

Request for advice

In a letter dated January 26, 2017, ref DGAN-DAD / 17008625, the State Secretary for Economic Affairs requested the Health Council to advise on health risks associated with livestock farms. In English, this request for advice reads as follows (translation by the Health Council of the Netherlands):

Dear Mr van Gool,

The Health Council of the Netherlands gave advice in 2012 on the issue of health risks associated with living near livestock farms. The conclusion of the Council was that the available knowledge was too narrow to develop a single quantitative framework for assessing which risk levels for local residents are the permissible maximums. Neither was it possible to determine the minimum distances between livestock farms and residential areas from a health science perspective. In order to reduce these gaps in our knowledge, the then Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) and the State Secretary for Economic Affairs (EZ) commissioned additional research into the health effects of livestock farms, known as the VGO study (Livestock Farming and Risks for Local Residents). A number of other relevant research reports have also appeared since 2012.

The majority of the results of the VGO study have also been made available now. In line with undertakings given to the Dutch Parliament, I am hereby asking you – also on behalf of the minister of VWS and the State Secretary for Infrastructure and the Environment (IenM) – to update your advice from 2012 in the light of this new knowledge. I would like to ask you to specify what insights are now generally accepted scientifically and for which risks it is more a question of indications.

A second question concerns secondary particulate matter resulting from emissions of ammonia. What is known about the health risks of exposure, about livestock farming as a source of particulate matter and about risk reduction measures? Is follow-up research in this field sensible and if so, what research would be recommended? When answering this question, I would like to ask you to link in to the request for advice entitled “Future air quality policy” (IenM/BSK-2016/88710), which the Health Council is already discussing.

A third question covers other health aspects that could possibly be related to particulate matter from livestock farming that were not investigated in the VGO study, namely cardiovascular disease and lung cancer. What is known about these health risks in the vicinity of livestock farms? Is follow-up research in this field sensible and if so, what research would be recommended?

Fourthly, in its recommendations in 2012, the Health Council proposed an advisory threshold value for exposure of the population at large to endotoxins. Research that can be used as the basis for developing an assessment framework for endotoxins will continue for at least another year. The State Secretary for IenM will also ask you for advice about that framework. I would like to ask you to take this into account already.

I look forward to receiving your advice before the end of 2017.

Yours sincerely,
(signed)

Martijn van Dam
State Secretary for Economic Affairs