoing political and regulatory change, but also stresses the importance of security regarding production rights:

> *"The farmer also needs to understand that things [the political agenda] are not going to stand still. Farmers still have to keep refining and working on how to make things even more sustainable. That doesn't stop. But hopefully, the farmer should ideally feel secure about where they can produce, where they have areas for spreading the livestock manure, and various other things".*

Economic uncertainty and missing guarantees are closures to farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement. Without clear, long-term incentives and assurances-both in terms of compensation and regulatory stability, farmers are likely to delay investments and hesitate to participate. This uncertainty is reinforced by unclear support mechanisms, insufficient municipal resources, and the absence of guarantees about future land use and production rights. Addressing these gaps with transparent, reliable guarantees and incentives is crucial for the agreement's successful implementation and for securing broad farmer engagement.

7.3.2 Networks

The Local Green Tripartite Limfjorden involves 18 municipalities, NST, DN, Agillix, and Fjordland – a total of 37 people – who must do the planning for achieving the agreement's goals together in the Limfjord area. These organisations are involved to ensure holistic planning, which creates a network of diverse interests and governance structures. Building upon the framework of 'support from society', this section explores the concept of 'network' in two ways: first, by examining the local networks directly involving farmers and their participation, and second, analysing the broader landscape of actors within the agreements' implementation, including their relationships, alliances, and local connections. This dual perspective allows for identifying both the openings and the closures for farmer engagement within these network interactions. The Green Tripartite Limfjorden operates within complex social and professional networks that directly or indirectly influence farmers' participation decisions. The collaboration between diverse organisations signals a commitment to the agreement's success, which can encourage participation.

Local networks

This section examines how local networks affect farmer engagement with the agreement, identifying both closures and openings through stakeholders' own perspectives.

The local networks surrounding the Green Tripartite Limfjorden reveals several interconnected dynamics affecting farmer participation. The most significant closures include the absence of dedicated discussion forums, uncertainty about social benefits, the perceived urban-rural divide, concerns about community impacts, and the risk of misinformation. Conversely, potential openings exist in leveraging existing communication channels, engaging 'opinion leaders' who can positively influence peers, highlighting community benefits, and addressing the desire for social recognition. Future engagement strategies should focus on developing structured information networks that acknowledge

farmers' community concerns while fostering peer-to-peer advocacy for agreement participation.

A notable finding is the apparent lack of established forums specifically for discussing the Green Tripartite agreement among farmers, potentially being a closure. As Farmer E, 2025 states: *"Local groups and networks where you talk about the agreement?: No, we do not have that. I have not really talked to anyone about the agreement yet"*. This farmer further explains that despite having *"a good local community and a good relationship with colleagues and neighbours"*, these existing networks are not being used to discuss the agreement at this point.

Even without formal discussion groups, established farmer networks is found to impact participation choices. The interviews highlight a strong influence from peers, where respected farmers can considerably shape other farmers in the community opinions for or against involvement. Dynamics between farmers can be considered an opening for participation if farmers share positive feedback on the agreement, or a closure for participation if the discussion of the agreement is negative. Gravesen, 2025 (Fjordland) explains this dynamic: *"If one farmer is strongly against it, there is also a high probability that others will be against it. But it works the other way too: if a big farmer, or someone who is good at talking, says, 'we can take a look at that,' then several others might also be inclined to say the same. If someone really advocates for it, it has a contagious effect"*. This demonstrates how 'opinion leaders' within farming communities can create either momentum or resistance toward the agreement, also supported by Dalgaard, 2025. This emphasises that farmers are capable of influencing the outcome of the agreement by influencing each other.

While structured discussion networks about the agreement may be lacking, farmers do maintain active communication channels for daily community information. Farmer B, 2025 mentions: *"we have these kinds of groups where people write, 'we are spreading slurry' or whatever, you know, that sort of thing"*. However, agricultural organisations represent an important communication channel, with Kjeldsen, 2025 noting: *"it is the agricultural associations that have the biggest role; they have contact with their members"*, the agricultural associations as Fjordland or Agillix have an important role in facilitating and affecting the local network.

Farmers' decisions to participate are influenced by perceived social recognition within their communities. Farmer B, 2025 observes that *"everyone likes to also be noticed, that they are actually doing something"*, suggesting that public acknowledgment of environmental efforts could motivate participation. However, N. Christensen, 2025 questions this: *"Whether you actually get rewarded in the form of more goodwill when, for example, we do not spread slurry on a Friday afternoon, I really do not know"*. This uncertainty about social benefits constitutes another potential closure to participation, as N. Christensen, 2025 elaborates: *"You do not get a pat on the back for, for example, leaving your field fallow; people see that as something very natural and 'of course you do that'"*.

In contrast, the data also reveal potential openings within local networks. Positive pressure from community represents an opening for increasing farmer engagement and participation as, Thøgersen, 2025 suggests that local communities may welcome certain aspects of

the agreement: *"I think the local communities are looking forward to it with interest, because suddenly there will be some areas that people would be able to move around in, which they cannot today"*. Thøgersen, 2025 further explains that *"The local community can well have an influence on whether the farmer wants to participate"*, suggesting that positive community pressure could encourage participation when members perceive broader benefits.

A closure emerges from the perceived disconnect between rural farming communities and urban populations or policymakers. This disconnect potentially affects how farmers engage with environmentally-focused agreements that originate from non-agricultural stakeholders. Farmer D, 2025 expresses frustration about urban ignorance of agricultural realities: *"the general public is a bit too ignorant about what's actually going on in agriculture, because it's those Copenhageners again, they're used to some vegan standing there and yelling in Copenhagen"*. The farmer suggests bridging this gap by *"making the distance between city and country smaller"* through better education. Similarly, Farmer B, 2025 points to a *"distance between politicians and farmers,"* using an example about nature management to illustrate different understandings of environmental practices. This perception of being misunderstood by decision-makers can reduce farmers' willingness to engage with externally-designed environmental programs and can be a closure for participation.

A final closure relates to concerns about misinformation circulating through informal networks. Kjeldsen, 2025 emphasises the importance of strategic communication: *"It is also important to communicate the opportunities of what is being proposed, so that myths do not start spreading on Facebook"*. This highlights how unmanaged information flows within digital networks could undermine participation if not addressed proactively, as seen in the Facebook network NOFFF as described later in Section 7.3.3.

Actor landscape

Successful agreement implementation involves numerous actors representing diverse roles and interests. The interactions within these networks shapes the implementation framework. Consequently, understanding the surrounding actor landscape and its networks helps understanding the openings and closures for stakeholder participation as it helps to locate potential governance conflicts surrounding farmers.

The collaboration between DN and L&F represents an opening for farmer participation, fostering dialogue and joint problem solving. DN and L&F are representing, in many areas, contradicting interests: nature and agriculture, and traditionally, have had different ideas of how the Danish landscape should look like. However, with this agreement, an alliance has emerged between these traditionally opposing sectors. This collaboration represents a significant development in environmental governance in Denmark, and this alliance, representing different interests within the broader population, mark a commitment to finding common ground where both nature and farming can coexist in the landscape.

As L&F proactively engage with DN, this initiative takes an important first step in reducing the pre-existing polarisation. However there are still conflicting dynamics nuancing this perception, elaborated in the following.

Figure 7.1 illustrates the hierarchical organisation of the responsible parties and their respective roles in the agreement's implementation and an overview of the how the interviewed committee members of the Local Tripartite Limfjorden are positioned.

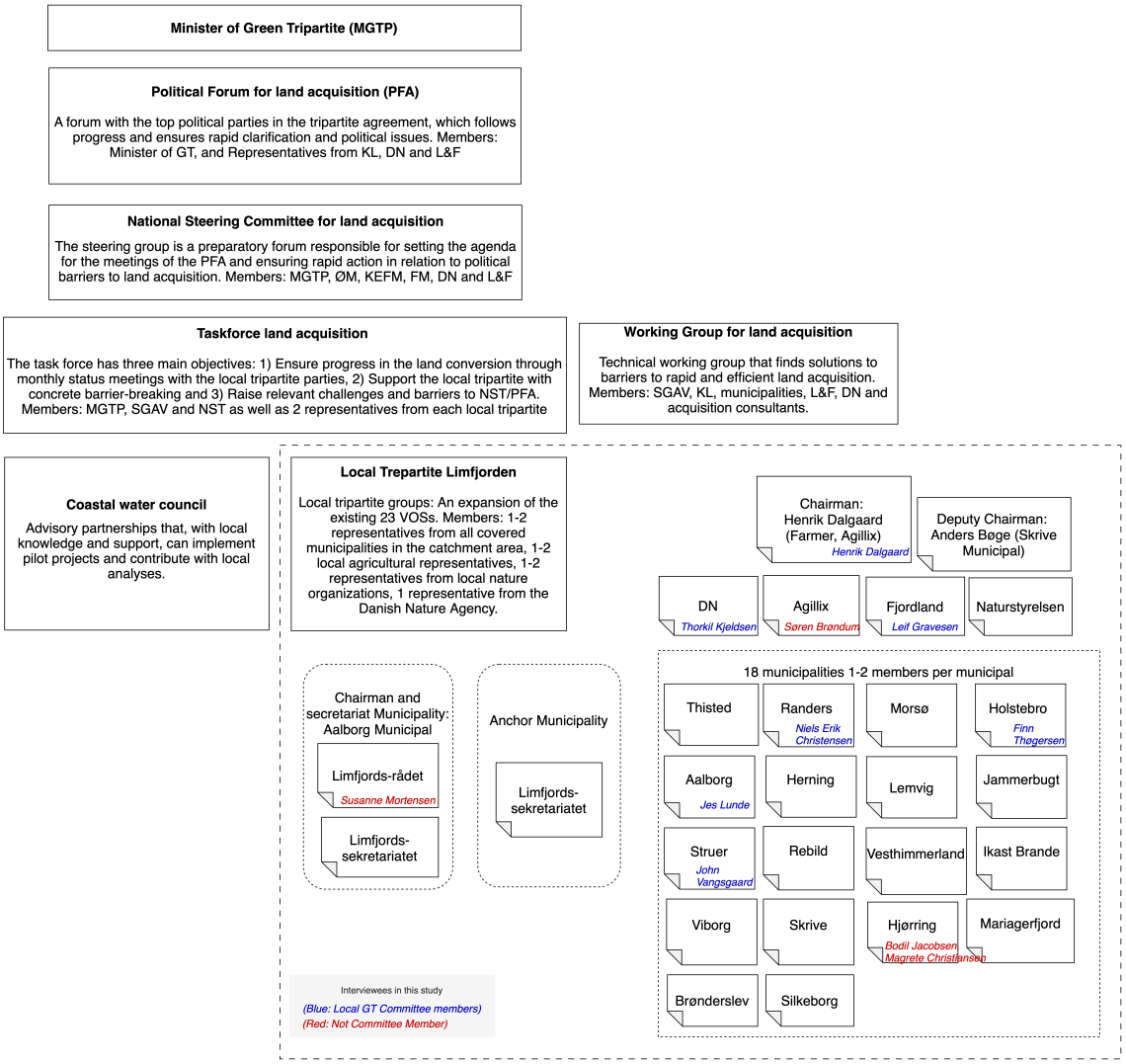

Figure 7.1. The organisational structure of the agreement and the Local Tripartite committee's organisation including the interviewees within this thesis (KL, 2024).

DN and local stakeholders

The Danish Nature Conservation Society (DN) serves as an actor in the agreement, representing not only its own environmental interests but also functioning as a representative for several other nature-oriented organisations. As Kjeldsen, 2025 explains, DN represents the Outdoor Council (Friluftsrådet), sports fishermen, hunters, and the Danish Ornithological Society (DOF). This positioning establishes DN as a collective voice for local interests, across the case-study regions. Vangsgaard, 2025 (Struer Municipality) emphasises that he acknowledges DN's role in the agreement and that they represent their members' interests. He characterises DN as having a unique position because *"they are the only ones who do not have an invested interest anywhere. They actively participate in the meetings, but they do not have anything at stake; they represent an interest as an organisation"* (Vangsgaard, 2025). This observation highlights how DN's lack of

direct economic interest in land shapes their negotiating position compared to agricultural stakeholders. However, they still have an important role in representing their members.

Tensions exist despite collaborative frameworks, Vangsgaard, 2025 criticises DN for posting updates claiming *"Danish farmers are pouring slurry directly into streams"* while simultaneously participating in negotiations on the Green Tripartite Agreement, calling this "politics" that influences public opinion, however, Vangsgaard, 2025 also recognises their role as representatives of their members. This suggests that the public narrative sometimes contradicts collaborative postures at negotiating tables. This could undermine trust and make it more difficult for farmers to engage constructively in the agreement, being an potential closure for farmer participation.

Landbrug og Fødevarer (L&F)
L&F represents the farming sector, but notably operates differently across various regions. According to N. Christensen, 2025, who is represented in three different local Green Tripartites: Limfjorden, Randers Fjord and Mariager Fjord, the interest organisations L&F and DN acts in *"3 different ways"* within the three local Tripartites. This variation in their approaches suggests that these interests groups are not uniform but rather adapt to regional contexts, revealing how geography could influence stakeholder positioning.

These regional variations reflect physical realities of land availability. As N. Christensen, 2025 explains, *"in Thisted, Mors, and that area, they do not have any low-lying areas where they can take land out, whereas we have some low-lying land in Randers Municipality and in Vesthimmerland"*. These geographical differences create *"different conditions for being able to contribute, and therefore also different prerequisites for having an opinion on what should be done"* (N. Christensen, 2025). However, farmers in regions with fewer options for land exchange might feel unfairly burdened, potentially leading to lower participation.

Governance complexity and implementation challenges

The agreement also creates situations where GT members hold multiple roles. N. Christensen, 2025 (Randers Municipality) notes that *"many local politicians in GT Limfjorden are also farmers – so there are several who wear two hats or have multiple perspectives"*. This dual positioning creates potential conflicts of interest, though N. Christensen, 2025 acknowledges that *"we local politicians should not solely represent the interests of agriculture and food either – we need to represent the interests of the citizens in the municipalities as elected politicians"*. The members do have different political backgrounds representing citizens interests.

The governance structure of the agreement (See Figure 7.1) presents potential coordination challenges. Lunde, 2025 describes *"a complex governance structure"* where representatives *"sit and represent 18 municipalities with many different opinions on how to approach this agreement"*. This complexity is compounded by a fragmented decision-making process where *"the decisions are not made in the local tripartite agreement. The local tripartite is supposed to coordinate the work and make a lot of strategic decisions about how we move forward in the processes. But it is every single city council that has to adopt its own plan"* (Lunde, 2025). This coordination and distributed authority creates potential for inconsistent implementation, for example if Vesthimmerland does not find the needed

solutions, then other municipalities will potentially need to adjust their conversion plans accordingly in order to reach the regional goals across Limfjorden.

If lack of trust and understanding is present in a collaboration, this can potentially act as a closure to effective collaboration and consequently affect the surrounding framework for farmer participation in the agreement's implementation. N. Christensen, 2025, (Randers municipality) who is represented in three different local triparties shares, that there have probably been the most challenges in the Local Tripartite Mariagerfjord where he reflects *"it is funny, now that it is the smallest of the three [Local Tripartites he is a member of], with only two municipalities and L&F and DN involved.* N. Christensen, 2025 argues the these dynamics are also determined by *"the individuals involved and the chemistry between them"*. He also argues that there are differences between the municipalities: *"at the city council meetings in Randers Municipality, we discuss and discuss, and it changes nothing, but it is very common for us to have city council meetings that last 6 hours. In other municipalities, city council meetings last 2-3 hours"*(N. Christensen, 2025). This emphasises the critical role of personal relationships and the ability of individuals from different backgrounds to work together effectively, regardless of the structural simplicity of the group and it highlights significant differences in local political cultures and decision-making processes.

Kjeldsen, 2025 (DN) anticipates inherent tensions within the Green Tripartite Agreement due to the diverse interests of the involved parties. Despite a general positive sentiment towards the agreement, he highlights the potential for "contradictions" arising from differing priorities between environmental advocates (DN) and agricultural stakeholders. Furthermore, he notes the influence of local political landscapes, suggesting that municipalities with a stronger environmental focus may align differently than those with closer ties to agriculture, potentially leading to the formation of both alliances and opposition groups within the broader collaborative framework. This internal diversity presents potential dynamic challenge for the agreements' implementation.

Dalgaard, 2025 (Chairman) provides a critical perspective on the effectiveness of the working groups. He expresses scepticism about their impact, stating: *"I personally also find that a bit odd (...) that there was a working group that operated for a while, and I really don't think they cleared many obstacles out of the way* (Dalgaard, 2025). This comment highlights a perceived lack of proactive problem-solving before the agreement, that hinder the efficiency of the implementation process.

Dalgaard, 2025 further identifies a significant procedural bottleneck within the governance system, particularly regarding the appeals process for municipal planning:

> *"The municipality makes a recommendation, and then there is a formal announcement that if you don't agree with it, you can appeal. Well, fine, so you appeal, and then it sits over there, and then it will continue to limit the finalisation of the project because you're waiting for a decision from the Natur- og Miljøklagenævnet (Nature and Environment Appeals Board). We've only just started, so this will involve many, many more complaints. And then we'll be sitting here in 2030, and nothing has happened because they haven't even finished processing the decisions in the Natur- og Miljøklagenævnet. It's*

a bottleneck".

This does not only slows down individual projects but, if left unaddressed, threatens the overall timeline and effectiveness of the Agreement's implementation. Dalgaard, 2025 points at the importance of effective problem solving within the agreements governance structure highlighting the five people working at KL (Kommunernes Landsforening - the Danish Association of Municipalities) with Birgit Hansen (Former mayor of Frederikshavn municipality) working on problem solving in monthly meetings with Søren Søndergaard (Chairman of L&F) and Jeppe Bruus (Minister of GT (S)). This shows that local issues can be escalated through KL to high-level political actors. The system is designed to facilitate communication and problem resolution across different governance levels, theoretically allowing for local obstacles to be addressed efficiently by those with the authority to enact change.

The actor network within the Green Tripartite Limfjorden reveals a complex web of interests, alliances, and regional variations. While new collaborations have emerged between traditionally opposing environmental and agricultural interests, potential challenges remain in the governance structure and implementation processes. The regional differences in stakeholder positioning reflect not just organisational priorities but geographical realities that can affect openings and closures for participation. The authority across numerous municipalities creates coordination challenges with planning that may challenge successful implementation and to reach the goals, while administrative bottlenecks in appeals processes threaten timely execution. This aspect of timely execution is a potential closure for participation. Despite this closure, the basic attitude across the Local Green Tripartite Limfjorden appears positive, with stakeholders demonstrating *"respect for each other and the understanding that we need to reach our goals"* (N. Christensen, 2025). This shared commitment provides a foundation for potential success despite the complex actor landscape.

7.3.3 Communication

A fundamental challenge authorities face is the lack of concrete information to share with farmers, creating a communication impasse. As Lunde, 2025 (Aalborg Municipality) states, *"we would like to talk to the farmers now, but we cannot because all we would say is 'we do not know,'"* highlighting how premature outreach leads to unproductive exchanges where authorities repeatedly would have to acknowledge their information gaps. This lack of information not only potentially delays meaningful engagement but also erodes trust in the entire process, as farmers remain in a state of uncertainty regarding decisions that directly impact their livelihoods and economic futures, why information (or lack of information) could ultimately be a closure for farmer participation (Lunde, 2025). Information gaps creates a frustrating circle where authorities want to engage but cannot provide the answers farmers need, resulting in meetings where people are *"going home frustrated"* without clarity, which is what Lunde, 2025 argues as the reason why they are not yet communicating with farmers.

In relation to lack of concrete information, Farmer F, 2025 express frustration regarding the pressure to reduce runoff from a stream discharging into the fjord. He highlights a critical

lack of concrete data on the stream's actual nitrogen discharge, noting the unavailable precise measurements when requested: *"Oh, then suddenly they cannot find the papers"* (Farmer F, 2025). This absence of verifiable numbers leads him to question the reliance on model calculations underpinning the Green Tripartite Agreement, expressing scepticism about the scientific basis: *"So, I can well understand that if you as a farmer hear these things, that the entire Green Tripartite Agreement is based on model calculations, then I think, where is the good craftsmanship from the universities or whoever has investigated it for them?"* (Farmer F, 2025). Furthermore, Farmer F, 2025 suggests a shared interest in effective solutions, implying a willingness to participate in measures that genuinely benefit the fjord, *"(...) or when the Limfjordsrådet then sits and says that it is so annoying to spend so many billions on something that does not help the fjord anyway."* Suggesting a desire for evidence-based action and a concern that current approaches may be misallocated.

All farmers in the study sample are reporting that they are only talking sporadically with others about the agreement at this point. Notably, three of the farmers are members of 'NOFFF' (No Farmers, No Food, No Future), a closed Facebook group with 7,565 members. This online platform serves as a hub for information sharing and the organisation of demonstrations across Denmark protesting the 'Government shutdown of Danish agriculture'. Within the group, administrators filter information, which predominantly focuses on the issue of nitrogen pollution in Danish inner waters linked to sewage treatment plants, debates surrounding the green transition, and critiques of government policies. The argumentation within the group emphasises missing nuances in the information shared about Danish agriculture in media and by politicians. While the three farmers in this study are not actively participating in the online platform or in demonstrations, they remain informed about the shared information and arguments. This is expressed by Farmer D, 2025: *"For goodness sake, remove that tax. And then we need some real numbers and facts on the table, because this thing of just saying that it is agriculture that is causing the nitrogen in the Limfjord, what about those five sewage treatment plants that overflow? There is a lack of facts!"*. This is a statement by Farmer D, 2025 and it has not been possible to fact check this statement. However, a report made by The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark in 2019, concluded that overflow from sewage treatment plants contributed to 5.7% of the total amount of nitrogen discharging to the ocean in 2018 while agriculture contributed with 69.1% (Miljø- og Fødevareministeriet, 2019). This is a closure for farmer participation and an example of a negative story that Dalgaard, 2025 emphasised need to be removed to foster participation.

Monitoring platforms like NOFFF can offer planners and politicians valuable insights into the underlying perceptions of this segment of farmers. This understanding can be crucial for tailoring communication strategies and knowledge distribution efforts to effectively engage with this audience. These platforms can be a closure towards farmer participation if not considered, however it can be a resourceful challenge to monitor these channels, why broad information sharing from the agricultural consultants is valued important.

Pre-existing negative relationships between farmers and municipal authorities could present a significant communication barrier and closure for participation. Dalgaard, 2025 describes how some farmers have *"terribly distorted relationships with the municipality because they are the authority"*, noting that *"even just the car coming into the yard, and*

some are already on edge". This historical hostility could mean that communication starts from a disadvantaged position before any words are exchanged. Dalgaard, 2025 visualises the challenges with negative stories: *"Imagine someone standing up in a public meeting, when there are a hundred people and landowners gathered, saying, 'Well, he just wants to share his experiences from when the municipality came [and looked at his land and discovered some nature], it costed him 3 million DKK' because the municipality goes straight home, and then draws the nature into their maps, which drastically reduces the land's value"*. These stories circulate and shape collective attitudes, making farmers hesitant to engage openly with authorities. These stories could affect how new information is received and interpreted, maybe through a lens of suspicion rather than cooperation, therefore Dalgaard, 2025 suggests sharing positive stories creating openings for participation: *"It is better that we say, 'just let it be,'[unclassified nature] - this agreement is so comprehensive, just let it roll, because it is better to get all landowners on board as players and get some good stories*. This emphasises the influence that negative and positive stories have on willingness to participate.

Communication and expectation missteps can create trust barriers between authorities and the farming community which is a closure for enhancing farmer participation. Mortensen, 2025 (Limfjordsrådet's Secretariat) highlights a potential critical reliability issue: *"It is very difficult if you initially talked to the landowners and emphasised that participation is voluntary, and it subsequently ends with the expropriation of some of them. That will undermine reliability"*. In this statement, Mortensen, 2025 describes the worst case scenario to emphasise the importance of doing what you say you will do. The general notion being communicated to farmers is that focus is on voluntary initiatives but if not successful, a regulation will come. However, this contradiction between initial promises and potential outcomes could create scepticism among farmers about governmental intentions.

The communication challenges surrounding the Green Tripartite Agreement reveal a complex interplay of information deficiency, trust issues, and historical tensions. Despite these obstacles, potentials exist for improved engagement through personalised approaches, understanding of farmer networks, and strategic communication planning. The analysis suggests that authorities should prioritise relationship-building, transparency, and mutual respectful communication to overcome existing barriers. While the implementation timeline creates immediate communication challenges, investing in these approaches now could establish the foundation for more productive engagement when concrete information becomes available. Success will ultimately depend on transforming the current environment of suspicion into one of cautious collaboration through consistent, respectful, and transparent communication practices.

7.3.4 Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy is emphasised by farmers in particular as a continuous closure for implementation of nature and climate initiatives. Especially farmers emphasised how administrative burdens, uncertainty about support schemes, and the risk of financial loses inhibit their motivation for participating. This section covers bureaucratic challenges hindering farmers' participation in the agreement based on farmers' personal experiences with former nature-related initiatives as well as general obstacles related to bureaucracy.

The establishment of the Task Force is argued to be an opening to participation, as a tool to address the foreseen bureaucratic closures. Both Dalgaard, 2025 and Gravesen, 2025 (Fjordland) highlight the task force's crucial role in navigating bureaucratic hurdles and conflicting legislation that have previously stalled projects. Dalgaard, 2025 emphasises its importance for ensuring "future and larger nature projects" by addressing the need to sometimes alter the status of existing nature areas. Gravesen, 2025 adds that the task force *"brings resources to handle barriers,"* fostering belief that projects will genuinely progress. By swiftly addressing issues and maintaining momentum, the task force aims to prevent negative experiences for farmers, encouraging continued participation.

Risks in relation to receiving subsidies

A large role in making nature initiatives for farmers is the possibility of achieving subsidies from the Danish State and/or the EU for converting agricultural land into nature such as creating mini wetlands. These subsidies are made to motivate farmers to make changes in their fields to benefit climate and biodiversity but along with these benefits follow strict rules and lengthy administration processing time as emphasised by Farmer B, 2025 and Farmer F, 2025. Farmer B, 2025 wanted to make a mini wetland area but it would cost a million DKK to do and he would not be paid back the money until after the wetland was established. This created uncertainty if he would ever receive the money and he was advised by his consultant not to go through with the project. In relation, Farmer F, 2025 has experience with making climate initiatives such as in-barn manure acidification. This experience has resulted in him fearing that he will not receive compensation in future climate initiatives due to rigid and stringent procedures, as he waited four years until he received compensation for introducing in-barn manure acidification. Furthermore, he states that it is not possible to make any changes afterwards - not even if the changes are made to benefit nature because you already received the compensation. In relation to lengthy administration processing time, Farmer F, 2025 states that:

> "*If you have an agreement that says when you do these things, you will get subsidies for this and that, and then we go ahead and meet all the requirements we are supposed to, and the money does not come because there is a system down in the EU or at the Agricultural Agency, because they are short on staff or they prioritise other things higher than dealing with it — then, as a farmer, you can get a bit frustrated.*" (Farmer F, 2025).

This quote emphasises farmers' frustrations towards authorities' handling of projects and uncertainty of receiving subsidies. The risk related to whether or not a farmer will receive subsidies is related to rigid rules which is uncovered in the next section.

Rigid rules

Rigid rules can be a potential closure towards farmer participation because it makes the farming practices more difficult for farmers, as expressed in the following. To be able to receive compensation for nature or climate initiatives, there are conditions that have to be met in order to receive subsidies. In addition to there being rules the farmer has to comply with, there are laws made to protect habitats which are scarce in the landscape.

These habitats are known as "§ 3 habitat types" as they are protected by The Danish Nature Protection Act's §3 (Naturbeskyttelseslovens §3) and include lakes, marshes, freshwater meadows, coastal meadows, heathlands, dry grasslands, and streams(Miljø- og Ligestillingsministeriet, 2019). In relation to farming, if an area is untouched it can turn into § 3 protected nature and farming activities would have to stop. Farmer D, 2025 has experience with this as he states that farmers have to plough all the way up to a ditch because if they do not, flowers or other plants might appear, and if they are protected, the area might be classified under §3 and then farmers are not allowed to do farming there (Farmer D, 2025). This influences farming practise as farmers might not have ploughed all the way up to a ditch if it does not make sense in terms of yield. This shows that farmers might view nature and protected nature as a risk and something they should fight. Legislation that is made to protect nature can hinder the creation of nature projects in the future as it is not allowed to change protected nature's status. Dalgaard, 2025 states that *"if nature is not allowed to change its official status, no progress can be made."* Dalgaard, 2025 states that the municipalities and DN have agreed on it being necessary to allow some natural areas protected by § 3 of the Danish Nature Protection Act to change its status in order to succeed with the implementation of the Green Tripartite Agreement. Otherwise, projects will be small and difficult to implement.

Rigid rules can be a closure, N. Christensen, 2025, shared his experiences with lengthy administration, processing time and legislation. The former tenant farmer of the land took some area out of production and applied for fallow land support. If an area is left out of production for five years or more in a row it turns into permanent grass and other rules apply. Because of the lengthy administration processing time, the former tenant farmer had to plough the area after four years to prevent it from turning into permanent grass as his case on the fallow land support had not been handled. Christensen stated that "*What we did was plough a four-year-old grass field, right next to our closest neighbour – the Gudenå River. It makes absolutely no sense. According to the rules, it would then be classified as permanent grassland. That means we would not be able to use it as fallow land going forward*" (N. Christensen, 2025). When implementing the Green Tripartite Agreement he states that *"hopefully, we will get rid of those type of crazy ridiculous rules"*. These rules are made to protect nature, but as in the examples above, in combination with lengthy administration processing time, these rules are a closure in relation to motivating farmers and their possibilities for doing initiatives.

Bureaucracy is a closure for swift implementation and is a closure for enhancing nature and climate initiatives as farmers get frustrated because of strict rules, insecurity, and lengthy administration processing time. The long processing time allows for insecurity and changes in the time frame that a case is being processed. These support from society is in these examples not fostering quick, effective and nature/climate promoting projects, as they are both affecting farmers willingness to corroborate in complex rule games, forcing them to use consultants where the farmers economic ability might not support these changes. To Farmer E, 2025, the bureaucratic barrier is a shame as he states that *"many farmers are willing to establish wetlands, but the municipalities are not on board because they are not ready to issue the permits. There are lots of people who want to take action, but they cannot really get through because it becomes too bureaucratic. And that is a shame, because sometimes we get blamed for the lack of progress, when in fact it is the authorities who are*

the real bottleneck."

The data shows, that bureaucracy, complex regulations, and ineffectiveness from authorities can discourage farmers from participating, and thereby is a closure. Previous negative experiences, such as lengthy administrative processes, strict and unclear rules, and the need for consultants to navigate intricate systems, affecting farmers willingness and economic ability to participate. Farmers may fear making errors within this complex system and potentially acts as a closure to meaningful farmer participation.

7.3.5 Summary of findings: Support from society to participate

Table 7.3. Identified openings and closures in relation to support from society

Openings	Closures
Economy	
- Well designed subsidies - Regulation (politicians) - 1:1 compensation (land price)	- Undefined subsidies - Regulation (farmers) - Not 1:1 compensation (land price) - Economic uncertainty and missing guaranties
Network	
- Existing communication channels and 'opinion leaders'	- Negative opinion leaders in the farmers network - Lack of established forums for discussing GT
- Cooperation between interest groups, reducing the pre-existing polarisation - Acknowledgement of regional variations	- Negative internal perception of the agreement between farmers - Perceived disconnect between rural farming communities and urban populations or policymakers
- Taskforce to address foreseen bureaucratic closures	- Perception of being misunderstood by decision-makers - Misinformation circulating through informal networks - Mistrust and negative relationships at polity level, influencing the surrounding framework - Complex governance structure
Communication	
- Positive experiences and positive stories	- Negative experiences and negative stories - Lack of information - Pre-existing negative relationships between farmers and municipal authorities - Communication and expectation missteps between authorities and the farming community
Bureaucracy	
	- Administrative burdens - Rigdig rules - Lengthy administration processing time - Complex regulations

The findings shows that societal support influences farmers' participation, acting as both an opening and a closure depending on context. Support from society contributes with an understanding of the societal framework, affecting the ability and willingness of farmer participation, showing that this agreement is a complex construction with many different factors influencing the implementation and participation possibilities. Many of the results

are multifaceted, depending on the individual farmer and the specific context, why it is difficult to argue if one result is only a closure or only an opening. Support form society affecting farmer participation therefore frames many different aspects, politically, personally and the associated networks influencing this agreement at different layers.

Our findings indicate a clear preference among farmers for incentives (carrots) over regulation (sticks), with land exchange and one to one compensation being the most favoured, followed by subsidies, and lastly, regulation. Past initiatives show that it has not been efficient only providing carrots. However, subsidies must be accompanied by administrative simplicity to minimise the perceived need for control, a common concern among farmers.

Regulation presents a more complex dynamic. While it can serve as a closure by creating disincentives and potentially leading to a loss of morale, it also acts as an opening by ensuring action where willingness might be low. The prospect of the collective nitrogen regulation, for instance, introduces the theme of shared responsibility but also raises concerns about equitable burden-sharing and the risk of a "penalty" system that does not account for individual contributions. Farmers generally prefer voluntary action, fearing that uniform regulations could undermine the diverse conditions and production capacities across farms. Therefore, careful attention to the scope, timing, and distribution of regulatory impacts is essential to achieve environmental goals while preserving agricultural livelihoods and avoiding a negative psychological impact that could lead to a contraction of agricultural output.

Furthermore, the perceived scepticism towards presented facts can create resistance. This highlights how negative narratives can impact farmers' trust and willingness, especially when potential yield reductions could severely affect their profitability, debt settlement, and investments, potentially leading to farm closures.

Social and professional networks play a crucial role in shaping participation. Openings can be found in leveraging existing communication channels, engaging "opinion leaders" who can positively influence peers, highlighting community benefits, and addressing the desire for social recognition. Conversely, a significant closure emerges from the perceived disconnect between rural farming communities and urban populations or policymakers. Unmanaged information flows within digital networks, as seen in the NOFFF Facebook network, can also undermine participation if not proactively addressed.

Finally, the administrative and geographical realities also impact societal support. Regional differences in stakeholder positioning and the authority spread across numerous municipalities create coordination challenges that can hinder successful implementation. Additionally, administrative bottlenecks in appeals processes pose a threat to timely execution of plans.

Effective societal support requires a nuanced approach that considers compensation and low bureaucracy incentives, sensible regulation to ensure collective goals are met, addresses scepticism with transparent communication, leverages social networks for positive influence, and navigates the complexities of municipal coordination and administrative efficiency.

Implementation strategies and farmer participation 8

The implementation of the Green Tripartite Agreement presents different strategies reflecting diverse reactive and proactive measures. While the agreement's full implementation is under development, distinct strategic tendencies are already observable among both farmers and authorities. This section characterises these implementation strategies, focusing on how they aim to achieve the agreement's objectives and target farmer participation. This chapter addresses the second sub-question: *What strategies are in place for the implementation of the agreement, and how do they target farmer participation?* The chapter is structured into two strategy types: strategies employed by farmers and implementation strategies prioritised by authorities to foster participation. Based on the results from the two analyses, the chapter ends with recommendations to enhance farmer participation.

8.1 Individual farmer adaptation strategies

Individual farmer adaptation strategies imply that a new policy landscape, as the Green Tripartite Agreement, creates a restraint towards 'here-and-now' participation due to the insecurities and undefined terms, potentially slowing implementation or creating an accumulation within a time-limited implementation period as an effect of the bottleneck slowing down the process, as previously identified. Different adaptation strategies have been identified; 'wait-and-see' strategy, 'exit strategy' and a market-based strategy, where non of these strategies imply truly proactive adaptation aligning with the agreement's objective. However, these farmers' strategies are not representative for the entire agricultural sector. According to committee members Dalgaard, 2025 (Chairman) and Lunde, 2025, some farmers are adopting proactive approaches aligned with the agreements objectives. Nevertheless, addressing the reluctance or speculative strategies observed in these particular farmers may be essential for successful policy implementation.

Farmer F, 2025 situation illustrates a 'wait-and-see' strategy, driven by the uncertainty and potential new incentives of the Green Tripartite Agreement. Currently involved in a planned wetland project, Farmer F, 2025 is considering withdrawing to explore potentially more favourable terms under the new agreement. This 'wait-and-see' approach aims to maximise benefits by postponing commitment on current wetland projects until the final structure of the new agreement is clear. This reflects a rational response by farmers to the evolving policy landscape, weighing individual gain against broader community impacts.

Another adaptation strategy is an 'exit strategy', where a farmer chooses to leave the

sector to avoid perceived uncertainties, rather than attempting to adapt or participate in the new agreement. The rising land prices, a consequence of the agreement's introduction (Johansson, 2024), results in an exit strategy for Farmer E, 2025. Faced with the insecurity associated with the agreement's implementation and a potential beneficial price for the farm business and land, Farmer E, 2025 is considering selling his farm and leaving agricultural production.

Another mere speculative adaptation strategy is the 'market-based' strategy, involving farmers actively manipulating conditions to their advantage. Being more proactive, this approach leverages the Green Tripartite Agreement's environmental objectives, such as reducing nitrogen emissions, to secure more favourable terms in land exchange negotiations, specifically by maximising the land "value" of what might otherwise be considered poor land. In anticipation of the agreement's implementation, Farmer B, 2025 is acquiring low-value land near the Limfjord and intentionally cultivating it with corn – a high yield crop that is poor at absorbing nitrogen which therefore discharges into the fjord. The objective is to artificially inflate the land's perceived "value" for future conversion plans under the new policy framework (Farmer B, 2025).

8.2 Authorities' communication strategies

Effective communication with farmers from the start is crucial for successful project implementation. This involves an inclusive, bottom-up approach through early and continuous dialogue, ensuring farmers are fully informed and engaged before any plans are made (Dalgaard, 2025). Agricultural consultants play a vital role in this process due to their close collaboration with farmers, that are essential to foster project ownership and address potential barriers proactively (Kjeldsen, 2025 Gravesen, 2025, Thøgersen, 2025, Kjeldsen, 2025).

This proactive engagement directly increases participation rates by acknowledging farmers' inherent stake in the process. By involving farmers and their perspectives first, they influence project design rather than simply reacting to it. The initial communication should focus on ensuring farmers' fundamental understanding of the agreement and its implications, fostering shared purpose and encouraging participation. This foundational comprehension is an essential precondition for securing active farmer involvement. Dalgaard, 2025 also stresses the importance of early communication, prior to any definitive mapping of project areas in the conversion plans and Gravesen, 2025 (Fjordland) emphasises the importance of early communication:

> *"We do not go out and talk about other people's land. If we have some areas where we think, 'this could make good sense to take out and replace with a wetland or afforestation,' then we gather the people in the area and start a dialogue. That is to avoid people sitting with their arms crossed saying they will not participate. Most people, even those who are opposed, say: 'Okay, let us shed some light on it,' and then it might turn out that it is actually doable" Gravesen, 2025.*

However, this early dialogue is to some extend hindered by the missing detailed information

about the effects of the agreement, according to Lunde, 2025 (Aalborg Municipality): *"We will just manage to hold some information meetings in 2025, for example concerning Halkjærbredning, which is a real hotspot. I imagine we will hold meetings with all landowners in that area. But getting out and talking to each individual landowner at their kitchen table, we definitely will not manage that in 2025"*(Lunde, 2025).

In contrast, Dalgaard, 2025 states: *"talking to farmers can easily be done before the summer holidays [2025]. I mean, it is just a matter of doing it"* and highlights the importance of timely communication: *"please make sure not to make that mistake, do not draw anything in without considering how the recipient will take it, but that is the municipalities' responsibility; I can only appeal to the municipalities to behave properly in this (...) to make those 20 pots of coffee and warm up the pastry. It is a small thing to get people on board"*. However, he also acknowledges the lack of specific information when communicating: *it is also easier with the retention maps to show where there is a greater effect from doing something. And it is simply not okay that they have [the Government] been in such a hurry to push this through and then they cannot even deliver the very basics for the task"*. This emphasises the need for the right tools that are necessary to have before optimal communication can be done.

In summary, practical implementation faces challenges due to resource limitations, incomplete information, and the scale of communication needed. Ultimately, success depend on authorities balancing urgent timelines with the quality of preparation and information provided for meaningful farmer involvement.

Strategic communication is to engage farmers, moving beyond simple information sharing to build trust and ensure genuine participation. Dalgaard, 2025 advocates for a structured processes, starting with the formation of municipal follow-up groups. These groups, intentionally kept small for confidentiality and trust, should include broad political representation and key stakeholders. This integration embeds the process within the municipal decision-making framework and facilitates open discussions crucial for targeting participation issues. Context-specific communication strategies are recommended, as Dalgaard, 2025 acknowledges that a "one-size-fits-all" approach is ineffective due to diverse local contexts and individual dispositions. Tailored methods, such as direct outreach or smaller landowner meetings, are essential for engaging "difficult" landowners and fostering strong interpersonal relationships built on trust, emphasised by Dalgaard, 2025:

> *"It is important to involve local actors, because in some areas there might be some landowners who can be a bit difficult, but then it helps to have someone who knows how to talk to them and say 'how do we handle this? Is it better if you reach out to them directly, or should we invite them to a smaller landowner meeting in that part of the municipality?' Where you gather just 20–30 landowners and have a proper conversation with them. It is incredibly important to create a confidential space among people who trust each other"* (Dalgaard, 2025).

Despite challenges, there is potential for improved communication through personalised, empathetic approaches. Farmer B, 2025 emphasises the importance of good communication

from authorities: *"they need to be very human and meet people where they are, because if they cannot do that, I think it will get stuck. (...) So, I think they will probably need to hire some farmers or some consultants or someone who can explain it, because there are some [farmers] who do not read up on it and just believe that they [the authorities] will just take everything"*. Vangsgaard, 2025 (Struer Municipality) recognises this need for tailored communication, noting that staff should present "opportunities and potentials" rather than demands, where it is primarily the administrative staff that needs to learn how to navigate the situation where they have to present a project recognising that they should not go out and say: *"We are interested in buying a large part of your land" or "We would like you to make this and that available"* (Vangsgaard, 2025). What Vangsgaard, 2025 is recommending is that *"we see some opportunities and potentials in an area that affects their properties. And then we have to take it from there and present the purpose and goal of the project"*. The informal setting of such discussions is also significant, with Vangsgaard, 2025 acknowledging that effective communication *"might well require a lot of coffee,"* pointing to the value of relationship building in comfortable settings. The focus should be on creating what Dalgaard, 2025 calls "good stories" of positive engagement, as these successful examples can counteract the negative narratives that is currently identified in some farmers' perceptions. These relationship-building efforts represent an investment in social capital that may facilitate more productive discussions when difficult decisions eventually need to be made.

Gravesen, 2025 (Fjordland) states that a strategy at Fjordland is avoiding direct discussion of specific land areas. Instead, they conduct large group farmer meetings early on to address scepticism. He hopes this approach familiarises farmers with the idea of land-use change, making them more receptive when detailed maps are released later this year.

Lunde, 2025 shares that at Aalborg Municipality, focus is on making multifunctional plans and think about synergies when they point to areas on the map and therefore, they do a lot of desk work before reaching out to land owners. On a map, they point to potential areas where they would like to get into conversation with the land owners at a later stage. When they have an idea of which areas to look into, they invite land owners to a meeting and the process goes on from there (Lunde, 2025). These strategies are supported by Mortensen, 2025 (Limfjordsrådet's Secretariat) as there are different approaches among the municipalities in connection with involvement in the conversion plan (and this is different from the individual projects where all municipalities must involve the individual landowner with direct dialogue) (Mortensen, 2025).

Which strategy that makes the most sense to use is based on several factors based on experience and municipal resources. The bottom up approach takes more resources and longer time to do. Mortensen, 2025 states: *"I think that if there are resources for it, then the bottom up approach is best, because it is a more respectful way of doing things"* (Mortensen, 2025). At the same time she emphasises that the bottom up approach is not always prioritised because there is limited time to develop the maps with potential areas for land use change and that the conversion plans are dynamic and can be adjusted. In addition, as participation is based on voluntarism and the landowners are not legally bound by it, it might not make sense to do the bottom up approach. Conclusively, she states that *"I think you can take a bit from both sides. Normally it is right to involve people as early*

as possible and respectfully from the beginning. However, in some areas it can be a very time-consuming/"unmanageable" task to involve all affected landowners in the conversion plan, where municipalities can choose to inform landowners when it has drawn the potential area into the conversion plan, since it is voluntary to participate" (Mortensen, 2025). This demonstrates that which strategy to use is context specific.

8.3 Conversion plans: buffer or no buffer zones

In the conversion plans, areas need to be identified to reach the goal of 2803 tons of nitrogen reduction in the Limfjord area. The interviewees describe the internal discussion about designating additional land beyond the target to create a buffer, allowing flexibility if some landowners choose not to participate. City council politicians Lunde, 2025, Vangsgaard, 2025 and N. Christensen, 2025 argue that a buffer should be included in the mapping of the areas. Buffer zones can have a mixed impact on farmer participation. While they help planners to handle participation uncertainty as explained by N. Christensen, 2025 (Randers Municipality): *"this offers more landowners the opportunity to participate"*, they simultaneously increase risks and distrust for individual farmers, as those included within a buffer area do not know if they are in or out. Without clear boundaries, this strategy could be perceived as "overdone" as Lunde, 2025 states: *"They [The agricultural sector] chose to say no, they did not want to designate for anything more than what exactly hit the target. Even if that means you need 100% compliance"*. However, with flexible management, buffer zones could align agricultural interests with environmental goals. This includes explicit guarantees that buffer areas will not imply automatic conversion mandates for the farmer if initial participation targets are met.

8.4 Strategies for land exchange

The effectiveness of land exchange strategies depend on overcoming institutional bottlenecks, securing adequate funding, whether public or private, and leveraging demographic opportunities to encourage voluntary participation and smooth implementation. A fundamental precondition for successful land exchange is the authorities' ability to facilitate it.

As Dalgaard, 2025 emphasises, the exchange of land cannot proceed without sufficient institutional support: *"either the State must provide the manpower to carry out land exchange, or municipalities must be empowered to do it themselves, because without action, there is nothing to exchange"* (Dalgaard, 2025). This highlights the critical need for either state-level intervention or the empowerment of municipalities to take on this role.

Both Lunde, 2025 and Dalgaard, 2025 identify a major bottleneck at the SGAV land exchange office in Tønder, where insufficient staffing limits the pace and scope of land exchange. Lunde, 2025 suggests that municipalities could take on greater responsibility for land exchange, but acknowledges that this would require additional financial support from the State to enable municipalities to participate meaningfully in land acquisition and meet the agreement's targets on schedule. This decentralisation could potentially streamline implementation and foster participation in projects involving land exchange.

From the farmers' perspective, Farmer C, 2025 advocates for a proactive state-led approach: *"start buying some of the properties that are for sale and then carry out land exchange that way. And then take out the areas they want removed"* (Farmer C, 2025). However, he raises concerns about the State's financial capacity to purchase up to 390,000 ha of land, questioning the feasibility of such an ambitious approach.

Addressing the funding challenge, Dalgaard, 2025 points to the growing interest from large private investors, such as Lego and Novo Nordisk, who may seek to enhance their green profile through land acquisition for environmental initiatives. The involvement of private capital could provide alternative pathways for land exchange, offering farmers additional options beyond state-facilitated exchange.

Finally, demographic trends present a timely opportunity for land exchange. As Lunde, 2025 observes, *"Our luck in this context is that the average age in agriculture is high, and therefore we can hope that enough people are nearing retirement and will be willing to take part in an exchange of land and give up some of their land. That is the hope"* (Lunde, 2025). The anticipated wave of retirements could ease the process of land exchange, as more landowners may be open to sell or redistribute their land.

8.5 Reactive strategies for non participation

The implementation strategies for participation in land conversion projects reveal tensions, while the process is officially framed as voluntary, the scale and political urgency of the agreement introduce elements of both implicit and explicit demand. The overarching challenge is to reconcile the collective environmental ambitions with the rights and expectations of individual landowners. Political, legal, and social constraints shape the implementation strategies, and local adaptation is necessary to achieve the agreements objectives. Implementing voluntary land conversion projects involves flexible, negotiated strategies that balance community goals with individual farmer abilities. There is not one unified strategy as it varies from adjusting conversion plan boundaries and increasing dialogue to, in rare cases, land expropriation, all depending on the specific situation. The strategies are agued to be context-specific rather than top-down approaches.

Farmer C, 2025, expresses concern that a refusal to participate might not be respected. This concern could stem from the Green Tripartite being a large scale project that necessitates broad participation for success. Furthermore, the same farmer contextualised the project's magnitude, stating, *"I mean, it is an area the size of Fyn they want to take out of use. It is not just a couple of fields they need to buy"*. Additionally, Farmer F, 2025 describes a fear that the municipality might unexpectedly demand *"now you have to give up this piece of land and that piece of land"*, to ensure the project's completion. This is a reactive strategi towards farmer participation.

The city council politicians were asked about the course of strategies if farmers declined participation. Farmers' refusal is not only possible but expected, acknowledged by Vangsgaard, 2025, who stated, *"You should not think everything is all rosy — sometimes people do say no"*.

Several strategies where identified: Firstly, N. Christensen, 2025 indicated that the Local

Tripartite would not address this issue in the current year, as their present task is to identify the most optimal areas for land conversion. He further explained, *"Well, then it will be evaluated in 2026 in the Parliament, and they will decide what measures should be used and implemented if we do not reach the goal"*. Secondly, if the landowner that say no is on the outer borders of a bigger wetland project both Mortensen, 2025 (Limfjordsrådet's Secretariat) and Thøgersen, 2025 (Holstebro Municipality) suggested that project boundaries could be adjusted to exclude their property, allowing the project to proceed without them.

Contrarily, if a farmer's property is central to a significant project, two potential strategies forward were identified. One strategi is to acknowledge the project's potential failure and seek an alternative location. The other strategy involves increased dialogue with the landowner to understand their concerns and reasons for refusal(Mortensen, 2025, Vangsgaard, 2025, and Dalgaard, 2025). With Dalgaard, 2025 elaborating: *"Then they need to call me, and I will go talk to them [and I will ask] what is it they are saying no to?"*. He further explained that dialogue might reveal underlying issues explaining their reluctance to participate, as for example municipal resistance due to previous cases.

Vangsgaard, 2025 further stated that *"it [the farmers saying no] really should have been caught beforehand, so we do not use too many resources on it [farmers saying no]"*. This appears somewhat contradictory to N. Christensen, 2025 who prioritises identifying optimal areas for conversion and postpones dialogue with landowners. Consequently, a unified strategy for engaging with landowners might not yet exist.

Mortensen, 2025 (Limfjordsrådet's Secretariat) states that there has been put a lot of emphasis on expropriation on a political level and therefore there is very little willingness to consider using expropriation as a tool. Further she states that *"[if expropriation is introduced] then the whole dynamic changes - and others will also want to do it [expropriation], and then it becomes a financial issue and an entirely different process"*. In contrast, Lunde, 2025 (Aalborg Municipality) states that *"There is a very narrow margin for expropriation. One ha out of 200 ha can be subject to expropriation"*.

Farmer F, 2025 offers a different interpretation of the voluntary aspects of the agreement, characterising this *"so-called voluntary participation – if it can truly be called voluntary – is more like, "If you do not do it, we will decide for you." It is essentially voluntarism under coercion"*. This statement finds resonance with Farmer C, 2025, who similarly perceives the situation as *"somewhere between voluntary coercion and something like actual coercion"*.

Farmer C, 2025 makes it clear how frustrating the situation can be for landowners and farmers. He compares it to a more relatable example: *"I think, at least, it is kind of like if they came in and said, 'One-third of all homeowners' gardens — you just have to leave them alone.' I think that would also cause some bad feelings"*. This comparison shows how people might feel if they were suddenly told they could not use land they own. For Farmer C, 2025, it is not just about inconvenience, he believes that *"property rights are being violated"* because landowners are being told what they can and can not do with their own property.

This tension emphasises the challenge of balancing the pursuit of a broad strategy for participation in a major environmental initiative with the deeply rooted rights of individual

landowners. N. Christensen, 2025 emphasises, *"Property rights are inviolable, and if I want to do 'A' on my land, then I should be allowed to do 'A'. And now I am being told that I have to do 'B' instead."* He highlights the financial pressures farmers face and the need for fair compensation, given their ongoing obligations. The central challenge, then, lies in creating a strategy that fosters voluntary engagement while honouring property rights, ensuring that collective environmental ambitions do not foster resentment or a sense of coercion among those that are to participate in the agreement.

8.6 Sub conclusion

This chapter presented strategies that have been identified throughout the interviews.In conclusion, the main strategies for implementing the agreement and targeting farmer participation involve early, tailored communication; flexible and adaptive planning (including buffer zones); and a mix of top-down and bottom-up engagement depending on local context. These strategies seek to build trust, reduce uncertainty, and encourage voluntary participation, while navigating the practical and psychological barriers that farmers face in adapting to the new policy landscape.

8.7 Recommendations

This section presents recommendations formulated from the collected data and the two analyses. These recommendations aim to facilitate farmer participation in the Green Tripartite and are divided into those for policy makers and municipalities responsible for planning and policy implementation.

Discussions with interviewees and insights from current research consistently indicate that financial incentives are the primary openings of farmer participation. However, the data also suggests that subsidy programs and voluntary participation alone are insufficient to make significant change. To achieve the agreement's targets, regulation appears necessary to align agricultural practices with the broader demands of the Danish population. It is also evident that some farmers acknowledge the decline in nature and are proactively addressing this issue. Nevertheless, the finalisation of financial frameworks is crucial before farmers can effectively assess their options and take action. Given the absence of these frameworks, we cannot offer further recommendations regarding specific mechanisms at this time.

The structural issues, which lead to uncertainty, such as compensation and nitrogen regulation, are expected to resolve as formal decisions are made and clear frameworks are made. Once these uncertainties are addressed, they will no longer pose a closure. However, several recommendations can still be implemented to enhance farmer participation.

Recommendations to Policy Makers

Recommendations includes recommendations to overcome structural closures based on bureaucracy and law simplification that cannot be overcome on local tripartite scale.

It is recommended to establish clear future premiss for participation to reduce uncertainty and enable informed decision-making. It is recommended to put resources into upscaling

the capacity of the land exchange office in Tønder to ease the process of getting projects through and ease the bottleneck that slows down progress and momentum that the agreement brings with it. Further, to speed up administrative processes in relation to purchasing land for land exchange. It is also recommended to build in flexibility to the projects as mentioned in the state of the art (Siebert et al., 2010, De Krom, 2017) as a driver for farmer participation, as this allows room for making changes which is valuable for farmers limiting the perceived risks of not receiving compensation. This ties well together with rule simplification as stated by Dalgaard, 2025, which is also recommended to do and should be delegated to the task force (in combination with the local municipality) particularly to ease participation in order to create larger nature areas.

Recommendations to the municipalities

As the municipalities have authorial responsibility in the agreement, communicating the process, sharing information and making sure that farmers are informed, is crucial for farmer participation as transparency helps clarify the process and eliminate concern. Communication is a strategy emphasised by the committee members of the local tripartite, and especially by Dalgaard, 2025. Communication as a driver for participation is also emphasised in literature stated in the state of the art (Czajkowski et al., 2021 and Frondel et al., 2012). As the next step of implementation is to make conversion plans and contact landowners, it is recommended to send out informative letters in advance, to inform that they might be included in the process - this allows landowners to know the status of implementation and also to start getting comfortable around the fact that their land might change and possibly engage in landowner meetings for additional information.

In addition to sending informational letters, it is recommended to invite farmers to meetings to provide additional information and the possibility for them to get answers to their questions before receiving a note on that the municipality have decided something for their land. These meetings include large landowner meetings but should become progressively smaller as the potential areas for land conversion narrows down. This appeals to farmer's support from society as emphasised by Westerink et al., 2020 on advice and local networks and is emphasised by Dalgaard, 2025 on the need to create room for sharing concerns and ideas and eliminate negative stories. The recommendations on communication and information sharing is pointed towards the municipalities but is even more crucial for agricultural consultants to do, as they act as an intermediary between municipalities and farmers.

The overall recommendations for policymakers, the task force, and the local tripartite group are to ensure early communication and simplify rules. It is essential to engage with farmers in a positive, respectful, and proactive way, aiming to find solutions that work for all parties involved.

Discussion 9

9.1 Farmers and the commons

The relationship between agricultural practices and common resources presents a fundamental tension in environmental and climate policy, particularly evident in cases where private land use by farmers affects shared natural resources such as water quality and biodiversity. This discussion examines the complex dynamics between farmers' property rights and their responsibilities toward common goods, with particular attention to the expectation of full compensation for environmental compliance and the broader implications for democratic governance and economic sustainability.

The commons is the *"broad set of resources, natural and cultural, that are shared by many people"* (aisc, 2023), and includes e.g. fresh air, clean water, a view and ecosystem services. The 'tragedy of the commons' occurs when individual rational behaviour leads to collective irrationality, resulting in overuse and degradation of these shared resources (Ostrom, 2015). In agricultural contexts, this is shown when farming practices on private property generate negative effects that affect common resources, such as eutrophication in the Limfjord due to nitrogen discharge from agricultural practise. The economic logic driving individual farmers to maximise short-term profits from their land use, can potentially undermine the long-term sustainability of shared environmental goods. This creates a challenge for policy makers: on how to integrate legitimate property rights with the protection of common resources that the Danish society depends on and demands.

The intersection of property rights and environmental policies demonstrates that when private land use activities significantly affect common goods such as water quality, regulatory intervention can be argued to be not only acceptable but also necessary to protect the commons. This challenges the idea that property ownership grants unlimited rights to use land in ways that may harm shared resources, where the implementation of regulations entered with the agreement, potentially establishes a framework where property rights exist within limits defined by their impact on common goods, as the potential nitrogen regulation will.

The expectation among farmers for full compensation (elaborated in Section 7.3.1) when asked to change to less environmentally harmful practices, farmers requests that society pay for the end of activities that damage common resources where those causing environmental harm expect to be compensated for stopping such harmful practices. Such expectations reflect a misunderstanding of the relationship between private property rights and public goods, suggesting that farmers view their right to environmental degradation as a compensable asset.

While AES or subsidies in the agreement can drive positive environmental outcomes, they also support the principle that environmental management requires financial incentives rather than being understood as a basic responsibility of land ownership. This approach raises questions about long-term sustainability, both economic and environmental, of systems that require continuous payments to prevent environmental harm.

The democratic legitimacy of compensation-based environmental policies also deserves careful and detailed examination. When farmers receive substantial subsidies while contributing relatively little to overall economic output with 0.84 % of the Danish Gross Value Added (GVA) (bruttoværditilvækst (BVT)) in 2024 (dst, 2024), questions arise about the fairness and efficiency of such arrangements. The concentration of agricultural subsidies among a relatively small population group, while the broader population bears the costs of both environmental degradation and compensation payments, raises fundamental questions about democratic representation and future resource allocation.

While farmer compensation may generate immediate environmental improvements, the long-term costs of maintaining these systems may exceed their benefits, particularly when alternative approaches such as regulation or market-based mechanisms might achieve similar outcomes. Using compensation or subsidy payments also uses public resources that could otherwise fund other environmental or social priorities.

Society faces a paradox: it asks farmers to stop harming the environment and commons but society is expected to pay for their economic losses from doing so. This raises questions about property rights and who pays for environmental damage.

Global perspectives

Another paradox lies in the increasing global demand for agricultural products, projected to support a population of approximately 10.3 billion by 2080 (UN, n.d.), while climate change simultaneously threatens agricultural output in various regions. For instance, Southern European wheat yields could decline by 49%, and Northern Europe may experience adverse effects from altered rainfall patterns (European Commission, 2020).

Monitoring total Danish food production in the context of agreement implementation is, in this global context, important because a reduction in Danish food output may not diminish global food demand. Decreased Danish emissions do not correspond to emission reductions in other food-producing nations (Schmidt et al., 2015). In a global context, ensuring high yields on remaining agricultural land might be crucial, why other policy instruments, as consumption regulation, might be ensure a shift the the agricultural practices.

9.2 The contribution of this thesis

This section introduces this thesis' contribution to existing literature on the subject, by relating its results to existing knowledge identified in the state of the art review.

The findings of the thesis contribute with additional knowledge as focus is on openings and closures of participation in the agricultural sector. These results can help policy makers understand what closures have to be addressed in order to enhance participation

of farmers. The results presented in this thesis can also be used in other planning processes where participation is relevant.

The results in this thesis show that there are multiple important factors for farmers when they consider participating or not and in many cases this might be context specific for the farmer. This finding aligns with other studies, identified in the state of art in Section 2.2, that also identifies farm type and farm size being important factors for participation in voluntary environmental agreements (Westerink et al., 2024, Wittstock et al., 2022 and Hasler et al., 2022). This is not considered a contribution to existing literature, but confirms and aligns with previous studies, strengthening the results.

One important factor identified in this thesis is the financial aspect of participating in the Green Tripartite for farmers. This is due to the potential consequences of the agreement, which may lead to some farms being forced to close. This highlights what is at stake for farmers. These findings align with studies such as Hasler et al., 2019, Dessart et al., 2019, Massfeller et al., 2022 and Czajkowski et al., 2021, which similarly emphasise the importance of financial considerations in farmers' participation.

The result of farmers prioritising land exchange instead of compensation for lost yield or becoming involved in subsidy schemes is a contribution to existing knowledge, as it was not identified in the state of the art review (section 2.2). This is a contribution to what farmers prefer when participating in nature and climate schemes.

The results also align with Geranmayeh et al., 2024, where coordination of multiple landowners when creating wetlands can create more lengthy and bureaucratic heavy projects. This was especially relevant when discussing previous experiences with nature and climate initiatives with the interviewees. This highlights that this thesis contributes with closure identification of such bottlenecks that should be removed to create better projects faster. In addition, the results show the importance of communication with the involved landowners and farmers from an early stage, and the importance of incorporating farm advisors in the process, also aligning with existing literature.

Both carrots and sticks are included with the introduction of the Green Tripartite Agreement. The results show that some farmers feel this approach leans more towards coercion voluntarism than voluntarism (Farmer C, 2025 and Farmer F, 2025). This is what makes this agreement different than before, and why some hope that it will succeed this time. This perspective aligns with Jacobsen et al., 2017, that state that mandatory measurements will ensure that the goals will be reached. This view is also echoed by landowners, who acknowledge that if they do not participate voluntarily, they will be subject to nitrogen regulations in order to meet the goals.

No findings were identified that contradict existing results in literature and does not challenge current understanding of farmer dynamics and motivation.

9.3 Research design implications

This section will discuss the use of phenomenological theory of science and the validity and reliability of the research design and collected data.

The phenomenological approach to the thesis has shaped the use of theory and methods and has consequently shaped the results. The phenomenological approach of this study acknowledges the farmers perception, and the social dynamics between actors, however if the focus had been different, there might have been a need for different theories and methods, changing the results of the study. This highlights how theoretical orientation not only informs the choice of methods but also frames the very way in which phenomena are perceived and understood. The use of e.g. critical realism would have changed the ontology and epistemology of the study to focus on power imbalance and power relations between actors shifting the focus of the study (Brøns Kringelum & Brix, 2021). Theories relevant for this thesis would divert from focusing on farmers to widen the scope focusing on power relation supported by e.g. the Policy Arrangement Approach Arts and Leroy, 2006 or other relevant theories used in relation to power dynamics. The epistemology of critical realism also determines the use of data collection methods acknowledging a mix-methods approach allowing for conduction of interviews as well. However, the interviewees and questions in the interview guide would differ.

Validity

The interview guides were designed using the conceptual framework, as it provides the lens of the thesis and the factors to investigate in relation to answering the research question, as to strengthen the internal validity by aligning the research objectives and the data collection process. It was ensured that the questions primarily focused on operationalising the concept of farmer participation within the context of the Green Tripartite. While the majority of questions directly addressed this concept, broader questions were also included, aiming at understanding the interviewees' general perspectives and perceptions of the agreement. These supplementary questions provide valuable context and nuance, even if they do not directly measure participation.

In terms of representativeness and generalisability, the external validity of the findings indicates that, although this thesis is a case study focused on the Local Green Tripartite Limfjorden with area-specific biophysical conditions, the results are argued to be relevant to all local green tripartites, due to the shared national policy (Flyvbjerg, 2006).Further, the identified openings and closures are shaped primarily by structural and political settings and secondarily by the individual behaviour of farmers. Farmer behaviour is influenced by local context, personal values and beliefs, but similar dynamics exist nationwide, which reinforces the wider applicability of these findings.

Reliability

Our background in environmental management and sustainability science could potentially have influenced the data collection and affect internal reliability as the farmers' awareness of our academic background might have subtly shaped their responses, perhaps leading them to emphasise aspects they believed would align with our interests or demonstrate greater understanding. While not directly apparent to us, it is possible that a different academic background, such as agricultural studies, could have brought out different responses.

Given the fact that not all factors of the Green Tripartite Agreement are clear yet, repeating this thesis at a later date could result in different conclusions, hence affecting

the external reliability in the thesis. A few months could bring progress in the agreement's implementation, potentially altering the findings. This thesis currently emphasises nitrogen reduction and wetland creation, due to this being the immediate priorities and frequently mentioned challenges by interviewees. This focus reflects the initial stages of the agreement, with forest afforestation, biodiversity and CO_2 initiatives planned for later.

The data was gathered during April 2025, coincidentally after the Local Tripartite Limfjorden held a meeting on Friday, April 4th. The primary focus of this meeting was to clarify the development of conversion plans (Aalborg Kommune, 2025). This affected the external reliability also. If the committee member interviews had taken place before this meeting, their responses might have lacked the clarity they gained afterwards, indicating that the timing of those interviews was advantageous.

Conclusion 10

The Green Tripartite Agreement seeks to improve the ecological state of Danish waters, creating more nature, improving conditions for biodiversity, and to reach Denmark's climate neutrality goal by 2045. In achieving these goals, agricultural land and practices is targeted with a need for changing to a more sustainable path, eventually converting 390,000 ha agricultural land to nature and relocating harmful practices away from sensible areas. Converting private land at this scale, necessitates farmer participation, however, previous experience with nature promoting initiatives shows that this approach, relying on farmers voluntary participation, is proven ineffective and is progressing too slow. In this context, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question:

How can farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement be enhanced?

The conceptual framework used to answer the research question was the 'Environmental Behaviour of Farmers', which examines three key factors: the willingness and ability of farmers to adapt, and the level of societal support for transitioning to more environmentally sustainable agricultural practices. Additionally, the concepts of 'openings' and 'closures' were applied to explore factors influencing farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement.

Enhancing farmer participation in the Green Tripartite Agreement requires a coordinated, context specific strategy that addresses both the practical and motivational factors influencing farmers' decisions to participate. This thesis demonstrates that no single intervention will be sufficient, rather a combination of targeted actions is necessary to overcome the complex and interrelated closures to participation that have been identified.

The findings show that farmer participation is shaped by their individual context, such as land composition, financial circumstances, and emotional attachment to their land, as well as by broader societal factors, including timely communication and the level of administrative support. While many farmers are willing and able to participate if the process aligns with their interests and offers adequate compensation, uncertainties around regulatory frameworks and economic impacts currently act as closures to participation. The ability to exchange land, in particular, stands out as an opening for participation.

Moreover, the sharing of misinformation and lack of trust in scientific facts and in authorities further diminish willingness to participate, highlighting the need for transparent, early, and respectful communication. The timing of farmer participation also plays a crucial role in how they act.

Based on these insights, four main recommendations to enhance farmer participation emerge:

- Establish clear future premises for participation to reduce uncertainty and enable informed decision-making.
- Remove bureaucratic barriers and simplify rules to facilitate smoother land exchanges and reduce administrative burdens.
- Ensure clear, early, and continuous communication with farmers, addressing both scientific facts and practical concerns, to build trust and counteract misinformation.
- Invest in administrative capacity, including more personnel and resources for the Land Exchange Office in Tønder, to speed up processes and support farmers effectively.

Ultimately, enhancing participation depends on recognising farmers' dual role as both being the reason for environmental challenges affecting the commons and an important actor in achieving the agreement goals. By addressing both practical closures, such as bureaucracy, rigid rules, slow administration, and underlying motivational factors such as, positive experience, securing good corporation with authorities, demolish misinformation, policy makers and planners can create conditions that enhances voluntary participation while ensuring to comply with the Green Tripartite Agreement's goals and securing the shared commons, are achieved.

Lastly, and most importantly, it is crucial to bring plenty of coffee and pastries to dialogue meetings with farmers and landowners in the coming years, creating a welcoming setting for constructive discussions.

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Appendix A

A.1 Interview guides

A.1.1 Committee members

Interviewguide: Medlemmer i Grøn Trepart Limfjorden		
Temaer	**Spørgsmål**	**Noter**
Formål	Få indblik i den Lokale Grønne Trepart Limfjords implementering og håndtering af frivillig deltagelse i aftalen.	
Formaliteter	Kan vi optage mødet?	
Præsentation af landmand / medlem i GT	Vil du kort præsentere dig selv? - Alder, produktionstype (planter/kvæg/svin/øko/konv.), antal hektar, år som landmand, slægtsgård, år i Byrådet/Kommunen, parti. Hvad er din rolle i den lokale Grønne Trepart Limfjorden?	
Implementering som byrådsmedlem	Hvordan er aftalen blevet modtaget i området omkring Limfjorden? I den Lokale Grønne Trepart Limfjorden, hvor er I i processen lige nu? Er der erfaringer fra tidligere eller lignende natur- og klimainitiativer i Limfjordsområdet, hvor landmænds frivillige deltagelse har spillet en rolle? - Hvad lærte I af disse erfaringer, og hvordan påvirker det jeres tilgang til den nuværende implementering?	
Frivillig deltagelse (RQ)	Hvordan vurderer du, at den nuværende struktur og rammer for den Grønne Trepartsaftale understøtter eller potentielt begrænser landmænds motivation for frivilligt at deltage i miljøinitiativer? Hvad er din opfattelse af de frivillige principper i aftalen? - Tror du, at det virker? Hvorfor? - Hvordan vil det påvirke dig? I den lokale implementering, har I nogle strategier for at fremme den frivillige deltagelse i aftalen? Hvilke? - (f.eks. jordfordeling, tilskud) Hvad sker hvis landmænd siger nej? Hvad gør I så? (Strategi)	
Regulering	Hvordan er landmænd ramt af nuværende regulering? - Hvordan spiller det sammen med de kommende reguleringer ifm. trepartsaftalen? (kontroverser/sammenhænge) Hvad tror du, at der vil ske, når der kommer en regulering? Hvad bliver reaktionen?	

	Frivillighed vs. regulering: Hvad er forskellen på det resultat, man får ud af de to tilgange til planlægning: regulering eller frivillighed? - Taber/vinder man noget ved at gøre det ene frem for det andet?	
Personlig deltagelse	Bliver du selv som landmand påvirket af aftalen - og hvordan? Har du tidligere lavet natur- og/eller klimatiltag på dine arealer? - Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke? - Hvad er din erfaring med det?	
Praktisk implementering	Hvad er, efter din mening, de forventede fremtidige udfordringer, landmænd står overfor, når de skal implementere natur- og miljøtiltag under den Grønne Trepartsaftale? Hvordan kunne man forbedre aftalen som ville gøre det lettere eller mere attraktivt for landmænd at deltage? - (Hvilke forbedringsmuligheder er der? Hvad mangler aftalen?) Hvilken form for støtte ville være mest gavnlig for landmænd for at fremme deltagelsen i natur- og miljøtiltag? - (støtte: økonomisk, teknisk, informationsmæssig)	
Individuelle overbevisninger og motivationer (Willingness)	Hvad er din holdning til natur-, klima- og miljøtiltag generelt? Hvad er de vigtigste faktorer, der motiverer dig til at deltage i natur- eller klimatiltag? - (f.eks økonomiske incitamenter (støtte), en følelse af ansvar, selvbestemmelse) Hvordan oplever du, at forskellige aktørers interesser og perspektiver bliver forhandlet og håndteret i den lokale Grønne Trepart Limfjorden? Hvilke alliancer ser du opstå i dette netværk?	
Ability	Hvad kunne lavpraktisk begrænse en landmænd i at omlægge arealer? - (f.eks. lån, størrelse på arealer, lokation, type af jord og vandopland)	
Støtte fra samfundet (Support)	Hvordan kommunikeres aftalen til landmændene? - (Findes der grupper/lokale netværk der formidler aftalen? - Hvilke?) - Hvem snakker du med om grøn trepart? (netværk) Hvordan ser du, at landmænds lokalsamfund spiller ind i deltagelsen af natur eller klimatiltag?	

	Tror du at aftalen kommer i mål med omlægning af 390.000 ha landbrugsjord? - Hvilke faktorer er afgørende for at nå dette mål?	
Nye dynamikker og accept	Hvordan vurderer du, at overgangen fra en primært frivillig tilgang til nu at være underlagt et større politisk fokus vil påvirke deltagelsen og den fremadrettede arealplanlægning? - (Dynamikker ændret?) Hvordan vil du vurdere accepten af regulering nu ift. tidligere? - (Er det mere accepteret nu?)	
Kommunikations-produkt	Hvad kunne I (medlemmer) bruge, der kunne hjælpe den lokale implementering og fremme deltagelse i den Grønne Trepartsaftale?	
Afrunding	Kan vi kontakte dig igen for opfølgende spørgsmål? Tak for din deltagelse.	

Danmarks Naturfredningsforening

Interviewguide: Medlemmer Grøn Trepart Limfjorden - DN		
Temaer	**Spørgsmål**	**Noter**
Formål	At få indblik i Danmarks Naturfredningsforenings perspektiv på implementeringen af den Lokale Grønne Trepart Limfjord og deres erfaringer og ideer til at optimere landmænds frivillige deltagelse i miljøinitiativer.	
Formaliteter	Kan vi optage mødet?	
Præsentation af medlem	Vil du kort præsentere dig selv? - Rolle og antal år i DN Hvad er din rolle i den lokale Grønne Trepart Limfjorden?	
Implementering som medlem af Grøn Trepart Limfjorden	Hvordan er aftalen blevet modtaget i området omkring Limfjorden? Hvordan samarbejder I på tværs af medlemmerne? I den Lokale Grønne Trepart Limfjorden, hvor er I i processen lige nu? Er der erfaringer fra tidligere eller lignende natur- og klimainitiativer i Limfjordsområdet, hvor landmænds frivillige deltagelse har spillet en rolle? - Hvad lærte I af disse erfaringer, og hvordan påvirker det jeres tilgang til den nuværende implementering?	
Frivillig deltagelse (RQ)	Hvordan vurderer du, at den nuværende struktur og rammer for den Grønne Trepartsaftale understøtter eller potentielt begrænser landmænds motivation for frivilligt at deltage i miljøinitiativer? Hvordan forstår du de frivillige principper, der lægges op til i aftalen? - (virker det?) I den lokale implementering, har I nogle strategier for at fremme den frivillige deltagelse i aftalen? Hvilke? - (f.eks. jordfordeling, tilskud) Hvad sker hvis landmænd siger nej? Hvad gør I så? (Strategi)	

Praktisk implementering	Hvad er, efter din mening, de forventede fremtidige udfordringer, landmænd står overfor, når de skal implementere natur- og miljøtiltag under den Grønne Trepartsaftale? Hvordan oplever du, at forskellige aktørers interesser og perspektiver bliver forhandlet og håndteret i den lokale Grønne Trepart Limfjord? Hvilke kompromisser eller alliancer ser du opstå i dette netværk? - (f.eks. landmænds økonomiske incitamenter, miljøorganisationers fokus på biodiversitet, kommunens lokale udviklingsplaner) Hvilke tiltag foreslår DN, at man indfører for at sikre, at aftalens mål bliver realiseret?	
Støtte fra samfundet (Support)	Hvordan kommunikeres aftalen til landmændene? - (Findes der grupper/lokale netværk der formidler aftalen? - Hvilke?) Hvordan ser du, at landmænds lokalsamfund spiller ind i deltagelsen af natur eller klimatiltag? Tror du at aftalen kommer i mål med omlægning af 390.000 ha landbrugsjord? - Hvilke faktorer er afgørende for at nå dette mål?	
Kommunikations-produkt	Hvad kunne I (medlemmer) bruge, der kunne hjælpe den lokale implementering og fremme deltagelse i den Grønne Trepartsaftale?	
Afrunding	Kan vi kontakte dig igen for opfølgende spørgsmål? Tak for din deltagelse.	

A.1.2 Farmers

Interviewguide: Lokale landmænd i Limfjordsområdet		
Temaer	**Spørgsmål**	**Noter**
Formål	Få indblik i landmandens perspektiver om den Grønne Trepartsaftale og forstå villigheden til at deltage i aftalen	
Formaliteter	Du vil være anonym i hele vores rapport. Kan vi optage mødet?	
Præsentation af landmand	Vil du kort præsentere dig selv? - Alder, produktionstype (planter/kvæg/svin/øko/konv.), antal hektar, år som landmand, slægtsgård	
Erfaring med tidligere tiltag	Har du tidligere lavet natur- og/eller klimatiltag på dine arealer? - Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke? Hvad er din erfaring med det?	
Grøn Trepart struktur	Hvordan forstår du den Grønne Trepartsaftale? Bliver du påvirket af GT? Hvordan? Hvad tænker du, når de fremlægger aftalen som frivillig? Vil du gå frivilligt med i aftalen? Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke? - Hvad kunne begrænse din deltagelse? Hvis dine arealer bliver udpeget, hvordan vil du reagere?	
Regulering	Hvordan er du ramt af nuværende regulering? Hvad tror du, at der vil ske, når der kommer en regulering? Hvad bliver din reaktion hvis du får regulering? Frivillighed vs. regulering: Hvad er forskellen på det resultat, man får ud af de to tilgange til planlægning: regulering eller frivillighed? - Taber/vinder man noget ved at gøre det ene frem for det andet? Hvordan vil du vurdere accepten af regulering nu ift. tidligere? - (Er det mere accepteret nu?)	

Praktisk implementering som landmand	Hvad er, efter din mening, de største udfordringer, landmænd står overfor, når de skal implementere natur- og miljøtiltag under den Grønne Trepartsaftale? Hvordan kunne aftalen forbedres, som ville gøre det lettere eller mere attraktivt for landmænd at deltage? - (Hvilke forbedringsmuligheder er der? Hvad mangler aftalen?) - Hvad er nødvendigt at have i aftalen for, at det kan fungere? Hvilken form for støtte ville være mest gavnlig for landmænd for at øge deltagelsen i natur- og miljøtiltag? - (f.eks. økonomisk, teknisk, informationsmæssig)	
Individuelle overbevisninger og motivationer (Willingness)	Hvad er din holdning til natur-, klima- og miljøtiltag generelt? Hvad er de vigtigste faktorer, der motiverer dig til at deltage i natur- eller klimatiltag? - (f.eks. økonomiske incitamenter/støtte, en følelse af ansvar, selvbestemmelse, jordomfordeling, andet)	
Ability	Har du noget som lavpraktisk ville begrænse dig i at omlægge nogle arealer? - (f.eks. økonomi, viden, tid og ansatte, størrelse på arealer, lokation, type af jord og vandopland)	
Støtte fra samfundet og netværk	Oplever du, at der er kommet mere fokus på landbruget ift. natur- og klimabevidst produktion? - Hvordan påvirker det dig/din produktion? Hvordan kommunikeres aftalen til jer landmænd? - (Findes der grupper/lokale netværk der formidler aftalen? - Hvilke?) - Hvem snakker du med om grøn trepart? Er du i dialog med dine rådgivere om, hvordan du vil blive påvirket? - (f.eks. reguleringer, omlægning af jorder, økonomi) Hvordan er dit forhold til dit lokalsamfund og andre landmænd i området? - Hvilken rolle spiller det for din deltagelse i GT? Tror du at aftalen kommer i mål med omlægning af 390.000 ha landbrugsjord? - Hvilke faktorer er afgørende for at nå dette mål?	
Kommunikations-produkt	Hvad kunne I (landmænd) bruge, der kunne hjælpe den lokale implementering og fremme deltagelse i den Grønne Trepartsaftale?	
Afrunding	Kan vi kontakte dig igen for opfølgende spørgsmål? Tak for din deltagelse.	

A.1.3 Limfjordsrådet's Secretariat

Interviewguide: Limfjordssekretariatet		
Temaer	**Spørgsmål**	**Noter**
Formål	Få indblik i den Lokale Grønne Trepart Limfjords implementering og håndtering af frivillig deltagelse i aftalen.	
Formaliteter	Kan vi optage mødet?	
Præsentation af interviewperson	Vil du kort præsentere dig selv? - Navn, antal år ved Limfjordsrådet, rolle ved Limfjordssekretariatet, o.lign.	
Limfjords-sekretariatet	Vil du kort præsentere Limfjordssekretariatets funktion? Hvad er Limfjordsrådets rolle uden for Grøn Trepart? Hvilken rolle spiller du/Limfjordssekretariatet i den Lokale Grønne Trepart Limfjorden?	
Status	Hvordan er aftalen blevet modtaget af lodsejere i området omkring Limfjorden? I den Lokale Grønne Trepart Limfjorden, hvor er I i processen lige nu?	
Erfaring	Er der erfaringer fra tidligere eller lignende natur- og klimainitiativer i Limfjordsområdet, hvor landmænds frivillige deltagelse har spillet en rolle? - Hvad lærte I af disse erfaringer, og hvordan påvirker det jeres tilgang til den nuværende implementering? - Hvis der har været udfordringer/konflikter mellem lodsejere og natur/klimaprojekter, hvilke værktøjer brugte I til at håndtere dem? Evt. opfølgende: (Hvilke udfordringer ser du, at der kan opstå i forbindelse med implementeringen af den Grønne Trepartsaftale?) Når vi snakker med landmænd, er der et stort fokus på jordfordeling, hvad er jeres erfaringer med jordfordeling?	
Frivillig deltagelse	Hvad er din opfattelse af de frivillige principper i aftalen? - Tror du, at det virker? Hvorfor? I den lokale implementering, har I nogle strategier for at fremme den frivillige deltagelse i aftalen? Hvilke? - (f.eks. jordomfordeling, tilskud)	

	Hvad sker hvis landmænd/lodsejere siger nej? Hvad gør I så? (Strategi)	
Regulering	Hvad tror du, at der vil ske, når der kommer en regulering? Hvad bliver reaktionen? Hvordan vil du vurdere accepten af regulering nu ift. tidligere? - (Er det mere accepteret nu?) Frivillighed vs. regulering: Hvad er forskellen på det resultat, man får ud af de to tilgange til planlægning: regulering eller frivillighed? - Taber/vinder man noget ved at gøre det ene frem for det andet?	
Praktisk implementering	Hvad er, efter din mening, de forventede fremtidige udfordringer, landmænd står overfor, når de skal implementere natur- og miljøtiltag under den Grønne Trepartsaftale? Hvordan kunne man optimere implementeringen af aftalen, som ville gøre det attraktivt for landmænd at deltage? - (Hvilke forbedringsmuligheder er der? Hvad mangler aftalen?) - Hvad er nødvendigt at have i aftalen for at det kan fungere? Hvilken form for støtte ville være mest gavnlig for landmænd for at fremme deltagelsen i natur- og miljøtiltag? - (f.eks. økonomisk, teknisk, informationsmæssig)	
Alliancer / netværk	Hvilke dynamikker mellem aktører (såsom landmænd, landbrugsforeninger, politikere, interesseorganisationer mm.) var der før den Grønne Trepartsaftale blev implementeret? - Er der sket et skifte i disse dynamikker efter introduktionen af den Grønne Trepartsaftale? Hvordan oplever du, at forskellige aktørers interesser og perspektiver bliver forhandlet og håndteret i den lokale Grønne Trepart Limfjorden? Hvilke alliancer ser du opstå i dette netværk?	
Kommunikation og samfund	Hvordan kommunikeres aftalen til landmændene? - (Findes der grupper/lokale netværk der formidler aftalen? - Hvilke?) Hvordan ser du, at landmænds lokalsamfund spiller ind i deltagelsen af natur eller klimatiltag? Tror du at aftalen kommer i mål med omlægning af 390.000 ha landbrugsjord? - Hvilke faktorer er afgørende for at nå dette mål?	

Nye dynamikker og accept	Hvordan vurderer du, at overgangen fra en primært frivillig tilgang til nu at være underlagt et større politisk fokus vil påvirke deltagelsen og den fremadrettede arealplanlægning? - (Dynamikker ændret?)	
Kommunikations-produkt	Hvad kunne I (medlemmer eller lodsejere) bruge, der kunne hjælpe den lokale implementering og fremme deltagelse i den Grønne Trepartsaftale?	
Afrunding	Kan vi kontakte dig igen for opfølgende spørgsmål? Tak for din deltagelse.	

A.1.4 Hjørring Municipality

Interviewguide: Hjørring Kommune - 20. Februar 2025		
Tema	**Spørgsmål**	**Noter**
Introduktion og præsentation af deltagere	Speciale om Grøn Trepart Vi er i den undersøgende fase og har endnu ikke lagt os fast på en retning/problematik.	
Formaliteter	Kan vi optage mødet?	
Grøn Trepart	Hvad tænker du/I overordnet om aftalen? Er der nogle svagheder eller udfordringer ift. aftalen? (f.eks. i implementering, omfang, kompleksitet)	
Kommunens rolle	Hvad er din/jeres rolle ift. den grønne trepart? - Indflydelse - Opgaver Hvilke udfordringer ser I at kommunen har/får ift. aftalen? Hvilke værktøjer har I til rådighed?	
Erfaringer og planer	Med de erfaringer, I har fået fra tidligere planer/projekter (f.eks. Vandrammeplaner) - hvad tager I så med videre i den her omgang? - Hvad var tidsrammen for tidligere planer og hvordan er de sammenlignet med den her? Hvordan overlapper aftalen med kommunernes eksisterende klima/miljøplaner?	
Inddragelse af lokale	Har der været en høringsperiode ifm. udgivelsen af den grønne trepartsaftale? - Omlægningsplanerne Hvordan ser I, at arealomlægningsplanerne vil påvirke ydre lokalområder i Hjørring Kommune? Forventer I lokal opbakning eller modstand? Og har I en strategi for hvordan Kommunen skal facilitere lokal forankring?	

Planen fremover	Helt lavpraktisk, hvad er så de forskellige skridt nu og fremover?	
Afrunding	Kender du andre, vi bør snakke med? Kan vi kontakte dig igen for opfølgende spørgsmål? Tak for din deltagelse.	

A.1.5 Agillix

Interviewguide: Agillix - 20. Februar 2025		
Tema	**Spørgsmål**	**Noter**
Introduktion og præsentation af deltagere	Speciale om Grøn Trepart Vi er i den undersøgende fase og har endnu ikke lagt os fast på en retning/problematik.	
Formaliteter	Kan vi optage mødet?	
Grøn Trepart	Hvad tænker du overordnet om aftalen? Er der nogle svagheder eller udfordringer ift. aftalen? - Implementering - Omfang - Kompleksitet	
Agillixs rolle	Hvad er din/jeres rolle ift. den grønne trepart? - Indflydelse - Opgaver	
Erfaringer og planer	Kan du kommentere på, hvordan den grønne trepartsaftale adskiller sig fra projekter, I faciliterer allerede? Hvordan overlapper aftalen med eksisterende klima/miljøplaner/tilskudsordinger? - EU tilskud mm.	
Inddragelse af lokale	Hvilke udfordringer ser I at landmænd har/får ift. aftalen? Hvordan ser du, at arealomlægningsplanerne vil påvirke ydre lokalområder? Forventer du lokal opbakning eller modstand? Hvordan er modtagelsen af aftalen i landbrugserhvervet?	
Afrunding	Kender du andre vi bør snakke med? Kan vi kontakte dig igen for opfølgende spørgsmål? Tak for din deltagelse.	