

Field tour May 29

5. Successfully innovating food production while coping with bureaucracy



In this excursion we will visit two farms in the central part of the Netherlands. Two very different farms with different experiences and challenges. The first is a biodynamic family farm in the Betuwe, the region situated between the rivers Waal and Rhine, on fertile clay soils. The second farm lies in the province Noord-Brabant, on very sandy soils. This is in fact a cooperative farm, with currently 140 members, producing meat, vegetables and fruits. This is a completely different and new concept in farming. Both enterprises have in common that in their development they are frequently facing bureaucratic regulations obstructing their plans. They have become experts in searching for solutions often with appealing the intentions of the laws and regulations, rather than its written words.

Deeli Fruits & Honey

Deeli Fruits & Honey started eleven years ago. *Size:* 4 ha own land at the farmstead, 14 ha of rented land (2 ha grassland, 1 ha orchard and 11 ha of cropland). *Soil:* fertile river clay soils.

Location: Ophemert, 60 km west of Nijmegen.

Farmers: **Roeland and Ingrid van Dee.**

General: A biodynamic (bd) farm with orchard, vineyard, berries, vegetable garden, cattle and chickens (crossbred), a few pigs and bee hives, crop production and a farm shop.

The farm is surrounded by a huge hawthorn hedge, planted at the same time as the fruit trees, at the very start of Deeli Fruits. Their initial aim was to plant a variety of trees, shrubs and herbs in order to provide their bees with season round pollen and nectar. From there on the farm developed to become an economically sound farm which offers their animals the possibility to express their natural behaviour. Female chickens are kept as layers, male chickens are not killed but grow up outside and are slaughtered for meat. Deeli Farm is aiming for closed cycles. Only processed products leave the farm, mainly via the farm shop.

Integration: Due to the diversity of plants the honeybees have enough food. The chickens have all year round free access to the vineyard, orchard and berry fields where they find part of their daily diet. Trees and shrubs not only provide food, but also provide protection against predators. Strips with herbs in the vineyard reduce pests and diseases and provide the chickens with feed. Cattle graze in the orchard. Feed for cattle and chickens is produced on rented arable land, all manure is used on their fields. By-products are used to feed the animals, including a few pigs. There is no agroforestry in the (rented) crop fields.

Benefits: The high rate of self-sufficiency in inputs (feed, manure) reduces the risk of diseases imported from outside the farm. Free ranging of the chickens reduces both feed and veterinary costs. During the eleven years no antibiotics have been used. Products are processed in order to add value. Fruit and berries in jams, ice-cream, juices and of course honey. Honey is processed. Animals are slaughtered and their meat and all other products sold in the farm shop to regular customers and tourists. Some products find their way to bio-shops and restaurants. Exchange of farm products with other farm producers (e.g. eggs – milk products) takes place to offer clients a greater variety of products in the farm shop.

Contribution: A farm with a key role for trees and shrubs, with a cyclic character from which only processed products leave the farm. A continuous learning process in which students are involved to study and search for new opportunities to integrate trees, shrubs and chicken raising.

Must see: A farm with a key role of trees and shrubs in the production of fruits and berries and the integration of livestock (chickens, cattle and pigs) in the farm system. A special role of trees and shrubs in allowing chickens the possibility to express their natural behaviour while being kept to produce meat and eggs.

Herenboeren Wilhelminapark

Herenboeren ('Gentleman farmers') is a new concept in farming. It is in essence a group of people (cooperative) that put money together to buy land, equipment etc. and to pay a full-time farmer to produce their food. The main aim: to get healthy food of known origin, produced in a sustainable way, with respect for nature. Herenboeren are consumers and producers at the same time. What and how their farm produces is decided by the members of the cooperative. **Herenboeren Wilhelminapark** is the most advanced Herenboeren farm, with currently 140 members. The farm is 20 ha of which six ha vegetables and fruits, the remaining for livestock (beef cattle, pigs and chickens). Herenboeren is a recent, very innovative approach in food production. The history of Herenboeren is very instructive on the aspect how to deal with law, regulations and on creative finance.