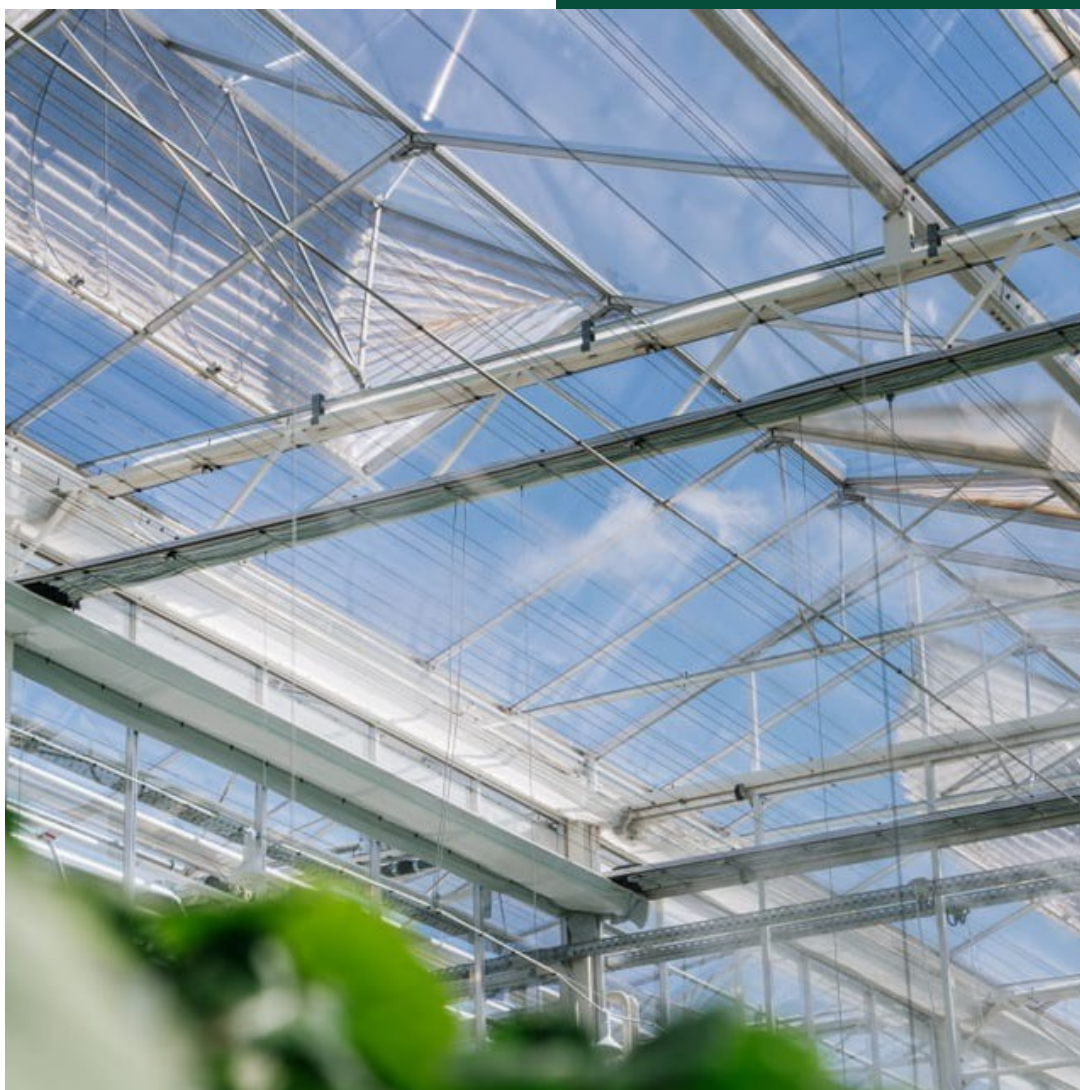


Climate, Environment, and Circularity policy





1.0 Who We Are

Coöperatie Hoogstraten is at the heart of greenhouse horticulture. Every day, growers, employees, and partners work together to grow and market healthy fruits and vegetables. This activity is inextricably linked to climate, energy, and raw materials, and the way we manage these resources says something about who we are.

This policy articulates what has long been part of our practice: using energy and raw materials responsibly, investing in resilience, and collaborating to create an agricultural system that is sustainable for future generations. Not as a reaction to external pressure, but because it aligns with the values of the cooperative and the people who are part of it.

The specific objectives and progress are reported annually in the sustainability report. This policy document sets the direction.

Sustainability is at the core, not an afterthought

Sustainability is one of the five strategic priorities of Coöperatie Hoogstraten, alongside knowledge, digitization, performance, and growth. It is not a separate initiative—it is embedded in the annual project cycle approved by the Board of Directors and implemented by the Management Team.

2.0 Who does this apply to?

This policy applies to all activities under the Cooperative's operational control: the central office in Hoogstraten and the two supply locations. Where relevant, indirect impacts through the value chain are also taken into account, particularly those of the affiliated producers.

Producers occupy a special position in this context. As shareholders, suppliers, and customers all at once, they are not external parties—they are co-owners of the future that this policy aims to shape. This calls for an approach that supports and facilitates, rather than controls or sanctions.

The priorities in this policy are based on a dual materiality analysis (DMA), a structured study that mapped out both the Cooperative's impact on the climate and the environment and the impact of the climate and the environment on the Cooperative. That analysis was conducted in 2024 and endorsed by the Board of Directors.

3.0 Four Principles as a Compass

Four principles form the backbone of this policy. They serve as a touchstone for every decision regarding climate, the environment, and circularity—whether large or small.

- **Science-based.** The approach is grounded in the best available climate science. Emissions reduction targets are aligned with the 1.5°C pathway and validated by the **Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi)**—an internationally recognized framework that determines whether climate targets are truly in line with the Paris Agreement and are not merely marketing promises.
- **Transparent and verifiable.** We measure what we want to improve. Annual reporting in accordance with the **GHG Protocol**—the international standard for measuring greenhouse gas emissions—and external verification ensure that our figures are accurate and verifiable.
- **Ambitious yet realistic.** High ambitions, but with both feet firmly on the ground. Taking into account technological availability, the economic realities of our producers, and the pace at which sectors can evolve.
- **Circular and future-proof.** Maximizing the reuse of raw materials, minimizing waste, and preserving the value of each product for as long as possible. Circularity is not an endpoint—it is a continuous process of improvement.



4.0 Climate – Our Approach

Climate change is no distant concern for greenhouse horticulture. More extreme weather conditions, rising energy prices, and shifting growing seasons strike at the heart of what growers do every day. The Cooperative is committed to tackling this on two fronts simultaneously: reducing its own emissions and making the production community more resilient to what is already an inevitable part of the system.

4.1 Reducing Emissions

Heating greenhouses, cooling produce, and logistics are the largest sources of greenhouse gases in the value chain. With a **GHG inventory**—a detailed measurement of all emissions in accordance with the GHG Protocol, with primary data coverage of more than 70% of total emissions—the Cooperative has an honest and solid starting point.

The net-zero target has been submitted to SBTi for validation. The reduction strategy rests on four pillars:

- **Energy and processes.** Electrification of its own operations, transition to 100% renewable electricity, and structural energy efficiency programs.
- **Supply chain reduction.** The Cooperative accurately maps emissions that do not originate from its own buildings or machinery but rather from growers, suppliers, and transportation—known as “**Scope 3**” in industry jargon—using kg-data and grower-specific emission factors. This enables targeted actions to be supported where they truly make a difference.
- **Innovation and technology.** Through the Harvestis research center, the Cooperative makes ongoing investments in more climate-friendly cultivation techniques and low-emission solutions.
- **Sustainable Energy.** District heating networks, collective use of CHP capacity, and joint investments in renewable energy are being actively explored—both for the Cooperative’s own operations and for services provided to producers.

The phase-out of fossil fuels is a delicate transition challenge—especially for the CHP plants at growers’ sites that were originally invested in at the government’s encouragement. The Cooperative therefore takes an active role in the sectoral policy debate: not to delay the transition, but to ensure it proceeds fairly and realistically.

4.2 Becoming More Resilient

Some aspects of climate change are already underway, regardless of what we do. The Cooperative is preparing its production community for this through a targeted **adaptation strategy**—based on scenario analysis of the most relevant physical risks to greenhouse horticulture:

- **Water security.** Investing in larger water buffers, water treatment technology, and a transition to water-efficient cultivation systems.
- **Infrastructural resilience.** Strengthening buffer capacity and drainage at our own locations and at growers’ sites.
- **Cultivation innovations.** Through Harvestis, research into climate-resilient varieties and cultivation techniques that increase resilience without the need for additional crop protection.

The Climate Transition Plan—adopted in 2025 and reviewed every two years—translates this approach into concrete actions, responsibilities, and a financial framework.

5.0 Circularity: Less Waste, More Value

As an auction house, Coöperatie Hoogstraten has a direct influence on the material flows associated with the production and packaging of fresh fruits and vegetables. This position serves as a lever: by using raw materials and packaging more intelligently, the Cooperative reduces its ecological footprint while simultaneously creating value for both producers and buyers.

5.1 Packaging

The Cooperative takes a leading role in determining the packaging choices for the products traded through it. The goal is clear: less material, better choices, more reuse.

In doing so, the Cooperative is actively anticipating the tightening of European packaging regulations—not as a compliance exercise, but because it is the logical direction to take.

- Reducing the total packaging volume.
- Innovation toward reusable packaging, FSC-certified cardboard, and cardboard punnets as alternatives to plastic.
- Actively guiding producers and customers through the transition to more sustainable packaging solutions.

5.2 Maximizing the use of food

As a market facilitator, the Cooperative has direct influence over the food value that its producers create every day. The ambition is twofold: to prevent surpluses by better aligning supply and demand, and to keep any surplus that does occur as high as possible in the value cascade—preferably as a full-fledged food product.

- **Value retention cascade.** Lower-quality products are repurposed through alternative channels: from jam and industrial processing to donations to food banks.
- **Innovation in shelf life.** Pilot projects—including ones involving strawberries—are exploring how shelf life can be extended without compromising quality.
- **Long-term contracts.** Working with long-term agreements reduces uncertainty in supply and demand and limits the risk of surpluses at the beginning of the chain.

5.3 Substrate and growing materials

For producers, substrate represents a significant raw material flow. The Cooperative supports its producers in managing substrate and other growing materials carefully and, where possible, in a circular manner—with a focus on what is available and where improvements can be made.

6.0 Water and Biodiversity

The 2024 dual materiality analysis did not identify water and biodiversity as priority themes for the Cooperative. Nevertheless, these issues are being monitored; a sector that depends on pollinators, healthy soils, and a functioning water system does not need to be reminded of this.

With regard to water, the Cooperative's own site already features limited consumption and maximum rainwater harvesting. At producers' sites, the Cooperative monitors water consumption and supports further reduction through research and innovation. For new projects, the impact on biodiversity is monitored and minimized where possible, and partnerships are sought regarding landscape management, soil health, and pollinators.

The Cooperative reserves the right to reassess water and biodiversity in a subsequent round of analysis, in light of evolving insights and stakeholder expectations.

7. Collaboration Along the Supply Chain

The greatest environmental impact does not occur solely within the Cooperative's own walls, but across the broader value chain. Collaboration within the value chain is therefore not a side issue: it is where real change is made.

- **With producers:** collaboration on emissions reduction, energy transition, water security, and innovation in cultivation techniques. Knowledge sharing through the Harvestis research center and the Hoogstraten Learning Fields are the most concrete examples of this.
- **With suppliers:** preference is given to partners who actively support the Cooperative's sustainability goals—in terms of packaging materials, growing media, and other inputs.
- **With customers:** coordination on packaging innovation, maximizing food value creation, and transparent communication about the sustainability performance of the products.

Supply chain collaboration only works if it is transparent about boundaries and responsibilities. The Cooperative does not impose unilateral burdens on its producers—it facilitates, supports, and coordinates from its central position in the supply chain.



8. Governance and Accountability

Who is responsible for what

Board of Directors — ultimate responsibility and strategic approval
Management Team — operational management and annual progress reporting
ESG Core Group — shared ownership, coordination, and data collection

Sustainability Manager — oversight of compliance, complaint follow-up, and training programs
All employees and producers — compliance in daily practice

Implementation takes place through the annual strategic project cycle. Sustainability projects are included alongside the other four strategic priorities, not subordinate to them. Progress is reported publicly and verified externally on an annual basis. This policy is reviewed every two years, or sooner if significant changes in the organization or the regulatory framework warrant it.

9. What Determines the Pace

This policy was established based on the best available insights as of 2025. At the same time, the Cooperative is aware that a number of factors help determine the pace and feasibility of the transition—factors that are beyond its direct control, but which it does not passively await.

- **Technological availability.** The energy transition in greenhouse horticulture stands or falls with the speed at which alternatives to fossil fuels—geothermal energy, green hydrogen, and electrification—become available and affordable.
- **Regulatory framework.** Changing legislation regarding nitrogen, CO₂ pricing, and packaging influences the strategic choices of the Cooperative and its producers. The Cooperative actively monitors these developments and makes its voice heard in the policy debate.
- **Innovation and subsidy framework.** A supportive framework for investments in sustainable technology and research is a prerequisite for an ambitious and feasible transition.
- **Market and consumer behavior.** Evolving customer preferences and retail requirements help drive the urgency and direction of strategic choices. The Cooperative prefers to anticipate rather than react.

In the event of significant changes to these preconditions, the Cooperative will reassess its policies and approach. Flexibility is not a weakness, but a prerequisite for remaining relevant and ambitious in the long term.



Our Commitment

Coöperatie Hoogstraten is actively embracing its climate and environmental responsibilities—not because it has to, but because it aligns with who it is and with what its producers and employees do every day. This policy is a first formal step toward making visible a commitment that has been in place for much longer. We're doing this together, step by step, with both feet firmly on the ground.

