

Resource

APRIL 2024 VOLUME 18

The journalism platform for all at Wageningen University & Research

Festival 0317
in harbour area

Lower cholesterol
with PFAS

Home testing
for pet food

Impulse coffee grounds
good for guts

Growing mussels
in the ocean

Wageningen in wartime
WUR student never
returned | p.14



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FOREWORD

Freedom and silence

Internationals who experience the two minutes of silence on 4 May and take part in Wageningen's Liberation Day Festival on 5 May for the first time may not know why Wageningen plays such an important role in the remembrance of the Second World War. It is because the surrender of the Germans in the Netherlands in 1945, after five years of occupation, was signed in Hotel de Wereld in the town centre. Every year around this time, *Resource* publishes an article about WUR and the history of the war. For example, about Wageningen student Etienne Puylaert, who refused to sign the mandatory declaration of loyalty to the Nazis for students and ended up in a labour camp. This year, we were tipped off about the story of Agricultural College student Bernhard van Gelder who was living at Gravinnestraat 2 during the war, now the home of WUR library employee Dannie de Kleijn. Bernhard was deported to Auschwitz and never returned (p. 14). Unfortunately, people are still waging wars and killing others today. That is a sad observation. Every day of freedom is a day to be cherished.

While not a comparable situation, the freedom and independence of editorial boards like *Resource* is also essential to a properly functioning, transparent and safe university. There have been several incidents recently undermining this: in Eindhoven, the editor-in-chief was suspended because of an article the executive board didn't like, and in Delft last week the university magazine *Delta* had to remove an article following legal threats (p. 5). Even when you live in freedom, journalists can be silenced.

Willem Andréé
Editor-in-chief





RAVEN STUDY

Which young ravens will get the five transmitters funded by the Dobberke grant (see *Resource #11*) awarded to Lysanne Sniijders, a researcher in the Behavioural Ecology group (Animal Sciences)? To decide that, you first need to find out which raven pairs have bred successfully and which chicks in the nests are sufficiently robust to carry the lightweight transmitters (less than three per cent of their bodyweight). The Dutch Raven Working Group is assessing that during their annual ringing sessions, in which they carry out a careful process of ringing, measuring, weighing and taking crop and cloacal samples. The workers can't reach every nest and some nests turned out to have been attacked by predators, but this one was fine: three healthy chicks about 28 days old. ME

For more about the raven study, see this QR code



Photo Marieke Enter

Summervibes line-up announced

Festival sensation Prins S. en De Geit will be the main act at the campus festival. The band from The Hague mixes pop sung in Dutch with hip-hop and electronic music. With hits including *Kinderboerderij* and *Rood Staan Hard Gaan*, Prins S. en De Geit have previously performed at Lowlands, Pinkpop and Rock Werchter. The programme also includes brass band Broken Brass, a Queen cover band and party band Daredevils. Carolien Berkhof, responsible for the festival communications, says, 'The music programme has now been finalized. We will also have the swing carousel that was such a success in 2023 and of course there will be a wide range of food and drink on offer.'

The first edition of the Summervibes festival was held last year. Despite the rain, some thousand visitors danced to the music of performers such as Kenny B. This year's Summervibes will take place on Thursday 20 June, from 16:00 to 23:00. LZ



Photo Sven Menschel



Student rowing club Argo has seen a slight increase in its FOS budget over the past 10 years • Photo Guy Ackermans

Redistribution of financial support for student societies

If the Student Service Centre (SSC) has its way, more associations will be able to apply for the financial support for students (FOS) as compensation for delaying their graduation when they do something like serve on a board for a year. This should lead to a broader range of associations, but it will negatively affect the budgets of the large student societies.

We learn this from Rutger Kroes of the SSC. He says some societies currently miss out on funding because certain rules determining who can get it don't work well in practice. One of the conditions for support, for example,

'We hope this will encourage a broader range of associations'

is that every Wageningen student is welcome at the society. Kroes: 'That sounds great but if you interpret it too strictly, it doesn't work well in practice. Now country-based and regional societies don't get FOS, whereas Christian ones do – on paper they welcome everyone, but perhaps not everyone would feel at home there.' The basic principle – that everyone should be welcome – still holds, says Kroes. 'But now we have added that it's okay for a society to focus on a particular target group.' In addition,

more study associations will be able to apply for FOS. 'We hope this will encourage a broader range of associations.'

Increase

The big student societies, which have traditionally received a large share of the FOS budget, are critical of the proposal. Student Council party VeSte and the Wageningen Federation of Student Associations (WKvK) argue for an increase in the FOS budget instead of a redistribution. They 'entirely agree' with the proposal that more associations should receive funding, but believe 'that shouldn't happen at the expense of the FOS budget that is now well spent by the large societies.' The WKvK and VeSte have written to the rector expressing their concerns. The proposal is likely to be discussed by the WUR Council in June. LZ

Read more on page 20.

15k

‘Welcome to Omnia, Meetings and Symposia. Omni-ya-ya.’ Omnia manager Chris van Kreij caused an intranet sensation with his parody of Joost Klein’s *Europapa*, Holland’s submission for the 2024 Eurovision Song Contest. His video clip on YouTube has now had more than 15,000 views. Van Kreij: ‘Some colleagues were so enthusiastic about the project they came into campus on their day off to help with the recording.’ DV

Violence on campus

At the start of April, a Chinese PhD candidate had stones thrown at him and was beaten up on campus. The assault took place late at night outside the Forum. The victim was so badly hurt he had to be taken to hospital to have his injuries treated.

The violent incident has made many in the international community feel unsafe, a feeling some have had for some time in Wageningen. In a letter to the university and the municipality, representatives of the international community say there have been other incidents too where international student have had stones or eggs thrown at them. They say ‘local youths’ hurl insults at them and exhibit other forms of aggressive and undesirable behaviour.

The police are conducting investigations, but no one has been arrested as yet. LZ



Attacks on independence of university media condemned

***Delta* – Delft University of Technology’s equivalent of *Resource* – removed a critical article from its website last week after the university put legal pressure on the magazine. The Dutch Union of Journalists (NVJ), the Association for Science Journalism and the Editors-in-Chief Group are among those firmly condemning the move.**

It all started with a critical report by the education inspectorate about personal safety at Delft University. The executive board did not accept the conclusions, criticized the inspectorate’s methodology and threatened legal action. The *Delta* editors reported on this affair from an independent perspective. That included a critical article on how staff at the Innovation & Impact Centre had been affected by the duty of secrecy imposed on them by the university regarding the functioning of their director. But *Delta* was forced to remove the article from the website following legal threats: the executive board threatened to hold the editor-in-chief and other editors financially liable for any damage suffered by the university. The executive board has since offered its excuses for what happened.

However, the NVJ and Editors-in-Chief Group say this is not enough. There have been several examples recently of pressure being put on editorial boards: in Eindhoven, for example, the editor-in-chief was suspended following an article the university didn’t like. In Dutch newspaper *NRC*, Matthijs Valent of the NVJ wrote: ‘The modus operandi is to use the heavy artillery straight away.’ That is why it is important to have robust editorial charters for all media publications in higher education, say the interest groups. Willem Andrée, the editor-in-chief of *Resource* and chair of the Editors-in-Chief Group, advocates a new approach: ‘Anchor our position of independence in law and let the Ministry of Education fund the editorial boards. Because however robust our charters are, at present we still depend on the people we are reporting on for our funding. And as we have seen in Eindhoven and Delft, sometimes they try to silence us.’

The issue has attracted the attention of politicians too: MP Luc Stultiens (GroenLinks-PvdA party) put questions in Parliament to outgoing Education minister Robbert Dijkgraaf about protecting the independence of university media publications. R

Festival 0317 in harbour area this year

Preparations are in full swing for the second outdoor edition of the Wageningen festival 0317 on Saturday 22 June. The festival will be in the Rhine harbour area rather than Torckpark, where it was last year.

Preparations are in full swing for the second outdoor edition of the Wageningen festival 0317 on Saturday 22 June. The festival will be in the Rhine harbour area rather than Torckpark, where it was last year.

It has had to move due to the many complaints from local residents. 'Which is understandable as it was in the centre of town,' says Dirk Beukers, Urban Environmental Management student and a member of the popUPop team that is organizing the festival. Fewer people live in the harbour area and there is more space.

The concept for the 0317 festival is the same as last year. 'There will be a big stage for live performers, for example Afro-funk, perhaps some hip-hop and also electronic music. We really like it when you have an actual group on the main stage, rather than just a DJ or one person with a mike.' The smaller stage will have DJs from the Wageningen collectives MiniCulture and Grassroots Bass Collective. For more info and tickets, go to 0317festival.nl.

More info and tickets on 0317festival.nl.



Plaque back in Aula

The plaque with the names of WUR victims of the Second World War will be returned to the Aula. When WUR vacated the building, it took the plaque with it. Much to the annoyance of local historic buildings association Wageningen Monumentaal. They think the plaque is a municipal heritage object that WUR should not have been allowed to take. The plaque lists the names of 30 students and 5 members of staff of the then Agricultural College who were killed in the war. Since ownership of the building was transferred two years ago, the plaque has been in storage on campus. The names on the plaque include the Jewish student Bernhard van Gelder, who was seized and murdered in Auschwitz. He lived in what is now the home of WUR employee Dannie de Kleijn. On page 14, you can read the story of this student and the house he lived until shortly before his arrest and deportation to Auschwitz, where he was killed. The house on Gravinnestraat is part of the annual Jewish Open Houses route, which will take place this coming Sunday (28 April). RK • Photo Guy Ackermans

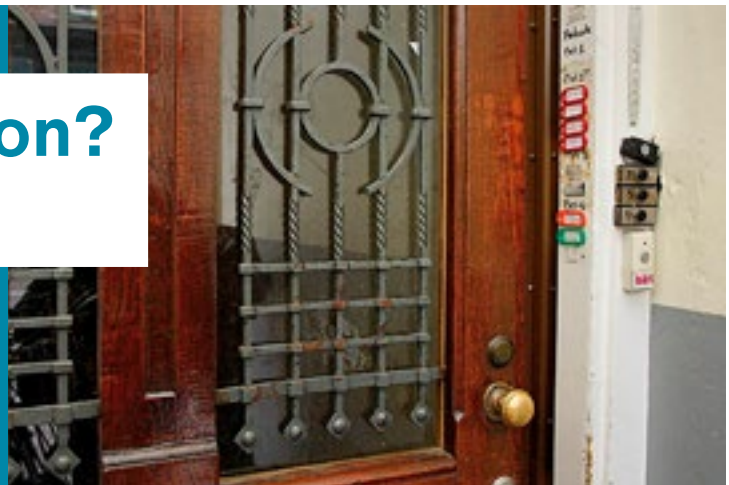
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Resource



Mussel farm with adjustable depth

Scientists at Wageningen Economic Research and Wageningen Economic Research are investigating whether a new concept for offshore mussel farms could work. This involves suspending mussel ropes out at sea using a steel structure with adjustable depths. Text Marieke Enter • Illustration Shutterstock

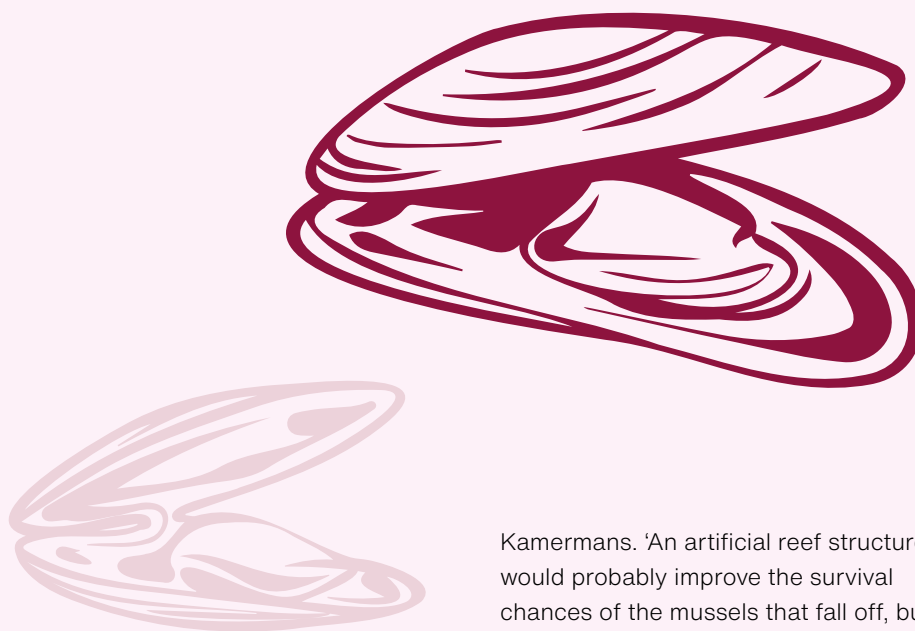
A mini version of the mussel farm was launched earlier this month. 'There are a lot of mussel larvae in the sea around the end of April, beginning of May,' explains shellfish researcher Pauline Kamermans. 'So it is important to have the test version already in the water so the larvae can latch onto it.' The eventual intended test location is Borssele wind farm, about 55 kilometres from the port of Vlissingen.

'It could result in ecologically important shellfish banks'

The idea for the mussel farm comes from OOS, a Zeeland company that manufactures steel offshore structures. The company came up with a pontoon-like structure designed specifically for use in wind farms, with four large legs connected by girders. Attached to this is a web of horizontal lines some dozens of metres long, with 'droppers' fastened on to the lines. These are the ropes hanging downwards that the mussel larvae latch onto, where they then grow and mature.

Adjustable depth

A distinctive feature of this farm is that the structure has an adjustable depth. It can be positioned just above the water's surface if people need to work on the pontoon, for example when harvesting the mussels, or metres below the surface to protect the mussels from the big ocean waves. 'Mussel farms are normally located in calmer waters,' explains Kamermans.



The research team will examine suitability for consumption — the mussels must be free of toxic algae — as well as mussel survival, growth and yields when cultivated using this method. Kamermans expects to be able to draw some conclusions already in the autumn. 'We are particularly interested in growth because the lines are quite close together — just a metre apart at the pontoon end. Does that lack of distance affect the growth or doesn't it matter as long as there are enough nutrients in the water?'

Shellfish bank

The research team is also investigating what happens under the platform, on the sea bed. 'Some of the mussels will drop off the ropes onto the bottom of the ocean. That could result in ecologically important shellfish banks,' explains

Kamermans. 'An artificial reef structure would probably improve the survival chances of the mussels that fall off, but we discovered it isn't possible to get a permit for that. That's why we are looking at what happens spontaneously. It will be interesting to compare this with another research site in the North Sea shallows near the delta, where we *will* be installing an artificial reef structure.' In addition to Wageningen Marine Research, Wageningen Economic Research is also involved in the pilot. These researchers will be organizing taste tests and will study the pricing of such mussels — and consequently the commercial viability of the concept. The pilot is part of the multi-year EU project ULTFarms, which includes similar pilots in Belgian, German and Danish wind farms.

[Live&Learn]

A botched experiment, a rejected paper: such things are soon labelled as failures in academia. As for talking about them – not done! But that is just what WUR scientists do in this column. Because failure has its uses. This time, we hear from Milena Holmgren, an associate professor of Wildlife Ecology & Conservation. Text and Illustration Stijn Schreven

‘For my PhD I wanted to do large-scale field research on the effect of fire in the mediterranean forests of Chile, my home country. The idea was to study the vegetation before and after a controlled fire, to see how resilient nature is.

It took me eight months to get the necessary permits and to document the vegetation. I made plans with the fire brigade for burning a wooded mountain slope. We made two attempts to start a fire but nothing would burn. At the third attempt, when it was hot and dry enough, the first big tree caught fire. And fell. And I burst into tears. Who was I to set fire to this tree, this forest? The tree burned down quickly but the fire stopped there and didn’t spread any further. It hadn’t worked, and that was fine by me. I was even grateful for it. You might think it was a shame to have spent all those months preparing for it, but I see it differently. I never call anything

a ‘failure’. I believe things either work or they don’t. The conditions were not right for the forest to catch fire, and that was okay. The lesson I learned from the fact that it didn’t work out how I wanted goes far deeper. I

‘When the first big tree caught fire, I burst into tears’

realized that my research goals were at odds with my ethical convictions. And I felt that I had no right to conduct such destructive experiments. In the end, we found an alternative method: we compared forests with different fire histories. We could answer the same questions, and on a larger scale, even. And without burning down even a single forest ourselves.’

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Impulse coffee grounds for healthy guts

Postdoc Melania Casertano (Food Quality and Design) is researching ways to upcycle food production residues to create new functional ingredients that benefit health. She recently looked at what to do with the grounds from the coffee machines in Impulse.

In their latest publication, Casertano and her colleagues describe methods for turning coffee grounds into ingredients that have a positive effect on your health. ‘We used the microwave assisted extraction technique. That involves heating the water molecules in the cells with microwaves. The moisture evaporates and the high pressure causes the structure of the plant cells to collapse. That releases useful substances that had previously been locked inside.’ Coffee grounds contain soluble fibres, as well as proteins and other bioactive substances that can be reused. ‘The soluble fibres that are released from the coffee grounds include inulin and oligosaccharides. They can be used as prebiotics (indigestible carbohydrates, ed.) that act as fuel for the bacteria in our guts – which in turn produce new substances that are good for your health, such as short-chain fatty acids and certain neurotransmitters.’

Ferrero

Casertano and her colleagues first studied this potential upcycling solution on a small scale, using five kilos of coffee grounds from Impulse. Now they know it works, they will see whether they can convert waste streams into valuable ingredients on a larger scale in partnership with food producers. But that means the solution has to be commercially viable.

‘We are currently looking at the coffee grounds of the chocolate and sweets manufacturer Ferrero. We are extracting functional ingredients that we then test in a gastro-intestinal tract simulator. That lets us determine whether these ingredients have a positive effect on our microbiome composition and whether the effect differs for similar products that aren’t from waste streams.’ DV





'PFAS accumulate in the environment, and in the human body. We still don't know enough about the effect such chemicals have on our bodies.' • Photo Shutterstock

Chemicals in the environment can benefit metabolism

PFAS chemicals reduce cholesterol and other fats in the blood plasma, show studies in mice by Brecht Attema (Human Nutrition and Health). She obtained her PhD earlier this month.

Complications in the metabolism, which can lead to diseases such as type 2 diabetes and obesity, are caused partly by the excess intake of calories and not enough exercise. But chemicals in the environment can also affect our metabolic health, as is confirmed by studies on mice performed by PhD candidate Brecht Attema (Human Nutrition and Health). She

'PFOA reduced levels of cholesterol and triglycerides in the blood plasma'

obtained her PhD at the start of April. 'I researched the role of chemicals in our environment and how they affect the liver in the light of metabolic complications such as type 2 diabetes and fatty liver disease,' says Attema. 'We know the group of chemicals known as PFAS accumulate in the environment and in the human body too. Only last month, high levels were found in the eggs of hobby chickens. But we don't yet know enough about the effect such substances have on the human body.' Attema examined the metabolism of

mice that had been exposed to the PFAS variant PFOA and to GenX, the recently developed alternative to PFOA. She also exposed the mice to the fungicide propiconazole, which is found in pesticides used on rye, wheat and stone fruit such as cherries and peaches.

More fat

'It is easier to measure the effects of the chemicals when the metabolism is already under some pressure,' explains Attema. 'So first we fed the mice a high-fat diet, which caused them to develop obesity and fatty liver disease. Then we exposed the mice to the chemicals to see what additional effect these substances had on their metabolism.'

Contrary to expectations, the chemicals had some positive effects. 'PFOA reduced levels of cholesterol and triglycerides (fats found in the blood, ed.) in the blood plasma. That is interesting because some people take medication precisely to achieve that same effect. The mechanism

whereby the chemicals have that effect is the same as in certain medicines known as fibrates. But exposure to both PFOA and GenX also had negative effects such as an accumulation of triglycerides, i.e. fat, in the liver.'

'Higher doses of the fungicide propiconazole reduced the bodyweight and levels of cholesterol and triglycerides in obese mice,' adds Attema. While this might sound positive, Attema also saw a big increase in liver fat and signs of an inflammatory response and scar tissue in the liver.

Caution needed

Just because we found the chemicals had some positive effects on the metabolic health of mice does not mean we no longer need to be so cautious about their use,' says Attema. 'The chemicals still have negative effects as well on the metabolism in the liver. And while some substances have the same effect or use the same mechanism as certain medicines, there is still a big difference between deliberately taking a medicine and unintentionally ingesting uncontrolled dosages of particular chemicals.' DV

PhD theses **in a nutshell**

Safe brushes

To make printheads dust-proof, highly fluoridated materials are used, which are toxic and will soon be banned in the EU. Annemieke van Dam has developed a safer and more environmentally friendly alternative: polymer brushes. These polymer coatings stick to the surface on one side, while working like a brush on the other side to keep it all clean. If that brush is long enough (a chain of nine or more carbon atoms) it is self-healing as well: it repairs itself when damaged. A nice example of improving the world, as her title suggests. *Improving the world one monomer at a time.*

Annemieke van Dam ◀ **Supervisor Han Zuilhof.** RK

Root architecture

The root systems of plants are largely invisible, and therefore quite a mystery. How plants make lateral roots has never been fully explained. Yes, we know that the growth hormone auxin plays a key role. But precisely how the mechanism works and which internal or external stimuli drive it is not clear. Kavya Yalamanchili from India sheds some light on the matter in her PhD thesis. She figured out which genes play a role in initiating root formation in the model plant the thale cress. But the bigger picture of the interplay between the root and the soil around it remains a mystery.

Digging Deeper.

Kavya Yalamanchili ◀ **Supervisors Viola Willemsen and Ben Scheres.** RK

Twice as harmful

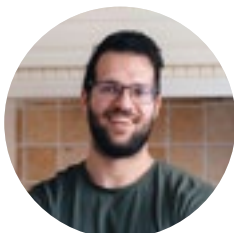
Both microplastic and pesticides pose their own threat to soil health. But what is their combined effect? And does it make any difference whether the plastic is new or is old and partially broken down? Hui Ju from China studied the spreading of the pesticide chlorpyrifos by earthworms in the presence of either biodegradable or non-biodegradable plastic. The results are disturbing. Non-biodegradable plastic causes the pesticide to spread further in the soil. The presence of the microplastic also inhibits the breakdown of the pesticide. What is more, tests on radishes show that the plant absorbs more pesticide from soil that is polluted with older microplastics and pesticides. So with pollution, like other things: one plus one equals more than two.

Soil health risks caused by interactions of microplastics and pesticides. **Hui Ju** ◀ **Supervisor**

Violette Geissen. RK

THE PROPOSITION

PhD students explain their most thought-provoking proposition. This time it is the turn of Reinier Egas, who graduated with a PhD on 23 April. His research was on the physiology of acidophilic sulphate-reducing bacteria that can clean up acidic metallic wastewater streams from mining.



‘Privatizing public transport is a prime example of political cognitive dissonance’

‘The privatization of public transport has created an uneasy political tension between, for example, the economic priorities and the sustainability priorities of the Dutch government. The government aims at public transport services that are accessible, reliable, sustainable and affordable. Theoretically, privatization advances these goals through competition and innovation, but that’s not how it works in practice.

The reason for that is that privatization simply means that the main priority is making a profit. In remote areas, bus routes are cut because they are not

profitable, forcing travellers to opt for other means of transport. And the off-peak discount introduced to reduce passenger numbers in the rush hour is really just a rush-hour surcharge for people who can’t choose their own working hours. Both problems are clashes of interests, since the more expensive option is logical for the company. With the cabinet formation still in full swing, the politicians should seek the solution that is best for the Dutch people.

I advocate an emphasis on sustainability, accessibility and affordability. That calls for government investments in the short term that will improve wellbeing and sustainability in the long term. Surely those should be the government’s priorities?’ DV

Computer says no



Sjoukje Osinga

A student emails me to ask if I can disenrol her for my course, because she enrolled by mistake. Now she can't enrol for the course she *does* want to take. The next day, I get emails from the teacher of that course and from her study advisor: please could I disenrol her quickly? Smart of the student to mobilize two teachers and a study advisor to undo her mistake, but since the advent of Osiris, I can't disenrol students anymore. Why on earth not? It would be so helpful if I could just rectify this straightaway. Instead of which, all teachers have to forward all

'To believe that Osiris is there to help us is a misunderstanding'

requests to enrol or disenrol to the secretaries, who are the only ones who are allowed to do it. It must be driving them crazy.

Another thing: some students have the right to take their exams in quiet rooms. The timetabling department arranges rooms and invigilators for them. It's a guessing game, as they don't know how many students to expect. Because that information is only accessible for teachers, in Osiris. So every teacher has to email the timetabling department for every exam. This must entail hundreds of emails. Wouldn't it be handier if the timetabling department could simply look up the number of students involved in Osiris? With an automated search, you can get those numbers in no time. The timetablers don't even have to know who

the students are. But that's not possible, because Osiris was designed without this question in mind.

And while we're at it: the stages of writing a Master's thesis (research proposal, learning goals, progress report, etc) now have to be recorded in Osiris. Students have to take the initiative for each stage, otherwise I can't even see them in the system. Then I get assigned a task, but as soon as I've ticked that box, the student disappears from my screen and I can't find him or her anywhere. And actually, it would be nice to see an overview of all the Master's students I am currently supervising. Apparently it's possible, but nobody knows how.

To believe that Osiris is there to help us is a misunderstanding. Osiris was designed to support certain processes in the interests of quality control. A design based on supporting the staff and making smart use of available information would be quite a different matter.

Sjoukje Osinga (56) 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

The new rector Carolien Kroeze

‘Making researchers happier’

Carolien Kroeze became rector of WUR on 8 March 2024. ‘We are facing an unprecedented global challenge in terms of the climate, water, biodiversity and sustainable food production, and I can’t see that anyone understands these issues better than we do.’

From her office on the sixth floor of Atlas, her gaze sweeps over the sunlit campus. Her new job demands a new perspective. ‘I can’t fall back on routine anymore; everything is different. I’m leaving scientific practice behind me to some extent.’ The hardest thing about that, explains Kroeze, is saying goodbye to her PhD candidates and students. ‘But luckily, I got to talk to a big group of Bachelor’s students at the opening of the Honours Programme at the end of February. It was nice to talk about science.’ This wasn’t a pre-planned career move for the new rector magnificus. ‘I’m not the kind of person who says: at the end of my career I’ll be a rector. I just want to contribute something, in whatever job I do.’ She spent a couple of years on the Academic Board and at



Text Willem Andréé

the Wageningen graduate schools, and she coordinated the government’s sector plan funds, after which she thought: I don’t want to advise the Executive Board anymore, I want to be the one getting the advice. ‘So as to make decisions.’ Kroeze stresses that she does that with others, and that the decisions concern the world beyond the campus. ‘We are facing an unprecedented global challenge: how can we produce food sustainably on a planet suffering from climate change, biodiversity loss and water shortages? I can’t see that anyone understands these issues better than we do. But we can only tackle the problems together with others. Our slogan “Finding answers together” is one I fully endorse.’

Good listener

After it became known that Kroeze would follow Arthur Mol as rector, *Resource* went around campus asking people what they thought. Most comments were positive: ‘She’s a good listener’, ‘she is thorough’ and ‘an academic mother figure’. Lovely words, but in this position you sometimes have to do things that mean people don’t think you’re so nice. ‘Of course you also have to be strong and firm. At the Open University I was Vice Dean in a period of cutbacks and a reorganization. I had to make some difficult decisions. If you are

Carolien Kroeze

She’s not very keen to talk about her private life, actually. It takes a little persuasiveness to find out that she’s been living in Wageningen for 20 years, and that she often goes for an evening walk on campus. ‘I have seen the university move from the town to the present campus. I think it’s a pity that WUR has become less visible in the town, and that’s why I want to invest in Wageningen town.’ Kroeze has two sons living at home and a partner with four daughters, and she’s on the sidelines of a korfbal or football pitch every weekend. She likes listening to music and she looks after her mother. ‘As a northerner, I feel I belong in Wageningen nowadays. It took a while, not having a technical degree. In the old days that made you an outsider, ha-ha.’ Kroeze studied Biology at the University of Groningen and got her PhD in Environmental Sciences at the University of Amsterdam. ‘After that I was a postdoc at the RIVM (the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment) and in 1995 I got a postdoc position in Wageningen. I’ve done all sorts of things over the years since then, but I’ve always worked for WUR.’

transparent, keep listening and stick to your plan, you connect with people and keep them on board.’

Alongside her work as a professor, until recently she worked on two large dossiers: she chaired the advisory committee to the Executive Board on collaboration with fossil fuel companies such as Shell, and she was involved in the Academic Career Framework. This new evaluation system has four cornerstones on which the evaluation of academics should be based: education, research, impact and services. ‘The aim is to make our researchers happier and thus improve our science.’

She doesn’t see it as a problem that she was chair of the advisory committee on collaboration with the fossil industry until shortly before becoming rector. ‘That plan was approved by the Executive Board at that time. Now there is a framework for testing potential partners. And I support it wholeheartedly.’

Independent

Talking of the fossil industry: more and more often, staff and students ask WUR to take a stand on issues such as the war in Palestine or the climate crisis. ‘As a knowledge

institute, we work on education, research and value creation. We shouldn’t take positions on political and legal issues. Of course, it’s fine for scientists to make statements based on their knowledge of their field on something like climate change, for example. But as an institution we shouldn’t jeopardize our independence.’

Kroeze has resolved to be visible for staff and students and – in collaboration with them, of course – to make sure WUR keeps its global status at the top among knowledge institutions. ‘We must make a contribution to sustainable food production so there is enough to eat for everyone in the world. The climate is changing, we are facing loss of biodiversity and water shortages, and geopolitical relations are coming under pressure. We will have to stay ahead of the game to keep our leading position — take the political developments in the Netherlands regarding internationalization.’ ■

‘As an institution we mustn’t jeopardize our independence’



‘You have to tackle the global problems of climate and food together with others. Our slogan “Finding answers together” is one I fully endorse.’
Photo Duncan de Fey

The Jewish student who tried to save his parents

WUR STUDENT NEVER RETURNED HOME

Library employee Dannie de Kleijn's house was once home to the Jewish student Bernhard van Gelder, who was murdered in Auschwitz. A commemorative paving stone will be placed in front of the house. Text Roelof Kleis • Illustration Valerie Geelen

One stone in the pavement outside Gravinnestraat 2 in Wageningen is different from the others. On it is written: 'Boas Roffesa 1900-1943 instrument maker'. Roffesa lived at this address with his wife Anna during World War II. But the Roffesas were not the only residents. From November 1940 until the spring of 1943, Bernhard van Gelder, a student at the Higher Agricultural College, lived here too. He didn't get beyond the foundation year at the college; he died in Auschwitz. Dannie de Kleijn, the Front Office team leader at the Forum Library, had been living on Gravinnestraat for about five years when a letter landed on the doormat outlining plans for a paving stone to commemorate what happened to Boas Roffesa during the war. This was in 2012. But the history really came alive when De Kleijn was approached by the Open

Jewish Houses route organization. 'They asked whether we wanted to take part by telling the story of the former Jewish occupants of our house. That's how it started.' By now it was 2019, just before the Covid-19 pandemic broke out. After the pandemic, she embarked on some research. At that point she had held two 'open houses' and had mainly told the story of Boas and Anna. But now she turned her attention to Bernhard's story – or as much of it as she could find, since information was scarce.

Clandestine

Bernhard van Gelder was born in The Hague on 23 February 1916, the youngest son of Rabbi Izak van Gelder and his wife Lea Coster. He was one of eight children. In October 1936, at the age of 20, he left for Groningen to study at the Agricultural College. There he met his future wife, Martha, the daughter of the well-known local photographer Joël de Lange, who, like Van Gelder, was of Jewish descent. It is not known when the young couple got married. Bernhard decided to pursue further studies in Wageningen, where he enrolled to

study Dutch Agriculture in the academic year 1939-1940. He lodged with a Jewish landlady in Renkum for a year, then moved to Veenendaal for seven months before arriving at Gravinnestraat in Wageningen at the end of November 1940, six months after the start of the war for the Netherlands. Exactly what Bernhard did during the war years is not known. His name was no longer in the registers of the Agricultural College, and yet the annual report of 1942 mentions that he passed his foundation-year exam on 21 April. Clandestinely, because Jewish students were banned from higher education.

Auschwitz

In February 1943, Bernhard's parents were seized and transported to Camp Westerbork in the Netherlands. On 10 March, they were put on a train to Sobibor concentration camp in Poland, where they were murdered on arrival on 13 March. When Bernhard heard that his parents had been arrested, he left for his parental home. 'Somebody,' says De Kleijn, 'we don't know who, sent him a message saying that if he turned himself in, his parents would be freed. So he went, in spite of warnings from those around him not to believe that promise.' The warnings were well-founded. Bernhard and Martha were arrested in



Bernhard & Martha van Gelder



The Hague and brought to Camp Vught in the Netherlands on 2 April 1943. His parents had died six weeks earlier. Documents in the Arolsen Archive (of victims of the Nazi regime) show that Bernhard and Martha arrived in Camp Westerbork on 2 July. They stayed there for two and a half months before being transported to Auschwitz on 21 September. Bernhard was murdered on arrival two days later. Martha survived the camp, remarried after the war and emigrated to Toronto in Canada, where she died in April 2008.

Unclear portrait

Those are just the bare facts. But who was Bernhard van Gelder? What were his plans? What were his dreams? And above all: what did he look like? De Kleijn does have an answer to the last question. Thanks to contact with a distant relative, she got hold of a family photo with

Bernhard and Martha in it. Small and unclear, but it does fill a gap. Close study of the small amount of archive material reveals a few more details. According to the Westerbork records, Bernhard was a teacher of agriculture and Hebrew. He was also assessed as ‘able to perform independently and interact well with an audience’. The notes on his physical condition say: ‘limps, otherwise healthy.’ Documents from the Jewish Council tell a story too. In 1943, Bernhard and

When Bernhard heard that his parents had been arrested, he left for his parental home

Martha were working towards emigrating to Palestine. De Kleijn even believes that the aim of studying in Wageningen was to equip him for a new livelihood in Palestine. The papers seemed to be in order by 31 August, three weeks before his transportation to Auschwitz. On 27 September, the emigration department records with bureaucratic precision: ‘Further action is pointless. 23/9.’ The day Bernhard van Gelder was gassed. ■

The Open Jewish Houses route takes place on Sunday 28 April. Information is available on the website of Wageningen 45.





VISUM MUNDI

The conversion of the Aula auditorium in Wageningen into a movie theatre is almost complete. Heerenstraat Theater's newest film theatre has seating for 120 spectators. They will be a lot more comfortable in their armchairs than the generations of spectators who watched the thousands of PhD candidates defend their theses. But the average film also lasts longer than the one hour allowed for the PhD defence. The film theatre is part of Visum Mundi ('view of the world'), as the Aula is now called. In addition to this room, the building comprises a spacious foyer with bar and an escape room. It is not yet known when the first film will be shown. ^{BK}

Photo Guy Ackermans

Pet owners can test dog and cat food at home

Pet-food producers usually test their products for flavour and digestibility in research facilities, but pet owners can also test them at home, shows research by alumnus Evelien Bos. She already offers home tests through her startup Pet Panel, for which she has been nominated for a Wageningen Entrepreneurship Grant.

To determine the quality of their products, pet food producers test them for tastiness and digestibility, usually on cats and dogs in testing facilities. That has its advantages: the conditions are standardized and controlled by the researchers who carry out the tests. But how closely does it resemble the real world for dogs, cats and their owners at home? For her PhD research, Evelien Bos developed a protocol for testing the tastiness and digestibility of pet food in the home. This can provide producers with important information about how the foods do in practice, and it offers an alternative to keeping animals in testing facilities. Bos: 'My passion is to improve animal welfare and to bridge the gap between science and the real world, in the course of my study I visited a lot of people at home, and it was really worthwhile to do the research with them.' Bos developed guidelines for conducting a reliable home test. It proved possible to do the tests quickly. 'Pets get used to

the new pet food within a couple of days, and they can soon make clear which pet food they prefer.' And that's important, because however healthy and nutritious a pet food is, if the pet turns its nose up at it, that's irrelevant. 'Tastes vary, it's quite simple.'

Poop

Owners receive weighed portions of the pet food in the post, and the first test is an acceptance test: does the animal want to eat the food? In another test, the animal gets to choose between two kinds of food. The owner retains the uneaten food and keeps a diary about the pet's behaviour. 'Pet owners know their pets inside out, and can evaluate their behaviour themselves,' says Bos. 'What

is more, they are the customer in the end, so their opinion is very relevant to a producer.'

Bos also asks owners to take samples of poop from their pets, because that provides valuable information. 'We can determine the nutritional value, meaning how many of the nutrients actually get digested and absorbed. That varies quite a bit between animals because factors such as sex, age, body weight and activity levels can affect it. With the home tests, animals of all breeds and sizes can take part, and so we can gather information about the whole pet population. Or we can create testing



Text Tessa Louwerens



Companies join forces

Evelien Bos's PhD research was partly financed by nine companies in the animal feed industry. All the companies donated a sum to University Fund Wageningen, amounting to a total of about 325,000 euros. Bos: 'It is quite unique for all these companies, who are normally each other's competitors, to invest jointly. That shows how important this is to the whole industry.'

panels with a representative group of animals which a particular product is made for.’

Startup

Bos got her PhD last November and started her company Pet Panel early this year, together with two partners. Pet-food producers can request tests from them. ‘I already got lots of requests for home tests from pet-food producers when I was doing my PhD. I couldn’t provide them then, but it did make me think. I have the expertise and the network. And I don’t want my research results to end up only on bookshelves.’

Bos has been nominated for the Wageningen Entrepreneurship Grant, awarded by WUR every year to young entrepreneurs who make a social impact. She will be in the finals on 22 May. ‘I’m really looking forward to it and of course I hope I win.’

She would use the prize money of 25,000 euros to upscale Pet Panel. ‘Normally, when you start a business, you start from scratch but because I was already working on it during my PhD research, the test applications are coming in thick and fast. That’s terrific, but it’s a challenge as well. Because we need a lot more test panel members.’

And as if she wasn’t busy enough already,

Bos is starting a postdoctoral study soon. She wants to develop an indigestible marker with which she can study digestibility even better in uncontrolled conditions like the home situation. ‘My idea is to spend about 70 per cent of my time on Pet Panel and about 30 per cent on my postdoc.’ ■

For more information or to join a test panel, see: www.petpanel.nl

‘I don’t want my research results to end up only on bookshelves’



Pet Panel testers Kerel (left) and Pippa • Photo Arjan Ligtermoet

Redistribution of funding for students (FOS)

Opportunities for small student societies, a headache for big ones

The large student societies in Wageningen are worried about a proposal for a redistribution of the 'financial support for students', FOS. They fear that it will become harder to recruit people for some of their committees if no financial compensation is offered. On the other hand, the societies that don't currently get any FOS are delighted with the proposal.



Text Luuk Zegers

So what's going on? The Student Service Centre is proposing to change the distribution of FOS (the financial support for students who work for, say, a student society board, the Student Council or Thymos sports association). If adopted, the proposal would mean that societies that are currently excluded from this financing would be able to apply for it. The idea is that the redistribution would lead to a broader range of student societies. At the same time, it would mean that less money would go to the big student societies from the academic year of 2025/2026. The Student Council party VeSte and the Wageningen Federation of Student Associations (WKvV) are critical of the plan and favour an increase in the FOS budget instead of a redistribution.

'Put simply, FOS consists of two variables,' explains Steg Snelders of VeSte. 'There's the monthly FOS amount and there is the number of months of FOS a society gets. WUR student numbers have almost more than doubled since 2013. There are more societies too, and

the number of students who belong to one has doubled. But the number of FOS months available for societies has not been changed in 11 years.'

Recruiting for committees

That is a problem, says Snelders. 'Instead of making sure that the FOS budget keeps pace with the student population, the university is now proposing a redistribution of the FOS months, claiming that there isn't the money to increase the budget. Yet the university's budget has increased by 80 per cent in 11 years. So we say: it's a matter of choice that there isn't the money. You can also choose to allocate more budget to this. Societies play a crucial role in Wageningen student life.'

According to Snelders, in practice the redistribution will mean that the larger societies such as SSR-W, Ceres and KSV Franciscus won't be able to fund two of their committees. 'If you can't offer students any financial compensation for having to postpone finishing their degree, it will be much harder to fill the positions on those committees. And that could endanger the continuation of the societies.'

Snelders expects that in the first instance, the budget

'Student societies see themselves as doing an important social job'



Student rowing club Argo has seen a slight increase in its FOS budget over the past 10 years • Photo Guy Ackermans

cuts will mean cutting down on the ‘extras’. ‘Student societies see themselves as doing an important social job by running things like wellbeing weeks, symposia, political debates and the like. It would be shame – for non-members as well – if such events couldn’t be run anymore. It would have a negative effect on Wageningen as a student town.’

Sensitive

Rutger Kroes of the Student Service Centre understands that the redistribution is a sensitive issue for the large societies. ‘That’s why we want to give them time in the next academic year to prepare for it.’ At the same time, he points out that the FOS budget has in fact grown with the student population. ‘The total number of FOS months has gone up from around 1600 in 2013/2014 to around 2000 in 2023/2024. The FOS budget was 485,000 euros ten years ago, and now it’s 772,000 euros.’

It is true that the additional FOS months didn’t go to

FOS

- FOS – *financial support for students* – offers students financial compensation for costs like delaying graduation, which they incur if they devote time to the Student Council, a society board or Thymos sports association.
- Top sportspeople qualify for the funding too, as do students in difficult circumstances beyond their control.
- The sum students get is currently 357 euros per month. Last year an additional 120 euros was allocated to fulltime board members.

the large student societies, says Kroes. ‘More societies have started up that qualify for FOS, including study associations, sports clubs and a new student society. Argo is getting a bit more support too.’ And yet the funding received by the large student societies has in fact gone up, adds Kroes. ‘Last year, the amount a fulltime student board member got went up to 470 euros per month, which means that relatively more money went to the large societies. We have to take that raise into account in the decisions we are now making.’

Moreover, Wageningen University’s FOS payment to large student societies is above the national average, says Kroes. ‘The biggest societies in Wageningen currently



‘If I got FOS funding for my board work, I would have said “yes” sooner’

‘Even after the proposed changes, the big societies here will still get above average FOS amounts’

still get 144 FOS months per year. With this proposal, that will go down to 130 months. By way of comparison: at Utrecht there is only one society that gets about 140 months of FOS. In the other cities, the large student societies often only get 60 or 70 months. So the funding level here is really high. That is partly because the societies play a bigger role here than they do in other, bigger university towns.’ And the growth of the large societies over the past 11 years doesn’t necessarily mean they should get more money, in Kroes’s view. ‘If a society grows, it can expect more from its members: more income from membership fees and more people to serve on committees. Not everything has to be paid for by the university.’

An extra incentive

Meanwhile, the societies that don’t currently get any financial support from the university welcome the proposal. The Indian Student Association (ISA) has a board of seven for a membership of about 250 students, explains treasurer Anushka Sawarn (23). ‘Regular board work takes us a couple of hours every week, and when we organize events, it is often a bit more hectic. Our events are not exclusively for Indians, by the way. About 220 people with nationalities from all over the world joined us for our Holi Festival of Colours, for example.’ Combining studying and board work is a bit much for a lot of ISA members, says Sawarn. ‘While we do receive funding for our events via the Kickstart Social fund, we do not receive FOS for our board work, and I think that

could help us recruit more people for our board. It would be a good extra incentive, alongside the motivation to do something for the Indian community.’

Financial support for board work is also more than welcome among the members of *t Noaberschap* (the student society for students from the eastern region of the Netherlands, 75 members). Board chair Loïs Pluimers (23): ‘I was secretary last year, and this year I’m chair. Both years, it was hard for form a new board. Four of us do the work of five board positions. In theory, it’s possible to combine it with your studies, but if you want to do it properly, it’s quite time-consuming. You shouldn’t underestimate that.’ As well as her studies and her board work, Pluimers also has a part-time job to be able to afford her studies and accommodation. Partial compensation for board work would make it more manageable. That would be good for the society, and maybe I wouldn’t need to work part-time anymore.’

‘I think the financial support will make it easier to recruit new board members,’ says Thyrsa van der Molen (20), chair of WSSF (the Frisian students’ association in Wageningen, with 50 members). ‘But even now it is not usually hard to form a new board, because you can go on being a fulltime student as well. It was harder to get people this year, though, than it used to be. I had doubts myself, because my studies are going really well. I don’t want to neglect them. If I was paid for my board work, I’d have said “yes” sooner.’ ■



Environmental Systems specialist Rik Leemans says goodbye

CARING ABOUT THE CLIMATE

Global warming has shaped his career. And climate change won't be stopping any time soon. But Rik Leemans is: the leading light of climate studies is retiring. Concerned, but hopeful. Text Roelof Kleis • Photo Guy Ackermans

Rik Leemans has been a Wageningen full professor for nearly a quarter of a century. For much of that time, he was chair of the Environmental Systems Analysis group. He became an international leading light in climate studies, and won a Nobel Prize, albeit a shared one: as a co-author of several IPCC reports, Leemans was among the Nobel Peace Prize winners in 2007. It was shared among hundreds of people, including our new rector magnificus Carolien Kroeze and special professor Pavel Kabat.

The certificate graced his office wall for many years. Was he proud of it? 'It was nice that we got it. It can open doors.' And he proceeds to tell a funny story about the VIP treatment he received on a visit to the University of Tashkent (Uzbekistan), where he was visiting professor for a while. There was a black chauffeur-driven Mercedes, a police escort, and exaggerated respect from the rector. 'He asked me to sit on his chair because no Nobel Prize winner had ever sat on it before.'

That Rik Leemans will go down in



history as a climate scientist is largely down to coincidence. He could just as easily have been an economist. 'I was torn between Economics and Ecology. My girlfriend at the time was going to Nijmegen and they didn't offer Economics there. But they did have a very good degree course in Ecology.' But he was only really gripped by the subject when he studied algae for his first elective course: 'We were studying diatoms (unicellular brown algae, ed.)

on the underside of the leaves of a water gentian. In three days a layer of diatoms forms on a pristine leaf, and within three weeks there's a culture





that is structurally as complex as a mature tropical rainforest. Along comes a mosquito larva then, and takes a bite out of it: a kind of deforestation among algae. That provides a very good illustration of succession and dynamics, two core concepts in Ecology. I found it fascinating.'

Reindeer pizza

Leemans got his PhD at the University of Uppsala (Sweden) with Professor Eddy van der Maarel, with whom he had done research at Nijmegen on European beech forests. 'At my graduation I was sitting by the pond on the Nijmegen campus with him. He had just got a new job in Sweden, and asked me if I wanted to join him there as a PhD student. In Uppsala, I delved into forest dynamics and started modelling how light that comes through the canopy influences the regeneration and the structure of the forest.'

His next job was by invitation too. 'In my last year in Sweden, my supervisor asked me if I'd like to accompany an American paleo-ecologist in Lapland. He was Allen Solomon and he wanted to correlate the growth of pine trees with the weather, using their growth rings. We were travelling around for two months to take samples from old pine

trees. Surviving on reindeer pizza for two months. And those samples never got analysed. Solomon was nominated for a job at IIASA, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, in Austria. He asked me to go with him. He said, you're a good forest ecologist and modeller; I need you.'

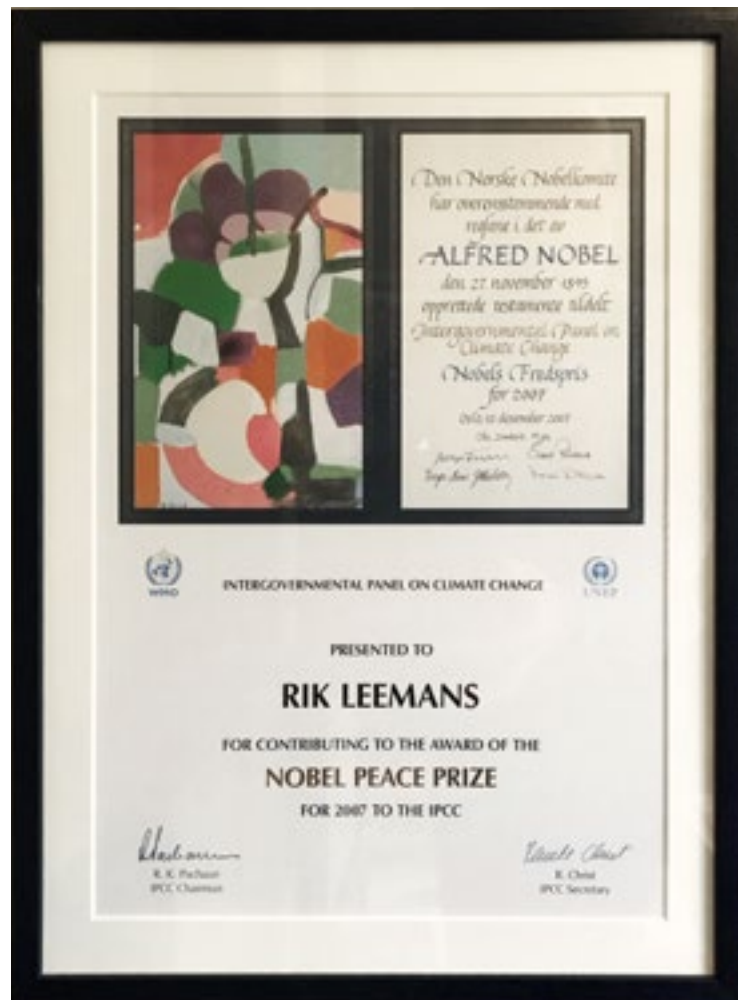
At IIASA, Leemans' career picked up momentum. He worked with a small team studying the dynamics of the boreal (sub-arctic) forests of Siberia, Scandinavia, Canada and Alaska. The result was the 1992 publication *System*

'I've been a pioneer throughout my career'

Analyses of the Boreal Forests. 'I did the modelling work for that book. A unique experience for a junior scientist to be allowed to edit a book like that.'

Unique in part because it produced the first interpolated (estimating values for places for which no data is available) digital climate database.

'We needed climate data for that work. So I rang the World Meteorological Organization to ask for their data. I could get it, but it was 1989 and hardly anything was digital. Wolfgang Cramer and I then established CLIMATE: the Cramer Leemans Interpolated Meteorology for Application in Terrestrial Ecology. That database has been used an awful lot. We started with the data from 14,000 weather



‘Climate scientists are much too cautious and conservative in their predictions’

‘You can’t discuss things with climate sceptics’

stations in the boreal regions, and in the subsequent years that grew to 40,000 stations all around the world.’

Pioneering

By now it was the early 1990s. Climate change was not yet being seen as a catastrophe that humanity was heading towards. In fact, Leemans found it quite inspiring. ‘The first time I heard of climate change was in Sweden at a lecture by Bert Bolin, who later became the first chair of the IPCC. This was something new, and as a young scientist I thought it was exciting. In scientific terms, it was highly innovative, and I was involved in the development of the first global vegetation models. The work at the IIASA generated articles that were published in the top academic journals. Solving new problems requires innovation, and that’s what makes me happy. I’ve been a pioneer throughout my career.’

Leemans sees CLIMATE as one of the highlights of his career. Another one was the IMAGE model: the Integrated Model to Assess the Global Environment. This model reveals the effects of human activity on the climate. Leemans started working on it during his period at the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), where he got a job in 1990 after IIASA. IMAGE was still limited at that point, but he developed it further and expanded it into the first global land use model. It provided the

basis not only for the IPCC’s various scenarios, but also for analyses of climate effects.

By that point a renowned scientist, Leemans became a full professor in Wageningen in 1999, and four years later the chairholder. The initial excitement about climate change had long given way to serious concern, and even shock. Climate change has become the biggest threat to humanity, and human beings are the culprits. That conclusion, which was initially met with scepticism, has been irrefutable since the latest IPCC report in 2021. Leemans has no time for climate sceptics anyway. ‘I haven’t engaged in discussion with them since 2010. I am all for scientific debates based on factual arguments. That is not possible with climate sceptics. Their goals are political and not scientific. They aim to sow as much doubt as possible so that nothing is done about the climate. I was once asked to discuss it with Thierry Baudet on the TV talk show *Op1*. I don’t do things like that.

It’s not a scientific debate, and he’s a professional debater, so you’ll only lose.’ The prospect of halting climate change seems more distant than ever. Is that a sorry state of affairs after a lifetime of climate research? Yes and no, says Leemans. ‘It depresses me when I see that time is going by and governments are doing so little. It is still theoretically possible to limit global heating to two degrees, but then we’ve got to pull out all the stops for the next 20 years. Governments, industry and financial institutions have really got to get on with reducing CO₂ emissions. But there is hope. We’re seeing some pension funds withdrawing from fossil fuel investments. A lot of Dutch municipalities are aiming to be climate-neutral by 2030. Electric cars are becoming commonplace. A lot of people are installing solar panels and they are getting cheaper and cheaper.’

Too conservative

What if we don’t manage that two degrees? ‘Then it will start getting tough,’ says Leemans. ‘We really can’t adapt beyond those two degrees. You can see that right now in many parts of the world. Heatwaves that go on for three weeks with temperatures of 40 to 45 degrees. Floods like the ones in Germany, Belgium and Limburg a couple of years ago. In *Science* magazine in 2005, several of us described the likely effects of climate change on Europe. The projections were for the end of this century. They were correct, but they were 70 years out. We’re already seeing the effects, especially in the form of extreme weather. Climate scientists are much too cautious and conservative in their predictions.’ ■

Scientists' role in the debate on plant breeding techniques

'Wrong approach can make polarization worse'

Resource invited four WUR researchers – two plant scientists and two sociologists – to discuss their views and their role in the debate on modern plant breeding techniques in Europe. Text Tanja Speek

The authorization of genetic modifications in plant breeding has been a controversial topic in European agricultural politics for years. Last year, the European Commission voted in favour of easing the rules on genetically modifying fruit and vegetables using 'new genomic techniques' (NGTs), as they are termed. The response among politicians and in society at large has ranged from 'relieved' to 'very concerned'. *Resource* invited two plant scientists and two social scientists to talk about their contribution to the debate on NGT crops. Social scientists **Michelle Habets** and **Phil Macnaghten** have studied the various roles plant scientists adopt in the debate and have investigated the societal impact of new techniques. **Patricija Gran** and **Nikita Sajeev** are plant scientists involved in GeneSprout, a European organization of young researchers who aim to contribute to the debate on new techniques in plant breeding.

To kick off: what are your views on the application of the new plant-breeding techniques?

Gran: 'I think authorization of these new techniques can help make world food production more sustainable.'

Macnaghten: 'Many of the people I spoke to for my research have critical questions about NGT. They are afraid companies will use the techniques mainly to boost their

own profits. I see the earlier development of genetically modified herbicide-resistant crops (see inset) as a worrying example of how the technology could be used.'

Habets: 'I share those concerns. I don't see much attention paid in the proposed rules to values such as fairness and sustainability in applications.'

Sajeev: 'As a co-founder of GeneSprout, I have spoken to a lot of different groups in the NGT discussion. I see the new rules as a step in the right direction. The current rules for genetically modified crops are not appropriate for modern NGT crops.'

Should all experts get involved in this debate?

Habets: 'We need plant scientists as they can explain what the technique involves, but the debate is broader than that.'

Macnaghten: 'In the social sciences, we look at the impact on society. This discussion demands different insights in addition to what plant scientists can offer.'

Gran: 'I actually joined GeneSprout so that I could talk to stakeholders and find out what their worries are, what drives those worries and how we could address them. It is good to involve various disciplines in the debate, including environmental experts and social scientists, because we can learn from one another.'

Sajeev: 'But not everyone can or wants to get involved in the discussion and I don't think you should force them. If you take the wrong approach, that can make the polarization worse.'

Does WUR do enough to nurture such discussions between groups?

Gran: 'I think we need more courses, workshops or meetings to bring scientists together. It should be something on the graduate schools' agendas, for instance. Everything we have done with GeneSprout could easily be adopted by the graduate schools.'

New European rules

NGT crops are crops that have been genetically modified using new techniques like CRISPR-Cas. These crops are currently still subject to the strict GMO rules (for genetically modified organisms). Now the European Parliament has approved a new law that would allow authorization of these crops under less strict rules. Possible amendments are still being discussed, such as a ban on herbicide-resistant crops, rules on labelling and agreements on patents.



From the left: Michelle Habets, Nikita Sajeev, Phil Macnaghten and Patricija Gran. At the bottom in the centre: interviewer Tanja Speek • Photo Guy Ackermans

Roundup

At the end of the last century, the American soya bean producer Monsanto used genetic modification techniques to make crops resistant to the herbicide Roundup, the trade name for glyphosate. The idea was that the farmer could spray weed killer without affecting the crop. If Roundup was used correctly, this would dramatically reduce the amount sprayed. But it only took a few years for the first resistant weeds to appear, which led to an increase in the use of Roundup.

Macnaghten: ‘Scientists should be more like an honest broker and less inclined to take on a promotion role in which they talk enthusiastically about how wonderful their research is and what the advantages are. The honest broker role fits with being a scientist. It is a skill you can learn, and social scientists can help with that.’

Habets: ‘In that role, you don’t say which policy is best but you do provide information. It is then up to politicians to make choices.’

Should everyone make an effort to depolarize the debate?

Sajeev: ‘Yes. A lot of trust has been lost. We have done too little to connect with one another. If there is trust, you can still disagree but you are not kicking one another into a corner.’

Macnaghten: ‘It is interesting how the dynamics of trust works. People distrust how businesses and technology influence what they eat. They no longer believe new techniques will help improve their lives and health. The discussion in society should be about the bigger story — which techniques help solve the problem of feeding the world — and

not so much whether the techniques are safe or not. That will get trust growing again.’

Sajeev: ‘We all want a better future but we don’t all have the same ideas about the path to get to more sustainable systems.’

How do you see that path to more sustainable systems?

Habets: ‘I think in terms of a less intensive agricultural system. When I look at the current NGT crops on the market, I don’t yet see evidence the new techniques will make agriculture more sustainable. It could equally be the case that the crops are used to maintain the intensive farming system. If we want to make proper work of extensive agriculture, we don’t need those techniques.’

Sajeev: ‘I see that as circular reasoning. If we can’t even try it out, how can we prove it helps?’

Habets: ‘Patents are another problem. They give companies power if the company can get a patent on the properties of a crop.’

Sajeev: ‘That is one of the issues in the debate in the European Parliament. The EU wants to prevent companies from being able to patent NGT crops, so that smaller companies can benefit from new, fairer rules. The current discussion makes me hopeful.’

Macnaghten: ‘Me too.’

Sajeev: ‘Let’s keep talking to one another about this topic. That is the most important thing. How about doing it over a beer or a coffee next time?’ ■

Limelight



Not much culture in Wageningen? This regular column proves how wrong that opinion is. This time it's the Through The Window Party at Heerenstraat 10 during the Liberation Day Festival. Text Ilja Bouwknegt

SUN
5-5-2024

Heerenstraat 10

From about
20:00

Through The Window Party



It is a longstanding tradition at No. 10, one of the Ceres student houses. Each year during the Liberation Day Festival on 5 May, a party is hosted through the windows of the first floor. The windows are opened, the amplifiers turned outwards and the party starts on the street. When asked, residents Gijs Berkenbosch (22) and Sil Sluifers (23) are unable to say how long their house has been organizing this event. 'Definitely more than 10 years, could be even longer,' says Gijs. 'We wanted to have our own party after all the 5 May parties had ended.'

In the past, No. 10 used wristbands to let people party inside, say the residents. They

sold alcohol too, but you can't just do that anymore. 'So now we open the window and two of our lads play the music through the window.' According to the two students, the DJs will play techno-style music with the occasional party number. 'One of them is still learning the trade; he plays records all day in

his room and is getting better at it,' says Gijs. Even though No. 10 no longer sells alcohol, the 5 May parties are still broken up by the police every year. 'It got really big two years ago,' says Sil. 'The whole town turned up, and we had about 300 people on our doorstep.' Last year, the police stopped the party only an hour after it had got going. This year, No. 10 plans to start a bit earlier in the hope of being able to continue for longer. 'We don't want the police seizing our equipment,' says Gijs. 'So if they turn up, we'll stop.'



Meanwhile in... Germany – Cannabis legalization

WUR is incredibly diverse, with hundreds of internationals working and studying here. In the *Meanwhile in* column, we ask one of them to comment on certain events in their home country. This time, we hear from International Land and Water Management BSc student **Tobias Otto (21)** from Germany, with his insights on Germany's recent move to legalize cannabis cultivation. Text Youssef el Khattabi

Otto: 'I was sort of aware of the funny legalization limbo in the Netherlands before coming to Wageningen. The decision to legalize cannabis in Germany was not unexpected, as discussions had been ongoing since the 2021 elections, yet its actual implementation came as a surprise to many. It's a significant shift that reflects the changing attitudes towards cannabis use, both culturally and legally, in Germany. Historically, Germany has been conservative regarding drug laws, which makes this a notable liberal shift. The law's implementation is a step towards more open discussions about drug use and legality. It's difficult to predict exactly how political trends will swing, but it's likely that cannabis legalization will eventually become a less controversial topic. Regarding the cultural aspect, cannabis was already widely accessible and somewhat normalized among younger people

in Germany. Now, legal changes may foster more open conversations about cannabis use, even within families. My circle, mainly young adults and students, welcomes the change. It removes the fear of legal repercussions for an activity that is already commonplace, and it potentially offers a safer, regulated environment for cannabis consumption. However, politically there's significant opposition, and future elections could pivot the legal landscape again. If I were to advise German policymakers, I'd emphasize the importance of keeping the law adaptive and responsive to societal and cultural feedback. It's crucial not to backtrack on progress made towards decriminalization and destigmatization, especially considering the broader social benefits like reduced incarceration rates. Ultimately, cannabis legalization is a complex topic, but it's one that needs practical regulation and open dialogue to integrate it successfully into society. With time, I believe it will become just another aspect of daily life, allowing us to focus on more pressing societal issues.'





You see great-looking people and the coolest outfits on the Wageningen campus. In this feature, we put one of them in the spotlight. This time it's Casper van Schaik, a lab technician at Nematology.

Text and Photo Coretta Jongeling

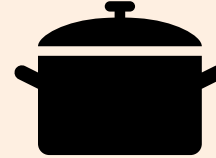


'My style developed through the music I listen to. I've been a fan of punk since I was 13, and these clothes go with the territory. I usually wear band T-shirts, which I prefer to buy at concerts. My jacket is just a denim jacket that I've decorated with spikes, patches, zips and badges. I make the badges myself; I've got a badge machine at home. The shoes are part of the style. They are creepers, which are popular in other scenes, like psychobilly, but also among punks.

'I've been through all the hair colours, but I always go back to blue. It lasts the longest. At work I don't very often bother with the mohawk, but I do for concerts. My wife and I dye each other's hair, about once a month. My little boy's got dyed hair too now. All three of us went to Rebellion, the festival where I met my wife, and then he wanted his hair dyed too. I said okay, as it was the summer holiday anyway. But he's still got it.

'I look the same at work as I do at home. No one ever says anything about it, actually. People are used to it, I think. I find fashion a strange business. Of course, I do follow a particular fashion myself. But the kind of fashion that changes every few months, I just don't get at all.'

In Wageningen, you can find all flavours of the world. Maha Yousfi, a PhD candidate in Agricultural Biosystems Engineering, shares two of her favourite Tunisian recipes.



Flavours of WUR

Tunisian Chicken Tajine & Mint Tea

'Tunisian cuisine is known for its flavours, with dishes like tajine and couscous being cultural staples. These delicacies are served on special occasions alongside the refreshing Tunisian green mint tea with pine nuts. This tea is so much more than a beverage: it's a symbol of hospitality. There are many different versions of Tunisian tajine, like spinach, chickpeas, chicken or tuna. Whether it's made in a modern kitchen or cooked in an earthenware pot over a wood fire in rural Tunisia, it captures the essence of our tradition.'

- 1 Fry the onions in oil until translucent.
- 2 Add ras el hanout, turmeric, paprika and black pepper.
- 3 Add diced chicken and salt, and fry for 2 minutes. Cover with water, and simmer for 10-15 mins.
- 4 Fry the potatoes in a separate pan.
- 5 Beat the eggs and add grated mozzarella, chopped parsley and black pepper.
- 6 Stir in the chicken and fried potato; adjust salt to taste. Pour the mixture into the greased dish, decorate with olives and bake for 30 mins at 170 degrees.
- 7 Serve hot with tomato sauce or cold for a buffet.

Ingredients (for 2 persons) :

- 3 tbsp cooking oil
- 2 potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 1 cup chopped onions
- 1 tbsp ras el hanout
- 1 tbsp paprika powder
- 1 tbsp turmeric
- 1/2 tbsp black pepper
- salt to taste
- 1 large chicken breast, diced
- 4 eggs
- 25g grated mozzarella
- fresh chopped parsley
- olives



Maha Yousfi
PhD candidate in Agricultural
Biosystems Engineering

Tunisian Mint Tea

The recipe for the mint tea served with this dish can be found online via this QR code.



Irregular Opening Hours May 2024

Forum

		Building	Library	Student Service Centre	ServicePoint IT	Restaurant	Grand Café	Wageningen in'to Languages
Thursday Ascension Day	9 May	10 am - 6 pm	10 am - 6 pm	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed
Friday	10 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 10 pm	closed	8:30 am - 5 pm	closed	8:30 am - 2 pm	closed
Saturday	11 May	10 am - 6 pm	10 am - 6 pm	closed	closed	closed	11 am - 4 pm	closed
Sunday	12 May	10 am - 6 pm	10 am - 6 pm	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed
Monday	13 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 10 pm	10 am - 2:30 pm	8:30 am - 5 pm	11 am - 2 pm	8 am - 5 pm	10 am - 2 pm
Tuesday	14 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 10 pm	10 am - 2:30 pm	8:30 am - 5 pm	11 am - 2 pm	8 am - 5 pm	10 am - 2 pm
Wednesday	15 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 10 pm	10 am - 2:30 pm	8:30 am - 5 pm	11 am - 2 pm	8 am - 5 pm	10 am - 2 pm
Thursday	16 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 10 pm	10 am - 2:30 pm	8:30 am - 5 pm	11 am - 2 pm	8 am - 5 pm	10 am - 2 pm
Friday	17 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 10 pm	10 am - 2:30 pm	8:30 am - 5 pm	11 am - 2 pm	8 am - 5 pm	closed
Saturday	18 May	10 am - 6 pm	10 am - 6 pm	closed	closed	closed	11 am - 4 pm	closed
Whit Sunday	19 May	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed
Whit Monday	20 May	10 am - 6 pm	10 am - 6 pm	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed

Orion

		Building	Bike basement	The Spot	Restaurant
Thursday Ascension Day	9 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Friday	10 May	8 am - 6 pm	8 am - 9 pm	8 am - 2 pm	closed
Saturday	11 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Sunday	12 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Monday	13 May	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 9 pm	8 am - 7:30 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Tuesday	14 May	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 9 pm	8 am - 7:30 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Wednesday	15 May	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 9 pm	8 am - 7:30 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Thursday	16 May	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 9 pm	8 am - 7:30 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Friday	17 May	8 am - 6 pm	8 am - 9 pm	8 am - 4:30 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Saturday	18 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Whit Sunday	19 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Whit Monday	20 May	closed	closed	closed	closed

Aurora

		Building	Bike basement	Coffee Corner	Restaurant
Thursday Ascension Day	9 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Friday	10 May	8 am - 6 pm	8 am - 6 pm	9 am - 2 pm	closed
Saturday	11 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Sunday	12 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Monday	13 May	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 5 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Tuesday	14 May	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 5 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Wednesday	15 May	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 5 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Thursday	16 May	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 5 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Friday	17 May	8 am - 6 pm	8 am - 6 pm	8 am - 5 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Saturday	18 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Whit Sunday	19 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Whit Monday	20 May	closed	closed	closed	closed

Leeuwenborch

		Building	Library	Coffee Corner	Restaurant
Thursday Ascension Day	9 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Friday	10 May	7 am - 6 pm	8.30 am - 6 pm	9 am - 2 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Saturday	11 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Sunday	12 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Monday	13 May	7 am - 8.30 pm	8.30 am - 6 pm	8 am - 3 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Tuesday	14 May	7 am - 8.30 pm	8.30 am - 6 pm	8 am - 3 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Wednesday	15 May	7 am - 8.30 pm	8.30 am - 6 pm	8 am - 3 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Thursday	16 May	7 am - 8.30 pm	8.30 am - 6 pm	8 am - 3 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Friday	17 May	7 am - 8.30 pm	8.30 am - 6 pm	8 am - 3 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
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Whit Sunday	19 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Whit Monday	20 May	closed	closed	closed	closed

[column]

EMOTIONS

fuel for opportunity?

'I feel hurt by what you did the other day!'
'I felt betrayed by you. Now, I am afraid to trust you again!'
Have you expressed these emotions lately to someone else, person to person, while looking them in the eye? Do you remember the uncomfortable and unsettling feeling it gave you? Maybe you do or maybe you don't. Or perhaps you preferred to avoid confrontation...

I've been reflecting on emotions and their role in the academic environment. During my academic life in Wageningen, I have encountered a decent number of conflicts and seen them in others as well. I have noticed that unresolved conflicts have three things in common: inflated egos, normalized narcissistic behaviour, and mostly, a decided disposition to not communicate emotions as experienced.

Being emotional is frequently perceived as a weakness, but I will dare to say it is more about our inability to feel, deal with and express our emotions. When people hide emotions in the deepest corners of their being, this severely affects their mental health. Does negative overthinking ring a bell?

We all experience life in unique ways, shaping who we are and how we react to our surroundings. Thus we cannot expect others to understand our realities if we do not communicate them. Communicating our emotions is as critical as active listening, allowing us to understand each other and hopefully find common ground for a feasible and just conflict resolution.

I think we could all benefit if we talked more frequently about how we feel, normalizing and validating our emotions in any situation. Let's talk more about our daily interactions with colleagues, failed experiments, frustrations, the upsetting feelings after hearing our supervisors say something we did not like, and life in general as it happens.



Willy Contreras-Avilés

Willy Contreras-Avilés (34) is a second-year PhD candidate in Horticulture and Biochemistry of medicinal cannabis, from Panama. He likes to dance (perrear), cook Italian food, and swim.

WEEKLY UPDATES ON STUDENT LIFE AND WORKING AT WUR?

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Resource

Colophon

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Illustration Linde Klop



Festival-goers can get ecologically high

Now nothing can get in the way of a successful festival season. Last week, Parliament unanimously agreed to a proposal to tolerate the production of MDMA, provided it is done in accordance with fair trade rules and under ecologically responsible conditions.

The party drug MDMA is very popular among festival-going students. Although its use is tolerated, production is prohibited. Despite that, the drug is mass-produced here in the Netherlands. This leads to major problems, such as criminal practices and illegal waste dumping in nature areas. The government wants to change this by tolerating the production of eco-MDMA. Any dealer who can prove that their product comes from an MDMA lab with eco-certification can get the coveted eco-label. The first requirement is that the lab must be located in a farmer's chicken barn that has at least two Better Life stars. The lab must also separate its waste before dumping it in the Brabant

forests. This makes decontamination easier for soil researchers. Finally, the dealer must ensure that the drug is distributed in biodegradable bags. While some see this as a sudden change, the Wageningen professor of soil decontamination Wilco Cain has been advocating such a measure for years. 'In the end, every Dutch person is the same: as soon as the crocuses start appearing and the sun comes out, we all sit out at pavement cafes and buy tickets for whichever festival comes along first. And just as an elaborate snack platter is part of cafe culture nowadays, various white powders are increasingly becoming a part of the festival experience. The *bitterbal* is to drinks what MDMA is to the world of partying.'

'The ecological impact of illegal MDMA production can only be restricted through government regulation'

'The alarm should have been raised much sooner. For years, snorting a line in a smelly portable toilet has gnawed at the conscience (and the nose) of every socially engaged festival-goer. The social and ecological impact of illegal MDMA production can only be restricted through careful government regulation. The eco-MDMA initiative gives me confidence that our government is capable of keeping up with the times and listening to the people.'

Check if your local dealer meets your requirements here: www.ecoMDMA.org