

WUR from within: straight, sharp, transparent

No 06

Resource

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The journalism platform for all at Wageningen University & Research

**Big energy cost
rise**
for WUR

**More women
please**
in gallery of men

**Idealis invests
heavily**
in buildings

**Pay the true
price**
in Aurora

Students protest
at Schiphol

**Theatre about values
in science**
aims to hit home | p.26

**Dairy
farming**
Cutting emissions
without pricy tech
p.18

EN



Contents

NO 1 VOLUME 17



12

**Women students
in Kabul**
waiting to graduate



22

Vincent Blok
questions free-market
economics



24

**The burden
of caring for
a loved one**

7 PhD students want
more informal
contact

8 Asparagus residues
put to good use

8 You win some, you
lose some: worrying
at night

14 Carcasses in nature:
death feeds life

28 The side job: fun
being the WURwolf

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background stories at
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FOREWORD

From the heart

We are perfectly capable of debating the climate crisis with one another. One person may make an enthusiastic case for technical solutions while another may see more of a future in behavioural change. WUR experts are equally able to discuss the nitrogen issue, the interests of the private sector or the work pressure problem. We do all that effortlessly using our brains as rational scientists. But are we willing to speak out if we don't feel safe? Or if we see threats to someone's personal safety? In other words, to speak from the heart? One such moment is shown on the cover of this issue. It is from *Mindlab*, a theatre production about 'truth-telling, values and integrity' that is showing on campus from 28 November. We talk to the makers on page 26. On the subject of speaking from the heart, page 12 has a story about the female students at the Afghan agricultural college NAEC in Kabul, which WUR helped set up. They still don't know whether they will ever be able to complete their training, while the men finished long ago. It is not clear who should take responsibility, but hopefully someone will soon let their heart speak and resolve the situation for the women. Nothing is as oppressive and unjust as a weak government or institution.

Willem André
Editor-in-chief





BEATS FOR BREAKFAST

You may have a range of feelings about the start of a new week, but not many people would call Monday morning party time. Yet that was exactly what last Monday was at student society KSV. It was all part of the Surf Your Stress week. The first beats sounded from the speakers at eight in the morning and 175 students started the week with coffee, a croissant and some action on the dance floor. Could this really help their stress? [CJ](#)

Steep rise in WUR energy costs

WUR will have to dig deep to cover costs under the new energy contract with Eneco. While the exact numbers are not yet known, the budget assumes purchase prices will rise by a factor of six, says energy coordinator Wouter van Leeuwen.

That means WUR may end up paying 30 million euros instead of five million. 'That is massive and it will really hurt.' The pain of the energy crisis will be felt throughout the organization. In principle, energy costs are passed on to the science groups based on their consumption. Savings are being implemented too. For example, thermostats have been set one degree lower since the summer. Van Leeuwen: 'We are also working on a change to the comfortable period: during working hours it will be 19 degrees and for

the rest of the time it will be 15 degrees.' An exception applies for the library.

Connecting up faster

Reducing temperatures will save an expected 10 per cent in gas. A number of buildings on campus are also being connected up to the recently installed thermal energy storage system faster than anticipated. 'We initially wanted to do it in two phases,' explains Van Leeuwen. 'In the first phase, the new system would cover three-quarters of use with gas for the cold days, and we would switch fully in the second phase. But now we are switching to an entirely gas-free system from the start.'

WUR also wants to double the energy it gets from solar panels. Van Leeuwen: 'We already have a lot of solar panels,

which generate 5.5 million kWh in power. We want to increase that to 10 million kWh. I am arranging a feasibility study for a roof covered in solar panels over the parking areas. We are also

Rather than five million euros, WUR may have to pay 30 million

investigating whether we can generate sustainable energy in the vicinity of the campus with a solar field.'

In addition, more minor measures are being taken. For instance, the Atlas light screen is now switched off at night. 'While the screen uses LED lights, it still consumes an awful lot of energy,' says Van Leeuwen. 'And it was on day and night. But not any more.' RK

Idealis to invest heavily in buildings

In the next ten years, Idealis plans to invest 80 million euros on refurbishing and greening buildings. The star-shaped block of flats Asserpark is first in line, in a year's time, and Hoevestein will follow in 2026.

This was announced by director Bart van As when explaining the new Idealis business plan for 2023-2026. The most striking new aspect is that each corridor will get a second communal area in addition to the kitchen. The new area will be created by doing away with the laundry room and/or one of the current seven bedrooms. People will be able to use a paid laundromat on the ground floor to do their washing. A large meeting area will also be

created on the ground floor. The apartment-block cafe will be kept.

According to Van As, students won't have to move out dur-

Each corridor will get a second communal area

ing the refurbishment, which will probably be tackled floor by floor. In addition to the new communal areas, the buildings will also be made more sustainable. Idealis aims to be carbon neutral by 2035.

Too large

The Dijkgraaf star-shaped flat is also due an overhaul in the longer term. Van As: 'Operation of Dijkgraaf in its current form will end in



Photo Resource

2027. Corridors with 10 to 18 units are far too large. Future students won't want that.' It is not clear whether the flats will be demolished, as was the case with Rijnsteeg. 'We are investigating the renovation option first.'

As well as refurbishment, Idealis will also invest 200

million in new construction in the next few years. In addition to the existing plans for Born-Oost (Mansholtlaan) and the Bornsesteeg expansion, Van As is also looking for a site to build 300 units in 2028/2029. RK

1

Website and hotline for threatened scientists

Since early November, scientists who feel threatened have been able to go to wetenschapveilig.nl.

This platform was announced a year ago by the universities, the Dutch Research Council and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in response to the increasing numbers of threats aimed at scientists by conspiracy theorists, radical groups and trolls on social media. 'It is quite unacceptable for scientists to face threats, intimidation and hate speech in their work,' said Pieter Duisenberg, chair of the UNL association of universities. 'We see the threats as an attack on academic freedom.' The aim is to provide the scientists quickly with the right help. There is a phoneline they can call 24/7. They can also report an incident via the website; the report is then forwarded to their employer. HOP

Education minister Robbert Dijkgraaf has decided there should be one publically accessible central register of the side jobs of professors at Dutch universities.

The current compulsory registration by individual universities does not always work well, as the TV programme *Nieuwsuur* showed. The 6800 or so professors have an estimated 20,000 side jobs in total. RK

Omnia 'wall of men' questioned

Opposite the Faculty Club Novum in Omnia is a wall full of portraits. Venerable men stare at you earnestly. But why are they all men? A special committee will be looking into alternatives.

'As someone in charge of art at WUR, of course I have also wondered why all the portraits are of men,' says Joke Webbink of the Art and Heritage committee. Until recently, the portraits were on display more or less anonymously in the Aula's small Auditorium. The portraits have recently undergone restoration work and have been reframed.

Now they are hanging in Omnia in a prominent, highly visible place. That is when it strikes you: hey, they are all men. There is a simple explanation for this, says Webbink. 'They are mainly rectors, who have all been male so far.' Traditionally, when the rector's term ends, a portrait is painted of them. A comment on Twitter about the wall-

to-wall men got Webbink thinking. 'I decided I would raise the issue in the Art committee. That started a lively debate, but everyone agreed we should do something about this.' So far, that 'something' means setting

'Everyone agrees we should do something about this'

up another committee to look into an alternative. This planned committee will at the very least include a scientist, a professor, a historian and an expert on diversity.

Alternative

What this committee will lead to is completely open, according to Webbink. Should there be a separate wall for women? Should the current wall get a different theme? Or are there more modern alternatives for a portrait gallery that put a different slant on



Photo Roelof Kleis

WUR's male-dominated history? The committee will be able to consider all these questions. RK

If you have ideas for a modern portrait gallery, you can share them with WUR Library's Special Collections (speccoll.library@wur.nl).



Paying the true price in Aurora

For two weeks in October, Aurora caterer Hutten offered students and staff a choice: they could pay the usual price for food and drinks, or they pay a surcharge for the environmental costs — reflecting the 'true price'. The trial was set up by five Master's students as part of their Academic Consultancy Training (ACT), in an assignment commissioned by Hutten. The true price includes the environmental costs of greenhouse gas emissions and food waste. The price difference per product ranged from 15 cents to 80

Extra information had no effect on buying behaviour

cents. Customers were given almost no information in the first week, but in the

second week they were told about the pricing structure and the purpose of the extra proceeds. That information had no effect on people's behaviour: 26 per cent of customers paid the true price in the first week and 22 per cent in the second week. The ACT assignment is part of a more long-term project with Hutten. Next spring, WUR will discuss the results with the caterer and the possibility of implementing this permanently on campus. ss

Exhibition about WUR founding father

Winand Staring (1808-1877) is seen as the founder of geology and agricultural science in the Netherlands. Less well known is the fact that he was involved in setting up the agricultural college in Wageningen that later became Wageningen University & Research. Staal Museum in Almen has devoted a special exhibition to him as the founding father of WUR.

Map

He gets that honorary title thanks to WUR professor Rob Comans (Soil Chemistry and Chemical Soil Quality), who

has been investigating Staring's role in the establishment of higher agricultural education in Wageningen for some time. In a talk he gave at the opening, he explained Staring's significance for WUR. That significance was underlined by the presence of WUR's President Sjoukje Heimovaara. An eye-catching exhibit is a giant reproduction of the first geological map of the Netherlands, which was made by Staring. The map is on the floor and you can walk on it. RK

The exhibition is in Staal Museum in Almen until 26 March 2023.

From impotent bystander to saviour in need

You could witness inappropriate behaviour anywhere: in the train, in the supermarket or even at university. What should you do?

Students were able to find out recently at the third SafeTEA Evening. Master's student Sergi Domenech-Carbo gave a workshop on how to be an active bystander and intervene (safely!). The role-playing session at the end showed how effective the tips were. The 15 or so students improvised a response that soon put an end to the

unacceptable behaviour of a drunk, convincingly acted by one of the participants. They cleverly distracted him and prised him away from the 'victim', allowing him to back down without losing face or getting into a confrontation – important for preventing the situation from escalating. The next SafeTEA Evenings will be on 29 November and 7 December. You can still join the programme, which will run through to December; see safety.wur.nl. ME

Aviation protest

On 5 November, dozens of students and staff from Wageningen took part in a large protest against the role of aviation in climate policy. They took part in the protest march or joined in the acts of civil disobedience organized by Extinction Rebellion and Greenpeace, blocking parked private jets. It all went relatively well. One student said, 'Two police officers lifted me up and carried me to a van, where we were officially arrested. I managed to stay anonymous by giving a false name and not having any form of ID on me.' The activists were released again after a couple of hours. ME





PhD students want more informal contact

Wageningen's PhD Council thinks there should be more opportunity for informal contact between PhD candidates and their supervisors. That contact often suffers from all the working from home, says Council chair Anne-Juul Welsink.

She bases this conclusion on a survey among 241 PhD candidates. Most are on campus four to five days a week. Their supervisors are in the office one day a week less on average. That makes contact more difficult. There is a lot of variation, however. Ten per cent of supervisors are on campus one day a week or less.

PhD students usually have formal meetings with their co-supervisors once a week or fortnight. Four in ten PhD candidates talk

'Many students think this is normal'

with their co-supervisor once a month or not at all. Appointments with their

supervisor are equally infrequent. Informal contacts follow the same pattern. There is almost no opportunity for informal interaction in online meetings.

Post-Covid

A quarter of PhD candidates find the lack of informal contact a problem. Welsink actually thinks that figure is an underestimate. 'Many students think this is normal — they don't know any better. So they don't find it a problem that they rarely see their supervisors. After all, most of the current batch of PhD students started after Covid came along.'

Welsink thinks supervisors are insufficiently aware of the social function of informal interaction. 'PhD candidates need to feel noticed by their supervisors.' And more clearly needs to be done in that respect, for example by scheduling informal meet-ups and coffee sessions. RK

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Sigma B army does more than combat stress

The protein Sigma B plays a key role in helping bacteria cope with stress. The protein sends out an army of proteins to combat stress. It does this by triggering the genes for making those proteins. But Sigma B does far more, as PhD candidate Claire Yeak discovered.

She investigated what Sigma B does in bacteria belonging to the *Bacillus* family by identifying sites in the genome of *Bacillus subtilis* that bind Sigma B. That binding switches on genes that drive the creation of the

desired proteins.

The landing spot for Sigma B consists of a piece of genetic code (the promoter) with around

40 base pairs. Yeak searched the *Bacillus* genome for this sequence. 'If you find that, it'll probably be able to bind Sigma B, pointing to a possible role for the protein.' Yeak found around 156 new binding spots for Sigma B.

That increases the total known set of genes controlled by Sigma B to

more than 500. The newly discovered functions unrelated to stress include control over the use of nutrients and the swimming behaviour of *Bacillus*.

Toxic

Bacillus subtilis and its relative *Bacillus licheniformis* are used a lot in biotechnology to make enzymes. But they also make surfactin and lichenysin, substances capable of destroying the membranes of plant and animal cells. Yeak discovered that Sigma B is indirectly involved in that production and that the substances are also toxic to humans. That raises the question of whether their presence in foodstuffs such as milk is safe.

'These days, consumers prefer lightly processed foods,' says Yeak. 'It's harder to kill bacteria in those milder conditions. In fact, my research into lichenysin shows that those conditions trigger their stress system as a protection mechanism.' RK

Functions unrelated to stress include control over the swimming behaviour of *Bacillus*

[You win some, you lose some]

A failed experiment, an error in your model, a rejected article: in academia such things tend to be labelled failures. As for talking about failure? Not done! But that's just what WUR co-workers do in this regular feature, 'You win some, you lose some'. Because failure can be useful. In this instalment, we hear from Sylvia Brugman, associate professor in Animal Sciences. Text and illustration Stijn Schreven

'While I was working on my PhD, I got some very nice results from an experiment. I was doing research on type I diabetes in rats. The rats developed diabetes naturally and my goal was to prevent them from developing the disease. Because I wanted to know whether microbiota played a role, I added antibiotics to their water bottle. With success: on antibiotics, the rats didn't develop diabetes, or only much later. That was fantastic, but it was only one experiment. Of course, as a good scientist, I wanted to repeat it, but these results were so clear, it surely couldn't go wrong. At the time, the animal carers were renovating the room where the trial took place. To my surprise, when I repeated the experiment, I saw no effect at all. I was totally baffled. I had already been imagining the major publication that would come out of it, and now I was doubting those wonderful results and myself. Eight months had gone by and suddenly I had no results. It was

getting towards the end of my PhD project, so it was stressful. At home, I couldn't get it out of my head. Until a week later, when I woke up at night and thought: the animal carers acidified the water against limescale in the

bottles.

That had probably killed my antibiotics. I couldn't

repeat my

experiment, but a quick test of the water confirmed my suspicions. It taught me that no matter how hard you try, you can't control everything.

I still often lie in bed worrying about work, and I wake up at night two to three times a week. When I do, I write down what comes to mind in a book next to my bed. I'm lucky that I don't forget things easily, but that has its pros and cons. The downside is, I can't switch off. Tips are welcome.'

'I still often lie in bed worrying about work'



Asparagus residues make soup powder

The juice and fibres from the lowest section of the asparagus plant make a good basis for instant soup powders.

When white asparagus is harvested, the stalks are cut to length and the lowest part is discarded as residue. At present, they end up as compost as they are too 'woody', but they do have plenty of flavour. In her PhD research, Joanne Siccama (Food Process Engineering) used the asparagus residues to make high-grade vegetable powders that could be used for instant soup.

Vegetable powders are usually manufactured using a belt dryer and hot air. But a lot of aromas are lost from the vegetables using that approach. The manufacturer compensates for the loss of flavour by adding artificial flavourings. Spray drying is another well-known drying technique for making powders. The juice is sprayed to form tiny droplets, which dry quickly and therefore retain the aromas better.

Anti-stick

Siccama used a press to separate the asparagus juice from the fibres in the lower sections. Before the juice could be reduced to 95 per cent dry matter in the spray dryer, maltodextrin had to be added. 'That prevents the asparagus powder from becoming sticky – for sugars make up two-thirds of the solid components in the asparagus juice,' explains Siccama. In addition, maltodextrin forms a coating around the droplets, helping to retain the aromas. Siccama was also able to make good use of the asparagus fibres: when dried and ground, they could replace some of the maltodextrin.

Test panel

Siccama got a trained sensory panel to compare four of her asparagus powders with two instant soup powders made by the project partner Unilever. The Unilever soup powders were made using a belt dryer, with or without adding an artificial aroma mix. She found the soup with the aroma mix had the strongest flavour but the powders from the spray dryer (without added aromas) tasted stronger than the belt dryer powder without an aroma mix. This means Siccama's asparagus powder could be an alternative to artificial flavourings in instant soup. ss



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How to make chrysanthemums more fertile

Chrysanthemums have composite flowers: they have female ray florets and hermaphrodite disc florets. A plant with a lot of ray florets is more decorative but produces less seed. Annemarie Castricum received a PhD for her study on how to do something about this.

The lack of seed is mainly a problem with cross-bred chrysanthemums. 'Wild varieties produce more seed,' says Castricum. 'Cross-bred varieties with a lot of ray florets produce less seed than the species that are closer to the original and mainly consist of disc florets with only a row of ray florets around the edge. So it looks as if the ray florets make less seed.' She discovered why that was. At any rate, it looks as if the quality of the ray floret's carpel plays a role. Castricum: 'The key factor here is the carpel's morphology: how well it opens up to catch any pollen.'

Genes

She also investigated which genes determine the ratio of ray florets to disc florets. To do this, she compared the genetic expression of two varieties with a lot of ray florets and their mutants with a lot of disc florets. A total of 290 genes were expressed

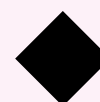
differently in the two mutants. Some of those genes are involved in the initial development stages of the flowers. Castricum eventually identified one gene (PDF2) that in all probability is responsible for having more disc florets than ray florets. She also discovered that genes involved in the production of the plant hormone

The gene PDF2 probably leads to more disc florets

effect: in this case, inhibition of the gene (and therefore the hormone) leads to more disc florets.

This raises the possibility of a practical application in which plants are treated with the hormone inhibitor brassinazole. 'But that is tricky,' says Castricum. 'You have to apply it to the flowers manually. I tested it on several varieties, but it didn't always work.' RK

brassinosteroid have a demonstrable



Dark resting place good for chicks' well-being

Giving broiler chicks a dark place to rest affects their gut bacteria and improves their well-being, discovered researcher Ingrid de Jong of Wageningen Livestock Research.

'The housing in the first weeks of a chick's life has a big effect on its health and behaviour, and consequently on well-being,' says De Jong. On commercial poultry farms, chicks spend 23 hours a day in the light for the first couple of days to make sure they get enough to eat and drink. 'It's hard for them to get any rest then.' De Jong and her colleagues investi-

Chicks that have access to a 'dark brooder' are more symmetrical

gated the effect of what they call a 'dark brooder' in the barn. 'It offers a dark, warm place for the chicks

to crawl under and rest, a kind of substitute mother hen.' De Jong discovered that chicks with access to a dark brooder were more symmetrical, meaning for example there was no difference in leg length. De Jong: 'Asymmetry is a sign of stress. This therefore seems to indicate indirectly that the chicks are less stressed.'

Good bacteria

It was also noticeable that chicks with access to a dark brooder had a less varied microbiome — the micro-organisms such as bacteria and fungi in the guts — at the age of two weeks, but they had more 'good' gut bacteria. De Jong: 'A varied microbiome is associated with less stress and therefore potentially better well-being, but surprisingly our results point in the opposite direction.'

It is known that the microbiome is important for the immune system, explains the researcher. 'In humans the link between the microbiome and behaviour has been studied in great detail, but not in chickens. We want to do that in future.' TL

THE PROPOSITION

For PhD candidates, their thesis propositions are an opportunity to publicly express their professional and personal convictions about science and society. In this feature they explain their most thought-provoking proposition. This time, a proposition from Ahmad Dermawan, Public Administration and Policy, who defended his thesis on 26 October 2022.



'The sandwich PhD construction is a guarantee for working 20 hours per day.'

'As a sandwich PhD, the idea was I would spend my first nine months and last nine months in the Netherlands. The other thirty months I would do fieldwork in Indonesia. The university would fund the portion spent on campus; the local organization would cover my time during the fieldwork. Before I started, I had mapped a plan for these four years. Unfortunately, major donors unexpectedly withdrew their funding and the organization had to redistribute the remaining resources. I was side-lined.

'I had to manoeuvre to secure other funds, but some of them required additional work not related to my thesis. My PhD was about palm oil, but now I also had to publish papers on other topics to satisfy the funders. As a result, I

often spent my days on work for the funders, then the evenings and nights on my PhD. In the end it took me more than seven years to complete my PhD because of the additional work.

'Ideally, there should be more explicit commitment from the local organisation to guarantee the availability of resources to cover the work, for example, a binding contract between the university and the organisation. However, from the local organisation's perspective, making a commitment to one particular staff member is not easy. Therefore, supervisors should try to find fully funded PhD positions or secure scholarship schemes that fully cover the PhD students. Then PhD students can focus on their study.' ss

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Resource

WUR from within: straight, sharp, transparent

Back to the office

The era of working from home is over. According to a survey by the Social Sciences Group, Leeuwenborch employees now want to spend 60 per cent of their time in the office again. I can't say I've noticed. A lot of the floors are still dead quiet and even along my corridor there are often only a handful of colleagues present. It seems that most of them prefer to work at home after all.

How bad is that? You can read, write and grade papers just as well at home, at least if your house is big enough and there are no young children around. Discussions work fine online, but spontaneous conver-

'I loved working from home, but I had it too good there'

sations are a lot harder. Our chair group meetings are now offline again and compulsory, so nearly everyone comes in on those days. Isn't it great to see your colleagues from head to toe again, to have lunch with them, or to pop in on them to sort out a few minor issues? No online meeting can beat that. I myself have been back in the office every day since the summer. Not that I am not the

sations are a lot harder. Our chair group meetings are now



Sjoukje Osinga

home-working type – on the contrary, I love working from home. But I have a confession to make: I had it too good at home, what with all the yummy things in the kitchen, especially when the boys were around. I piled on the Covid kilos. As long as my BMI was still within the healthy range, I told myself I wasn't going to worry about it. But I gradually reached and then went over that healthy limit and I felt something had to be done. Shouldn't I cut down on carbs, or maybe try periodic fasting or something of the sort?

The solution turned out to be much simpler. My method has just two rules. One: go to the office every day again, preferably by bike. Two: take your own lunch. That's all. WUR fruit is provided, but that is allowed. But no further snacking is permitted. The canteen is only open for a few hours, so you can't grab a muffin at four o'clock anymore. Now I am back to my pre-Covid weight. So I can thoroughly recommend a return to the office. And free heating is thrown in, too.

Sjoukje Osinga (55) is an assistant professor of Information Technology. She sings alto in the Wageningen chamber choir Musica Vocale, has three sons who are students and enjoys birdwatching with her husband in the Binnenveldse Hooilanden.

Women agriculture students in Kabul still 'on hold'

The men of their year have long since graduated. But the 36 women students at the WUR-supported Afghan agricultural college NAEC are still living with uncertainty as to how, and by now whether, they will ever be able to complete their education. How could this situation arise? And is a solution still possible?



Text Marieke Enter

In early November, Afghan women students urgently appealed to the Lower House of the Dutch parliament, prompting critical questions addressed to ministers Schreinemacher (Foreign Trade & Development Cooperation) and Hoekstra (Foreign Affairs). Hans van Otterloo, until recently NAEC project manager in Kabul on behalf of WUR, has a lot of questions too. He keeps in close touch with NAEC staff, although he no longer lives in Afghanistan. 'Minister Schreinemacher stated that the security risks are too high for the women to complete the course. But that is not consistent with the information I get from Kabul.'

In March, a solution for the women seemed to be in sight, and it even had the consent of the Afghan authorities. But implementation was slow: the Taliban changed their minds and withdrew their consent, while the Dutch organizations were sluggish. The project's end date was approaching and there was still no solution for the women. Hedwig Bruggeman of Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (see inset) on that impasse: 'Early this year,

everything was in place for offering the women blended education. Those plans were put on hold, in consultation with all concerned, when the Taliban authorities announced that a decision would be taken "soon" on whether this form of education for women would be allowed. There is still no decision.'

WUR has had no formal, contractual relationship with NAEC since 31 October. Meanwhile, the plight of the Afghan women has not changed since this time last year. They have two semesters to go to get their qualification. WDCI tells us that NAEC has issued the women with a certificate for the education they have successfully completed. They will also get a letter of recommendation from WUR, so they can continue their studies if NAEC opens again or at another institution that starts training women again. That is cold comfort, says Van Otterloo.

Is there nothing that can be done to let the women finish their education?

Van Otterloo: 'The minister, Elisabeth Schreinemacher, says the situation is

currently too dangerous. Of course there are risks, but my Afghan contacts say the level of threat has not really changed since March. The question is what information the minister is basing her decision on. An article in the *Volkskrant* newspaper implies it comes from WUR.'

So are the risks not that great in reality?

'I know the Afghans involved well; they are perfectly normal citizens, and not foolhardy. Safety has always come first on the project. If they say it can be done, who are we to decide that it can't? The women have clearly expressed their wish to go back to college. Their families have given their consent, and they really won't recklessly let their daughters go out on the streets. I think it's arrogant of the Dutch authorities to believe they know better about the risks. Women are being deprived of a choice, "just to be on the safe side". Even though they'll be running the security risk, not us. Politicians



Munition left behind by Taliban in fields in Balkh, northern Afghanistan. • Photo Shutterstock

seem to be more concerned about keeping their hands clean than about the fate of these 36 women.'

Is there anything else WUR can or should do?

'Not in a formal sense, no. The contract ended on 31 October, and that was the end of WUR's role, officially. Personally, I think WUR also has a moral duty to help the women, but that's not how the game is played. I never thought Wageningen was very enthusiastic about this project, and the chaotic conditions in Afghanistan haven't improved matters.'

According to the development organization Spark, 150,000 euros would be enough to enable the women to finish their training.

'What needs to happen now is for the ministry of Foreign Affairs to sign a contract with the college in Afghanistan directly. Or, if that is too tricky, with an

NGO that is willing to be a go-between financially – and they can be found. Schreinemacher wants to identify the options by the end of this year. But that means another two months before the women know where they stand.'

What will be lost if NAEC does have to stop?

'For the 36 women, it will be a dramatic loss, let that be clear. As for the institute, it has achieved a lot. In the past 10 years, countless people have been trained and a

new curriculum has been spread among 150 schools. And yet something important will be lost if NAEC stops, and that is Afghanistan's capacity to improve its agricultural education itself. This doesn't have to happen: the Islamic Development Bank has already expressed its willingness to co-finance a new start, provided the Netherlands stays on board. I hope that happens. Although in my experience, loyalty to the people we claim to be working for is not the Netherlands' strongest point.' ■

NAEC & WCDI

The National Agriculture Education College (NAEC) is an Afghan agricultural teacher training college set up in 2009 with funding from Dutch ministries (Foreign Affairs and Agriculture). At the time, the project was managed by Van Hall Larenstein, which was then part of WUR. Later, it was taken over by Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI). As of 31 October, WUR/WCDI no longer has contractual relations with NAEC. WCDI says it still has weekly meetings with the NAEC board to finalize everything properly. 'Another point of discussion is how WCDI can support students. We have a constructive relationship with the NAEC board. And we are trying to work with Foreign Affairs in a solution-oriented way,' says WCDI's Hedwig Bruggeman.

Death feeds life

Carcasses play an important role in the natural cycle. PhD student Elke Wenting seeks to understand that role.



Text Roelof Kleis

In a clearing on the Veluwe, several dead fallow deer are rotting away. There is nothing unusual about that in itself. They don't get cleared away in this area, explains ecologist Elke Wenting (Wildlife Ecology & Conservation). But there is something special about these fallow deer: they are part of Wenting's study of how carcasses contribute to the cycle of scarce nutrients such as zinc, cobalt and selenium. 'The idea is that animals have a big impact on that cycle of trace elements,' Wenting explains. 'Through their diet, they get those scarce substances from all over the place. When an animal dies, there is a relatively high concentration of those substances at the site of the carcass. The question is what happens to them. Are they eaten and dispersed by scavengers or do they disappear into the soil?' Wenting's fallow deer should give us some idea.

Secret

The fallow deer are local, but Wenting prefers to keep the location to herself. 'Anyone is welcome to know what I do, but not where I do it. There is expensive equipment here, and I don't want the trial to be disturbed.' The site is not likely to attract casual visitors either. It is tucked away out of sight and if that's not enough, a double electric fence will do the rest. But the fence is there to keep animals out, rather than people. 'I use it systematically to keep certain groups of animals away from the carcasses, to see how important they are for the nutrient cycle. A little way away lies

a carcass which all the animals can reach. There is one place with a wildlife grid that only keeps out wild boar. Here, where we are now, only birds can reach the carcass, and over there, only insects.'

Decomposition

A power supply is essential for keeping animals out, and Wenting has to visit the site every week to change the batteries. A solar panel on the site helps, but it can't provide all the power required. 'Changing the batteries is the biggest job here,' says Wenting. Along with taking monthly samples of the soil under the carcasses. A special hoist has been developed for that purpose, to lift the animals carefully and put them back in exactly the same place after the sampling. Those samples will be examined for their chemical composition. Fallow deer were chosen as test animals for mainly practical reasons. Wenting: 'Roe deer are not shot here and red deer are too heavy to lift.' The carcasses are in various stages of decomposition. The rate at which that happens varies per animal. 'It's impossible to make sense of,' says Wenting. 'And we don't know why it is. There are a lot of scavengers here, because for several decades now there's been a policy of leaving carcasses on the spot. Some carcasses are gone within three to four days, but others are lying there four months later looking as though they were shot yesterday.'

Boar

It has become clear, though, that wild boar can play a role in the disposal of carcasses. Wenting discovered this from an experiment in which carcasses at various

'Anyone is welcome to know what I do, but not where I do it'

locations around the country were kept under surveillance with cameras. Wenting: 'With these, we tracked the stages of decomposition, the species of animals involved and how they behaved near the carcass. Which tissues do they eat and at which stage of decomposition are they active? And wild boar really do eat everything. They also come in larger groups. Wild boar are scavengers. They need animal proteins on top of acorns and the like. Boar can speed up the process tremendously, but they don't always do so.'

An aspect of the cycle Wenting is trying to document is the chemical composition of animals. With remarkable results. Wenting: 'It's always been assumed that the chemical composition is very consistent in animals, unlike in plants. After all, they can move around and take what they need. But it turns out that is not the case at all.' She found this out when she compared otters and fallow deer, two species that have little in common. Otters appear to have a much more constant

chemical composition than fallow deer. 'In addition, there appeared to be quite a lot of variation within the species. That raised the question of how that would be within the same environment. I then studied red deer and boar from my study area, also looking at where in the body those nutrients are stored.'

Remarkable

These results – which are yet to be published – are even more remarkable. 'I am finding big differences. Not only between the two species, but also per individual. It's impossible to predict where in the body the trace elements will end up.' And that is interesting news. Organs like the liver or kidney are often used as indicators of the presence of certain substances in an area. 'But I see in my study that it is not as straightforward as that. One red deer, for example, had masses of lead in its lungs. So that one was seriously ill, in fact. In such a case, if you look for a cause in the liver alone and you find nothing, you can draw very wrong conclusions. So it's not enough to analyse a single organ as a measure of the whole.' ■

'Wild boar really do eat everything'



Elke Wenting with one of the dead fallow deer. ♦ Photo Guy Ackermans





WILD SEA

'What is still nature in this country?' sighed Dutch poet J.C. Bloem in 1947. Quite a lot in fact, as Dutch filmmakers have shown in recent years. It all started with *De Nieuwe Wildernis*, the successful film about the Oostvaardersplassen nature reserve. *Wad*, *Levende Rivier*, *Wolf* and *Grutto!* followed. But the Netherlands' largest nature area — the North Sea — had yet to be the subject of a film. That is set to change with *De Wilde Noordzee* (The Wild North Sea). This film, shot by the makers of *De Nieuwe Wildernis* and others, will premiere in 2024, but visitors attending the recent North Sea Days conference got a taster in Omnia. WUR is a partner in the project. The North Sea is an important area for the work of Wageningen Marine Sciences. The photo shows Peter van Rodijnen (cameraman) and Jack Over (diver with lighting equipment) during a dive for a scene about bib fish. ^{RK}

Photo Dutch Maritime Productions

REDUCING EMISSIONS WITHOUT EXPENSIVE TECH

Some dairy farmers favour technological innovations as the best way to reduce emissions of ammonia and methane. But great strides can be taken just with feed and management measures. As has been demonstrated by the 108 farmers participating in the Netwerk Praktijkbedrijven, a network of experimental farms jointly established by WUR and LTO Noord. *Resource* visited one of the farmers.

Text and photos Marianne Wilschut

In the sun-drenched meadow in the Rondehoep polder near Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, dairy farmer Richard Korrel's herd of cows lie chewing the cud contentedly. 'Every day the cows can be out of doors is a bonus, but if it gets too wet later on, we will bring them in,' Korrel says. 'Otherwise they trample the field to bits.'

The meadow is an important factor in Korrel's efforts to reduce his emissions. By mowing at the right time of year, he can control the protein content of the grass. 'I can reduce nitrogen emissions that way. Because what doesn't go in, doesn't come out either. If there is less protein in the feed then the manure contains less ammonia, a nitrogen compound. That's how I can reduce my nitrogen emissions.' Korrel also puts his 140 dairy cows and 60 young cattle out to grass as much as possible. 'Out in the meadow, cows don't pee and poo in the same place and so no ammonia can be created by the mixing of the two, which reduces nitrogen emissions. And the cows eat more fresh grass, which is good for reducing methane emissions too.'

With these and other measures such as cutting down on fertilizer and diluting the manure he spreads on the fields with water, Korrel has already managed to reduce his farm's ammonia emissions by more than 30 per cent. A further 20 per cent was achieved with his modified barn with an insulated roof and low-emission floor. But he still signed up as a participant for the experimental farm network, a partnership between Wageningen University and LTO Noord. 'I'm dealing with nitrogen quite successfully, but reducing methane emissions is a lot harder on my

farm because I farm on peat soil. That means I can't grow maize for my cows, and maize reduces methane emissions. So through the network, I hope to learn from experts and from other people's experience.'

Environment and bank balance

'Methane emissions are natural for cows,' says WUR researcher Gerard Migchels. 'When they digest grass and other food, methane is produced through the cows' burps and the manure. We try to reduce those methane emissions by managing their diet.' So the farm network's goal is to reduce not only nitrogen emissions but also methane emissions by 30 per cent by 2024.

Migchels leads the network, together with Cathy van Dijk of LTO Noord.

'OUTDOORS, COWS EAT FRESH GRASS, WHICH IS GOOD FOR METHANE EMISSIONS'



Richard Korrel's cows are outside as much as possible. 'In the meadow, cows don't pee and poo in the same place and so no ammonia can be created by the mixing of the two. This reduces nitrogen emissions.'

Wageningen provides the experts on things like grassland management, barns and fodder, while LTO takes care of the knowledge transfer and support. The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) is funding the project, in which 108 dairy farmers are participating. The participants make use of what has been learned from previous projects, Proeftuin Natura 2000 and Proeftuin Veenweiden, in the Natura 2000 areas and peatland areas respectively. Migchels: 'In those projects, we learned a lot about how to reduce nitrogen emissions. Participants in those projects managed to cut nitrogen emissions by as much as 20 to 40 per cent. Knowing that society will expect more from farmers in the coming years in terms of climate, water, biodiversity and animal welfare, we are

adopting an integral approach in this project, looking at nitrate, biodiversity and animal welfare as well as ammonia and methane.'

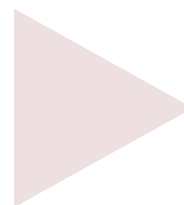
'We are looking for solutions that are both practical and affordable,' adds Cathy van Dijk of LTO Noord. 'Both the environment and the dairy farmer's bank balance must benefit. This means that we don't concentrate on expensive technology such as barns with under-floor suction that mops up the emissions caught beneath the gratings in the barn. The market will run with those technological innovations. We focus on feed and management measures. There is much to be gained just through them.'

Clash

But the integrated approach can cause a clash between sustainable goals, in the experience of dairy farmer Korrel. Of the

80 hectares of pasture near Amsterdam that he manages with his father Gerard, he leaves 23 hectares alone for field birds until early June. 'To avoid disturbing the breeding field birds, we let the grass grow longer in spring, but that makes it coarser. That means the cow has to chew the cud for longer to digest it, and then more methane is released.'

Every three months, Korrel gets together with the network coordinator and the feed consultant to discuss such obstacles. There are also networking days at which participants can exchange experiences. Korrel's farm is one of 22



demonstration farms that are participating in the project. Cathy van Dijk: 'The group is divided into research farms, demonstration farms and ambassador farms. New measures are first tested on the 18 research farms for feasibility and user-friendliness. These measures are then further tested and fine-tuned on the 22 demonstration farms. The output from that is then tested at the 68 ambassador farms.'

To monitor the results of the measures, sensors take measurements on and around the stables. Farms also use a digital nutrient accounting system, the Kringloopwijzer, which keeps track of their environmental and climate performance. 'For some organic members of the network, that was a new tool,' says Van Dijk. 'Diversity is important to us. It doesn't matter whether a farm is large or small, organic or mainstream, on sandy, clay or peaty soil. The reduction of emissions is tailored to suit each farm, which is why we chose the

broadest possible group of participants, including farms with little experience of such projects.'

Hope

Gerard Migchels: 'We had around 30 participants in mind for this trial when we started, but we got over 150 responses to our call. So we decided to expand the number of participants.' This enthusiasm came as a surprise to Migchels, especially in view of the unrest in the sector caused by the nitrogen measures looming over it. 'At one of our network meetings, a woman farmer came up to me and said: "The perception now is that only way to reduce nitrogen emissions is to stop farming, but you are giving us hope that there are other options."'

While there are gains to be made with smarter farming, the emission targets cannot be achieved without cutting livestock numbers, says Migchels. 'For some farms, extensification by reducing the number of cows will be among the strategies for achieving emission reduc-

'WE ARE LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS THAT ARE BOTH PRACTICAL AND AFFORDABLE'

tions, combined with looking for other sources of income.'

Korrel is already working on that, although dairy farming comes first for him. 'My wife has a background in catering and she came up with the idea of hosting guests on our farm,' he says, showing a room containing stacked straw bales and picnic tables with pretty red-and-white checked tablecloths. 'We rent out this space for children's parties.' Also on the farm is a meeting room and a bar with a big terrace where day-trippers can drop in for a cup of coffee and a sandwich. Korrel and his family also offer 'farmer's golf' followed by drinks or a barbecue. There are go-karts everywhere for children to play on. 'People are allowed to go everywhere on the farm, we have no secrets from the outside world.'

These activities bring in a nice bit of extra income, but that was not Korrel's main motive for opening his farm to the public. 'So many negative things are said about farming these days, some of which are not true at all. So we think it is important to interact with members of the public and, above all, to show how dairy farming works.' ■



Farmer Richard Korrel: 'If there is less protein in the feed then the manure contains less ammonia, a nitrogen compound. That's how I can reduce my nitrogen emissions.'

Student at COP27: 'Invest in young people'

World leaders, NGOs and scientists are meeting this month in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt at the UN climate conference COP27. WUR student Thomas Westhoff is there.

Why are you at the climate summit?

'IAAS went to Glasgow last year, our first climate summit in years. Many valuable contacts came out of that, including a partnership with FAO (the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.). In the run-up to the current summit in Egypt, we organized conferences at which young people formulated policy recommendations. That's quite tricky, because what seems like a good idea to a European might be a bad idea to an African. For us it's a way of seeking consensus as a kind of youth UN: we ask, "What would benefit everyone?"'

'Also, IAAS members around the world are setting up climate-adaptive agriculture projects. I am going to the COP to find investors for those projects and to increase the visibility of IAAS.'

What message are you taking with you?

'That young people should play a leading role in shaping the future. That message is being received positively, as you can see from the increasing number of partners who want to work with us. For example, the FAO is making budgets and training courses available for things like learning how to write proposals for development organizations and banks. With such training, more young people can approach development banks with agricultural projects, which makes the banks more aware that they should be involving young people in such things. That's the development that I want to highlight: the involvement of young people in shaping a better future. There is a generation of young people champing at the bit, eager to initiate change. Invest in that.'

'I continue to believe in these kinds of bodies'

'I also have a letter with me inviting Frans Timmermans and Mark Rutte for a dialogue with students at the IAAS congress in January, when students from all over the world will come to Wageningen. And at the confer-



Photo Thomas Westhoff

ence, we also want to present and discuss the results of a new policy paper.'

How is IAAS different from climate action groups?

'We have the same goal but we use different means. As IAAS, we try to improve the world through political engagement and dialogue. I see a lot of pessimism, but I continue to believe in these kinds of bodies. For a global problem, it is good to establish global agreements. At the same time, we agree with activists that it's all got to happen much faster. Countries should feel genuinely obligated to meet their climate targets.'

What would make this COP a success?

'If it leads to firmer climate ambitions and member states involving their young people more. The targets have got to be more ambitious, they've got to be binding, and they've got to be acted upon.' LZ

Thomas Westhoff (23) is doing two Master's degrees (International Land and Water Management and Climate Studies) and since last summer he has been president of the International Association of Students in Agricultural and related Sciences (IAAS), a global student association for agricultural students that is active at more than 100 universities in over 50 countries. The association has over 10,000 members.

'WE SHOULD FOCUS MORE ON EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS'

To arrive at a good climate policy, we have to question free-market economics, argues philosopher of technology Vincent Blok. Text Anne van Kessel

According to Vincent Blok, associate professor of Philosophy of Technology and Responsible Innovation, climate change shows that the world around us is not as stable as we always thought it was. He published a book this spring: *Van wereld naar aarde, Filosofische ecologie van een bedreigde planeet* (From World to Earth, a philosophical ecology of a threatened planet). In his book he sets forth a way of thinking that has ecosystems at its heart rather than our own interests. The question is whether humans are willing to give up their central place.

The title of your book is 'From World to Earth'. What is the difference between the two?

'By world, I mean the environment in which you are at home; the climate. Because you are familiar with that stable environment, you know what the

buildings you live and work in are for and how you live alongside other people, for example. Underneath that is the Earth; which can undermine the world with volcanic eruptions, storms and shifting tectonic plates. The philosophical tradition has paid very little attention to this eruptive aspect of the Earth. You are dependent on the Earth and yet you don't have a relationship with it like you do with the world.'

But indirectly you do, of course. Humanity is causing climate change and as a result, the number of tropical storms is increasing, for example.

'The strange thing is that climate change is making us aware for the first time that we are in a climate at all. We used to see the world as something relatively stable that we didn't need to give any further thought to. Now the world turns out to have become unstable. We are now acting as though we can make that unstable world do what we want but I doubt whether we can. By which I don't

mean there is no justification for tackling climate change. We got beyond that discussion long ago.'

So what discussion should we be having now?

'What does climate change imply for the meaning of life? What is the role of humans in reversing climate change? What are our capacities and incapacities? Because the urgency of climate change calls for action, we forget to ask these kinds of existential questions.'

Was that why you wrote this book?

'I got the idea for it while teaching an 'Introduction to Philosophy' course that I developed for non-philosophers at Wageningen. In that course, we step outside our orientation towards solutions and ask what is the purpose of a scientist's life on an endangered planet. The book is an elaboration of those lectures.'

To what extent do you think humans are willing to give up their central position?

'I think we find that very difficult because it has massive implications for what we do and don't do. We are having

'AS LONG AS THE STARTING POINT IS THE ECONOMY, THE ECOSYSTEM WILL SUFFER'

this conversation using a mobile phone, for example. If we were really to put nature first, it's questionable whether we would be able to make phone calls at all. Our phones are technically recyclable but that costs a fortune so it hardly ever happens. A sustainable and circular economy sounds lovely but as long as the starting point is the economy, the ecosystem will suffer.'

Do you have an example of that?

'I was in Berlin last week and everyone is riding around on electric scooters there. People call that a typical example of a sustainable solution. Is it, though? Those scooters are so insanely popular; hasn't net energy consumption gone up as a result? That's called the Jevons paradox: innovations intended to save energy often cause us to use more energy overall. We turn down the heating and with the money we save, we fly to Ibiza for the third time this year. In other words, we claim to be putting the ecosystem first, but the economy is still decisive. As long

as our thinking about sustainability fails to consider how capitalism reduces economics to consumerism, it will only lead to interventions like those scooters.'

Does that stem from that focus on solutions, do you think?

'Yes. We need some self-reflection before we can make a transition. For instance, are our lives as humans made meaningful by the continuous satisfaction of our needs? You could base economics on humans as aspirational beings. Not every aspiration is about the short-term satisfaction of a need. Satisfying aspirations to things like knowledge and beauty is often a more long-term process, and it tends to actually reduce our footprint.'

What would you like to say to your WUR colleagues?

'In the climate debate, you have people who put a lot of faith in technical solutions: the eco-modernist movement that believes in a techno-fix. There are lots of members of that movement in Wageningen. I would ask them to think about the politico-economic context of their technological interventions, and their implications for human existence. On the other hand, you have people who think the climate problem can be solved with behavioural changes such as reducing consumption and birth control, and many of these people are critical of technological solutions. To them I would ask: "Is technology the problem? Or the linking of economics with technology?" There are alternatives, such as what are known as biomimetic technologies, which are inspired by natural processes and don't necessarily exploit nature. In my opinion, technology is not the problem and we may even need it to make our case for climate solutions palatable for the "lower" socio-economic classes.' ■



Photo Guy Ackermans

Work or studies and caregiving

KEEP TALKING

How do you hold down a job or do a degree while caring for friends or family? To mark Carer's Day on 10 November, *Resource* spoke to two employees and a student who combine work and care. Text Milou van der Horst

Doing the laundry, going to medical appointments, keeping an eye on how a family member or friend is doing: chances are you are one of the five million informal carers in the Netherlands, looking after a needy loved one on a voluntary basis and long-term. Almost half of all informal carers have a job as well, and feel the combination is manageable. Maruscha, Cor and Adina share their stories.

Maruscha van Es

director of the Welcome Centre Food Valley (48), is a carer for her son (17) with autism and her daughter (16) with an anxiety disorder

Besides this 32-hour job, she is a carer for her son (17) with autism and her daughter (16) with an anxiety disorder. 'My children are less independent and need more attention than is usual at their age. And I am constantly looking for the right care and support. That entails conversations with people like doctors, special education providers or the school attendance officer. My home situation has caused me to become extra alert and to develop a talent for organization. Qualities that come in handy at work.

I combine my job with caring by realizing that I can't do it alone. I have to know where to get help, and to enlist it and be open. Talking is one way of dealing with my situation. For example, I pop in on the corporate social worker on a regular basis to get things off my chest, and I have also had therapy. Because of my openness, I get a lot of support from colleagues. Sometimes they worry because they see I've got a lot on my plate. But I know my limits. Fortunately, I experience a lot of freedom, understanding and trust, which allows me to organize my work my own way. Sadly,

not all informal carers know where they can go for support. Employers can help with that. My advice to the employer is not to make any assumptions about an informal carer: every situation is unique. Ask questions and figure out what is feasible together.'

Cor Meurs

is an informal carer for his partner

Cor Meurs (57) held various positions within WUR for 34 years and is now a self-employed coach, trainer and consultant. He directed the theatre production *My Mother*, about caring for a mother with dementia, which was performed on campus on 9 November. 'It was only through this interview that I realized that I am a carer too. I never saw caring for my husband as a task; you choose to stand by each other in good times and bad. My partner may have a mental health issue, but it also went well for 16 years, between two hospital admissions. So for me, the carer role was mainly challenging mentally. The run-up to the hospital admission was a particularly anxious and uncertain time. My husband became unpredictable due to a psychosis, so I was very worried and had to prevent accidents. He would only be admitted when he was a danger to himself and the environment; but when was that? As a result, my mind wasn't on my work and, in consultation with WUR, I could stay at home. That wasn't a difficult conversation – it helps that I am very open. I think there is less rec-

I COMBINE MY JOB WITH CARING BY REALIZING THAT I CANNOT DO IT ALONE.



Student Adina Bergsma (sitting at the table on the right): 'Mostly, I arrange things like medical appointments, diagnostic assessments and financial matters.' ♦ Photo Reyer Boxem

ognition of informal care for people with mental health disorders because there is relatively little openness about them. There are plenty of possibilities at work as long as you talk about the situation. What is going on, what's behind it, and how can you avoid long-term absenteeism? Managers play an important role in this. Caregivers have a lot to offer, and we can strengthen that potential. And that is necessary now that the healthcare system is under pressure and informal care is becoming more important. The play helps with starting a conversation about that.'

Adina Bergsma

Nutrition & Health student, (24), is a carer for her father (64) with Alzheimer's and her sister (22) with a mild mental disability

'Last week, I wondered for the first time if I am a carer when the GP used the term about me. Mostly, I arrange things like medical appointments, diagnostic assessments and financial matters. My mother relied on my father for those things, but I have to do them now. He is more and more forgetful, finds it harder to follow conversations and is becoming more passive. The hardest thing is the pressure of having to do it and the way my stress level is constantly raised, which affects my sleep as well. I feel responsible, I want to

help as much as I can, and to make memories, but I don't have much time outside of my studies. It doesn't help that my parents and sister live in Friesland. And it's hard for me that I can't really live my own life. I can't stay away for long periods of time, for instance, because then I lose the overview and am afraid that something will go wrong. That also makes me reluctant to hand things over to anyone else. But it would be nice to be able to tell my story and to learn how to cope with the extra stress.

When I came to university, I told my student adviser about my situation in case things get worse later on. She responded kindly, but didn't offer any tips or information. It would be nice if I could get an exemption if I have to attend an appointment, for example. Now such appointments take up a lot of extra time because I have to plan practicals around them, or catch up later. There is already so little time to recover.' ■



Tips on informal care can be found on our website.

Theatre about values in science wants to hit home

'If you feel it's you we're talking about, fine'

It takes a group to create a culture, even a dishonest one. This is the theme of *Mindlab*, a show about 'truth-telling, values and integrity' in science. Theatre is a particularly apt medium for starting a conversation about this, thinks writer and director Walter Supèr: 'It gets under your skin and reveals people's inner world.'

Text Marieke Enter & Leoni Andriessen (Cursor, TU/e)

Bringing about a culture change at universities: that is what Twente professor Ellen Giebels had in mind when she approached Walter Supèr, the artistic and theatrical director at Theatre Makers Radio Kootwijk (TMRK). He delved into the world of science and created *Mindlab*, a reportedly impressive show that aims to spark an 'honest and courageous' conversation about creating a safe and inspiring working and learning environment that includes 'looking out for each other'. After successful performances at the University of Twente, University of Utrecht and Eindhoven University of Technology, the show can now be seen at WUR from the end of November. *Resource* spoke to the theatre maker.

The play is based on input from the academic community?

Supèr: 'Yes, we talked to people with different roles: researchers, PhD students, professors, support staff. We at TMRK want to know why things happen the way they do, what's behind them. That's our forte, unearthing the story behind the story.'

And what have you found out?

'That people at universities, just like anywhere else in the world, suffer from cognitive dissonance reduction. I call that a kind of screen in your brain that you can hide things behind. People report something which

they actually find unacceptable, but then they think, it's not my business. Or: I am only indirectly involved. As a result, they don't take action. And not many people deliberately say "I'm going to make a mess of this" yet it still happens. I find that fascinating.'

Did all the situations in the show really happen?

'Most of them did. They come out of the stories. I didn't reproduce those literally, because I want people to feel free to tell us things. So I sometimes changed the setting a bit. If you feel it's you we're talking about, fine. That's exactly what it's about.'

Is the intention that people recognize themselves?

'Yes and no. On the one hand, you want people to be inspired, and on the other, you want them to think: ouch, that's me and that isn't how I want to be at all. But recognizability is not enough by itself; the play should also be unsettling and should hit home. Instead of confirming what we already know, this show seeks to

'It's all about the grey area: that's where change happens'



'The play is based on people who want to do the right thing, which is most people. It is mainly about bystanders who don't take action or hide behind processes, protocols or systems'. ♦ Photo TheaterMakers Radio Kootwijk

provide new insights. We're interested in the grey area: that's where change happens.'

Do people want to be confronted with their behaviour?

'Everyone I talk to wants to do the right thing. I think individualism gives us room to do stupid things oblivious to other people. In the scientific world, just like elsewhere, we create hierarchical invulnerable positions. The play deals with themes like these too. It's based on people who want to do the right thing, in other words the majority of people. It's mainly about bystanders who don't take action, or who hide behind processes, protocols or systems.'

Isn't it precisely the people in positions of power who need to change their behaviour?

'*Mindlab* includes a case that's about what kind of ideas we have about leadership. Leadership takes place in interaction. The board, deans or chairholders won't get anywhere if a big majority says: we're not going to do that. The boss is not always the leader.'

What do you hope people take away from the show?

'That's up to them. The play doesn't tell you what is right or wrong, nor does it give any answers. But it does invite you to think. Take that cognitive dissonance reduction,

for example: *Mindlab* is a laboratory in which we manage to switch it off. The protagonist relives a number of experiences and can't park them behind that screen in their brain any longer. What happens then? It's a good thing we have cognitive dissonance reduction, but it would also be good if we could override it sometimes. That gives you a new perspective on things.'

Why is theatre a good way of getting a dialogue going?

'Because it can get under your skin. A show like this is not a documentary. Things happen in it that expose people's inner world. And it is a live experience. The fact that you experience it together has an effect. When people are silent or laugh together, that tells you something about group dynamics. It is a mirror that shows you that you are not alone, it gives you a shared frame of reference.' ■

See for yourself?

The Wageningen performances of *Mindlab* relate to all WUR staff (including PhD students but not other students). The TMRK show will be performed between 28 November and 13 December, with 18 performances on campus (in Omnia) and two in Lelystad. For more details and to book, scan the QR code.





THE SIDE JOB

You've got to make ends meet somehow. We can all borrow from Uncle Duo, but there are also students who earn money in unusual ways. In this series, we put some interesting side jobs in the spotlight. This time *Resource* talks to the WURwolf. This mascot comes to life not at full moon but at events such as openings, receptions and the AID. Text Steven Snijders

'I lead a double life. Most of the time I am a student, but from time to time I turn into the WURwolf. My identity as a human being is secret. It's not important. I want to uphold the fairy tale of the WURwolf: Wolf is alive and well! As Wolf, I can only use sign language, but that works perfectly well. Students like to give me a high five and

'The Wolf does like mischief'

have their picture taken with me. Even Louise Fresco, the former president of WUR, came and gave Wolf a fist bump. As Wolf, I get to places I don't get to as a student, like the festive opening of Aurora. Or on stage with the DJ, to dance. Wolf was kidnapped once. A white van drove onto the grass near Forum and I was bundled into the back of it. It turned out to be my transport to a beer cantus.

'The suit gets terribly hot, though. It's got a little fan inside it, but I still sweat buckets. It's heavy too. You've got to be fit to do this job. I was WURwolf once when it was 38 degrees. Then I had to take off the suit within 15 minutes, for



Photo Spreadthewurd

It's fun being the WURwolf

Who: The WURwolf

What: the WURwolf is the WUR mascot

Why? He keeps everyone entertained and he's allowed to get into mischief

Hourly wage: €15 per session (30 min-45 min)

safety's sake. Wolf is always accompanied by someone who makes sure things run smoothly and that the WURwolf doesn't faint, for instance. Or fall down the stairs. You look out through the mesh of the mouth, so you can't see very well. But I'm an experienced and mature Wolf nowadays, and I can move about very well in the suit.

'Another nice thing about it is that Wolf doesn't have to follow all the normal social rules. As Wolf, I sometimes walk into a random classroom where students are doing group work. I shake hands with everyone and they're all amused. Or I steal someone's pen and just go off with it. Wolf does like getting into mischief. By the way, we are looking for more partners in crime, students interested in doing this too.'

Do you have an unusual side job or know someone else who does? Send an email to steven.snijders@wur.nl

Flower hunting

In this series, student editor and MSc student of Plant Breeding Julia van der Westhuyzen (photos and text) and professor of Plant Ecology Joop Schaminée (stories) go looking for the loveliest campus flora.



Musk mallow

Common name: Musk mallow

Scientific name: *Malva moschata*

Location on campus: all around the botanical garden

Flowering time: July to September

There are five *Malva* species in the Netherlands, and one of them is the musk mallow, named for its pleasant musky fragrance. In the Netherlands, the musk mallow is often found in built-up areas – on road verges, for instance. An example of what we call an opportunistic species. The musk mallow has many uses, from an ingredient in perfume to a garden cultivar to medicinal purposes. After flowering, the plant grows a fruit that looks just like a round, flat Emmental cheese. Hence the Dutch name *kaasjeskruid* (cheese herb). As a child in Limburg, my friends and I liked foraging for these fruits and eating them, although this species was rare back then. Another species, *Malva sylvestris*, did grow there. We weren't the only ones to have snacked on these plants. The story goes that Jesus was hungry once, but his mother, Mary, could not afford to buy bread. When the baker gave them free bread, Jesus told Mary to pick one of these plants and take it to the baker. Upon arrival, she found the fruit had turned into gold!



Flavours of WUR

Guido Camps (39), a researcher in Human Nutrition and OnePlanet, shares a recipe for an autumnal pumpkin pie.

Autumnal pumpkin pie

'In America, they have the incomprehensible habit of baking a pie crust first, and then filling it with apple, cherries or sweet potato and putting it back in the oven. The result is a sweet twice-baked pie that you can hardly get a knife through. In the autumn, you can't go anywhere in the US without coming across products with pumpkin spice, from a latte to body lotion. This spice mix was originally used for pumpkin pie, a quintessential autumnal dessert. It's good to make it once, if only to go back to baking good old Dutch apple pie afterwards.'

'I give my students the opportunity to request pie recipes during the course. I create secret Brightspace modules for them. Surprisingly, American-style pies are always very popular there.'

- 1 Rub the flour, butter, sugar and salt together to make a breadcrumb texture (or use a food processor). Slowly add water to form a smooth ball. Wrap the dough in foil and let it rest in the fridge for 1 hour.
- 2 Roll out the dough, line the pie dish with it and pinch it around the edge. Let it rest in the fridge again while you preheat the oven to 180 degrees. Bake the dough in 2 steps: first blind (with baking beans to weigh it down), and then empty, both times for about 10 minutes, until both edge and base look dry.
- 3 Cut the pumpkin into pieces and steam it in a sealed container in the microwave for about 6 minutes

Ingredients (for a small pie dish):

Crust

115g butter, 150g flour, pinch of salt, teaspoon of sugar, a few tablespoons of cold water

Filling

a pumpkin, a tin of condensed milk, 1 egg, 3 heaped tablespoons of brown sugar, *koek en speculaaskruiden* (Dutch spice mix), vanilla essence, salt



until tender. Let it cool, skin and mash it.

- 4 Mix the pumpkin puree with the egg and the condensed milk, brown sugar, salt, vanilla and spices to taste. Stir well.
- 5 Now fill the pre-baked crust with the pumpkin filling and return the pie to the oven. If the edge of the crust starts to burn, cover it with aluminium foil. Bake the pie for about 35 minutes until it is firm in the middle.

90 minutes of war

This month sees the kick-off of the controversial World Cup in Qatar. Koen Janssen, editor in WUR's communications department, wrote a book about the explosive mix of politics and the World Cup.

Why a book about the World Cup and politics?

'Years ago, I read an article that briefly referred to how West Germany's World Cup win in 1954 had given that country a tremendous boost. Shortly before, it was still deep in the doldrums as a result of World War II. Ever since then, I have been fascinated by the combination of sport and politics. The book starts with the first World Cup in 1930. I don't cover all the World Cups, but jump around in the history. So you see how the World Cup was used for political ends related to World War II, decolonization, the Cold War, drug wars in Colombia, and so on. I cover about 16 World Cups in total. There are enough historians and sociologists who have studied the history of football. In their research, they don't focus on the game itself so much as on the world around it:

the political and social impact, identity and nationalism, themes like that. Books get written about every World Cup. My German is not bad and I can also read French and Spanish, and that gives you a lot of sources you can use.'

How do you deal with people's biases when it comes to football?

'As I did my research, I had to be alert to myths. For the Dutch, for example, there is the 1974 World Cup final that was lost 2-1 to Germany. We think: those Germans dived in the penalty area and that's why we lost. But Neeskens scored a goal for the Netherlands with a penalty that should never have been given: the foul was made outside the penalty area. It was a German goal that was wrongly disallowed. If you're not being partisan, it really should have been 3-0 for Germany. Because of the Dutch trauma, that has been etched in the national memory differently.'

There has been quite a furore about the World Cup in Qatar. Will you be watching?

'The World Cup in Qatar is crazy in so many ways. The corruption and bribery through which Qatar was awarded the World Cup; the bizarre idea of playing football in the desert where there's no real football culture; the fact that so many stadiums are being built for a few games; the workers who have died building those stadiums; and so on. But I will still watch. I am under no illusion that I will make a difference if I don't. These days we can be quite purist about "right" and "wrong", but it's obvious that our own government struggles with it too. They can say, "it's wrong, we won't go," but right now we just can't afford that. If we don't want to depend on Russia for gas, we've got to get it from somewhere else.'



Resource gets to raffle one copy of Koen Janssen's book, *90 Minuten Oorlog* (90 Minutes of War), among people who email the correct answer to the following question to resource@wur.nl.

'In 1969, two countries fought a brief war two weeks after a heated World Cup qualifying match. This conflict is known as 'The Football War'. Which two countries were involved?'

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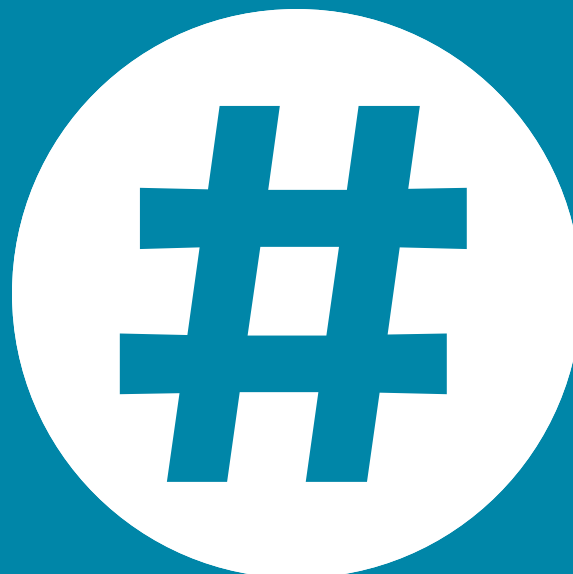
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CAFETERIA OPENS BRANCH IN OMNIA

The dialogue centre Omnia is getting a second caterer: Cafeteria De Berg will open its doors next to Faculty Club Novum in two weeks' time.

‘Essentially, we are joining forces,’ says the owner of De Berg, Joost Hofstee. It was Hofstee who took the initiative to approach the Omnia caterer Hutten. Hofstee: ‘I got more and more people coming in looking pale with shock and hunger. They were new graduates with a Master’s or a PhD and they wanted a drink and a snack at the Faculty Club — until they saw the prices on the menu. Which are incredible! I admit, what you get there is pretty good, but at our place you get more for your money: heaps of *bitterballen*, including vegetarian ones. And that’s exactly what they ordered. My wife and I were sitting on the sofa at home one evening when I suddenly said: “I see an opportunity!”’

Omnia manager David Duku: ‘At our venue, you can host delegations and clients in style. Of course, the prices reflect that. We serve delicious specialty beers with names like Pieper and our appetisers tickle the

taste buds. And we get showered with compliments about the look of the place. Still, Mr Hofstee’s phone call got me thinking.’

De Berg will have its own corner in the Faculty Club. ‘The budget option,’ the two men say in unison. Duku: ‘This way, everyone can enjoy this beautiful establishment and still keep body and soul together. Win-win, I reckon!’ Asking around on the campus makes clear that this idea is likely to succeed. A poll of 43 students and staff suggests that people will be more inclined to grab a drink at the Club. Hofstee: ‘A sneak preview for you: we are now developing our own version of the traditional Dutch *kapsalon* (a takeaway dish of fries, meat and cheese) that will get taste buds tingling in our restaurant too. I am thinking of calling it Duku’s Delight. But I am open to suggestions.’