



Finding the perfect match between farmers and new entrants

Even though there is a growing number of young people in the Netherlands wanting to start a career in sustainable agriculture, many Dutch farmers still have trouble finding a successor. Operational Group Land in Connection wanted to bridge this gap, so they experimented with initiatives such as the 'farm-in-farm' where existing farms act as incubators for small start-up agricultural companies.



Project leader Maria van Boxtel, Landgilde, explains "Two thirds of farmers in the Dutch province of Gelderland aged 55 or older have no one to take over their farms when they retire (report by ABN AMRO, Dutch bank). What is more, farms have increased in size and therefore reduced in number which makes it difficult for young people to take the plunge." Rising land prices, especially in sectors such as arable farming and dairy farming, are also an obstacle. But Maria goes on, "At the same time, we have observed that more and more young people from a non-farming background are becoming interested in the organic farming sector."

The Land in Connection Operational Group (OG), which started in 2018, therefore wanted to create opportunities where young people and new entrants can meet the right people and gain the right experiences to begin new or take over existing agricultural companies.



One of the 3 main tools developed by the OG was about matching young farmers to existing farms to identify successors. Together with the young farmers association, the local school for organic farming and an association for new agro-ecological farmers, Land in Connection organised 3 'speed-dating' sessions. At each session, the 80 new and experienced farmers who attended could find out if there was a match to be made and which farms/farmers would best fit their style and talents. The OG has also set up an online match-making tool. "We now match between 10 and 30 organic farms in the Netherlands every year, even after the end of the project in 2020" says Maria.

Another tool was related to funding. The OG explored new types of funding available for new entrants such as crowd-funding. "We supported new entrants in their search for funding. Two farmers were successful in creating their own investment fund and farm-related crowdfunding. We also contributed to the establishment of [Aardpeer](#), a nationwide fund for sustainable farmers." Explains Maria.

The third tool that the OG developed was a concept they call 'farm-in-farm learning companies'. Maria explains "Farm-in-farm is where a farmer provides land, and sometimes building and machinery, to a new agricultural company. The farmer acts as a mentor for the new entrant, and gives them the

opportunity to 'try out' their new activity on his or her land." The OG helped to identify suitable host farms for the start-ups.

This concept came from the coordinator of this Operational Group - De Lingehof, a biodynamic and organic certified arable farm in De Betuwe region. For the past 10 years it has housed a small start-up company, Tuinderij de Stroom, making vegetable boxes and selling vegetables from the De Lingehof farm shop. Andre Jurrius the host farmer: "It was pretty lonely being an organic producer, I was searching for some support. Tuinderij de Stroom were looking for a piece of land and we had enough land available. We support each other, we have coffee and share ideas." They even set up a joint initiative 'adopt an apple tree' where consumers can sponsor an apple tree and harvest the apples for free.

Using the Lingehof experience as an example, the Operational Group has tested 3 more practical examples of these 'farm-in-farms' and is now promoting the concept further in the Landgilde network. Maria explains that there can be 4 different outcomes to this type of exchange: "A) the start-up develops within the 'mother farm' to a more or less independent business acting in symbiosis with the mother farm. B) The start-up grows and steps away from the host farm to continue independently elsewhere. C) The start-up takes over the host farm. D) The start-up doesn't make it, but has been able to test a business model."

Finally, the project has used its experience to produce a set of materials that can be used by others. They have published brochures on access to land and on access to capital and they have produced a [farm succession roadmap](#) which has been translated into English by the [Newbie Horizon 2020](#) project. "The roadmap helps you to identify and maintain important benchmarks. [...]. It is a good instrument between dream and reality, to make all your ideals and dreams into something viable, so that your good intentions lead to something." Says Herman Jan Stroes, entrepreneur and a new entrant in agriculture.



More information

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