

Field tour May 29

6. Transforming conventional dairy farms into agroforestry farms



In the western part of Noord Brabant, the province renowned for its intensive bio industry, two conventional dairy farms have been transformed into farms in which trees and shrubs play a major role. However, the visitors will hear two completely different scenarios.

De Regte Heijden

De Regte Heijden shows her transition into agroforestry, started since two years. 120 dairy cattle, 80 ha pasture land. Location: Riel, 85 km west of Nijmegen.

Farmers: **Willem and Henriëtte van Roessel.**

General: A large conventional dairy farm with formerly 200 dairy cows, existing already for several generations, is transformed into an agroforestry farm. The farmers sold 80 dairy cows including the milk quota and started integrating trees, poultry, recreation and milk-processing in their farm system.

Integration: Fruit and walnut trees (600 altogether) have been planted in rows in the grass clover pastures. In the future the trees will provide shade to their dairy cows and will generate additional income. A one ha wood pasture has been established to provide the cows with shelter and forage. Cows do not receive any concentrates. Calves remain up to five months with their mother. Free ranging dual purpose chickens follow the cows in the pasture after

three days feeding among others on fly larvae in the cattle dung. They have a mobile poultry house to lay their eggs and to shelter at night.

Benefits: The integration of various production systems on the farm produces additional benefits. Furthermore products such as meat and milk are processed and sold in the farm shop. Workshops and events are organised and a meeting room is rented. In the future, when the fruit and walnut trees will produce, the sources of income may even be more diverse.

Contribution: It is really unique that a dairy farmer plants trees in his pasture and integrates chickens in the rotational grazing system, and that is exactly what Willem and Henriëtte did. They have protected the trees against damage by their dairy cows. They received subsidies from the regional government to strengthen nature and biodiversity on their farm.

Must see: Very inspiring to visit this large dairy farm where the owners decided to integrate trees and chickens in their farm system and to apply agro-ecological principles. The farm couple has a pronounced opinion about planting trees on their farm. They are both an exception in and an example for the region.

Boshoeve Sprankenhof

Boshoeve Sprankenhof started 15 years ago by Mark and Josè. The size of the farm is three ha. It is located in Udenhout, 70 km west of Nijmegen.

Farmers: Mark Vonk en Josè Vermeer.

General: The conventional dairy farm which Mark and Josè took over from Josè's father has been transformed by them into an organic fruit garden with a variety of berries integrated with vegetables, a greenhouse and chickens. All products are sold to clients on the farm.

Integration: The three ha of integrated fruit and vegetable farming is realised in six steps over a period of 15 years. Berries have been planted in rows forming small blocks. Depending of the type of fruit either vegetables or a grass-clover mixture is grown in between the rows. About 60 hens are 'travelling' through the garden in a mobile poultry house. The garden is surrounded by species rich, broad hedgerows. Also a pond has been dug.

Benefits: Small scale fruit and vegetable growing minimise risks caused by pests and diseases and of crop failure caused by adverse weather conditions. The aim of the hedgerows is to attract a wide variety of useful animals, create a micro climate and supply wood for mulch and firewood. The chickens catch insects and manure the orchard rotating in their mobile poultry house. All products are sold in the farm shop and are used in the farm kitchen where clients can cook and eat during workshops, meetings and events.

Contribution: The farm brings food production, nature and farm life close to the urban people. In a number of ways it contributes to the achievement of ecosystem services.

Must see: In 15 years' time the farmers have developed an agroforestry farm, that is welcomed by the urban population and provides in a stable and solid income.