

Field tour May 31

1. Two food forests and a large green chicken farm, all close to Utrecht

On this field tour we pay a visit to two food forests, varying in size and objectives, and a biological poultry farm integrating trees in its production system.

Food forest Makeblijde



Food forest Makeblijde is designed by **Xavier San Giorgi** in 2013 and is also managed by him. Xavier is one of the first designers of food forests in the Netherlands. Makeblijde is an architecture park of 2.8 ha near the city of Utrecht. In this park Xavier is developing a food forest within the existing structure of 30-year-old trees. This forest is composed of six sections, representing as many types of food forests, differing in their management and plant species grown. The different types of food forest are gradually developing. Experimentation and education are the most important goals of Food forest Makeblijde, but there is enough harvest for a nice dinner or a small party. Xavier organizes excursions and courses. The park is always freely accessible.

Food forest Oostwaard



The former farm Oostwaard has, due to the expansion of the city, been transformed into a new farming estate. In 2015 the owners asked Xavier San Giorgi to design a 2.4 ha project on their 8 ha estate. With over 225 varieties the aim is to become a future proof small holding, growing food for the local market, especially restaurants, self-pick and food-box companies. See also [Food forest Oostwaard](#).

Apart from the food forest Xavier designed a fodder hedge for a small herd of cows and Wiltshire Horn sheep and a small forest for the cows to give birth. In the near future, they also will establish a 0.3 ha market garden. In the municipal zoning plan the area has been qualified as agricultural land use with the function of food forest. A novelty in the Netherlands.

De Zandschulp



De Zandschulp is a biological poultry farm with 15.000 layer chickens. Started in 2006. Size: 6 ha of land + buildings. Location: Overberg, 50 km north-west of Nijmegen.

Farmer: Wim Thomassen.

General: De Zandschulp won the award *Best outdoor area for free-range chickens (2015)*. The chickens have free access to an outdoor area of more than 5 ha. Part of the outdoor area has been planted with apple trees, another part with coppice willow. Altogether the chickens should have a 70% tree coverage. Apple production is organic. Wim Thomassen is member of two cooperatives of poultry keepers. One is specialised in marketing eggs (of which Wim is the director), the other one in marketing the meat of hens. Apples are processed into apple juice. The willow branches were to be used for the biomass heater but are currently used for braiding decorative garden separations. De Zandschulp is also a care farm.

Integration: Trees are integral part of the husbandry of organic free-range chickens. Chickens are forest birds and trees allow them to express natural behaviour of seeking shelter, scratching the soil, dust- and sunbathing, looking for insects to eat. Both coppice wood and apple trees add to the income, although in 2017 apple harvest was rather disappointing. Plague reduction, for example apple scab, by the chickens is under investigation.

Benefits: Free ranging chickens need coverage from trees. Eggs and meat from outdoor free-ranging chickens fetch higher prices. Important in this respect is also the membership of two marketing cooperatives for resp. eggs and chicken meat from the hens. The coppice pollard-willow and apple trees not only provide shelter, safety and food to the chickens they also

produce fruit and building material for garden fences. Work in the orchard and willow plantation offers the clients of the care farm a more diversified working programme.

Contribution: The role trees can play in medium scale poultry production. The skills required to manage both chickens and fruit trees on an organic farm.

Must see: A very nice example of combining organic, free-range chickens with trees. A price awarded outdoor area in which trees play a crucial role.