

# Resource

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The journalism platform for all at Wageningen University & Research

**Community service for**  
campus assault  
perpetrator

**'Universities**  
are too dependent  
on tech companies'

**Animal researchers**  
on humane farming  
agreement

**EU PFAS ban**  
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New nightlife mayor?

## Drink & drugs in Wageningen 'Part of the scene' | p.12



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## FOREWORD

### Change

When I started at *Resource* in 2018, everyone was worried about the rapidly rising student numbers and the extra workload this meant for teachers. I couldn't imagine then that seven years later we would be worrying about a significant decline in the student intake. Times change.

How can we ensure Wageningen remains appealing to prospective students and make our Bachelor's programmes future proof? Those were the questions the Portfolio Analysis working group was set up to address. If the Executive Board agrees to the working group's proposals, we will soon have fewer BSc degree programmes, and the way the courses are funded will change too (page 24).

Almost 90 per cent of Dutch people think weight-loss drugs such as Ozempic should be included in the basic health insurance package, according to a poll by Ipsos I&O. People who want to lose weight without resorting to medication could switch to an 'eat-slow' diet. That reduces your daily consumption by an average of 369 calories, shows research by Marlou Lasschuijt (page 26). Less alcohol could help too, although a lot of students think 'excessive alcohol consumption is part of student life' (page 12). Some things never change.

**Luuk Zegers**

Student & Education editor





## EBB AND FLOW ON THE RHINE

If you don't recognize this place, you probably don't live in Wageningen. As soon as temperatures get above 20 degrees, people abandon their hot student rooms and stuffy lecture halls and crowd onto the banks of the Rhine. Bring your own bottle, negotiate a good spot with the local cows and cool off occasionally in the water. As the sun sets at the end of the evening, the crowds pack up their towels, footballs and guitars and disappear, leaving the cows behind on the silent river bank. [CJ](#)

Photo Guy Ackermans

# WUR student to spend year on ISO board

**Olmer Tutein Nolthenius (22) spent the last year as a member of WUR Student Council representing the VeSte party. That brought him into contact with the Dutch National Students' Association (ISO). Now he will be moving to Utrecht, where ISO is based, for the coming academic year. 'ISO represents all students in the Netherlands.'**

'Students in the various university student councils meet up in Utrecht every now and then to discuss various topics and reach a common position,' explains Tutein Nolthenius. 'That's how I got to know ISO. ISO then takes those standpoints and presents them to the

Ministry of Education and politicians. At the moment, the political parties are working on their manifestos for the upcoming elections so we will be telling them what things are important to students.'

Tutein Nolthenius will be a general board member. 'That means I'll be responsible for various portfolios. For example, I'll look at how to strengthen student consultative bodies at universities and how to boost students' interest in them.' He will also be looking at internationalization and the Erasmus programme. 'Another topic I'll be dealing with is the link between education and the labour market.'



Olmer Tutein Nolthenius (on the right) with the new ISO board in Utrecht • Photo ISO

We want the internship allowance to be a legal requirement, for example, and we want measures to prevent discrimination in internships.' LZ

## Fifty key farmland species

President of the Executive Board Sjoukje Heimovaara was recently presented with the *Canon of Dutch Farmland Nature*, a book detailing 50 species of flora and fauna that typify the Dutch countryside. The selection was made with input from Professor Liesje Mommer and researcher Dirk van Apeldoorn, who are both involved in the Wageningen Biodiversity Initiative.

'The *Canon* would have been a thousand pages long if it had been up to Liesje and Dirk; they were so enthusiastic,' said the publisher. 'They also showed that "farmland nature" is not a contradiction in terms: the Netherlands is home to various animal and plant species that live here precisely because farm practices create the right habitat.' That association between cultivation and nature is the key theme of the foreword, which was written by WUR emeritus professor of the Ecology & Philosophy of Nature Restoration Matthijs Schouten. 'We

have become used to seeing humans and nature as polar opposites,' he argues. 'But a form of cooperation that benefits nature is possible. However, that will require us to see nature as a partner to a greater extent than at present.' ME



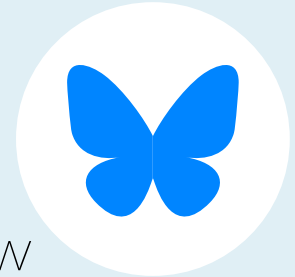
## ► Community service

**A 20-year-old man from Wageningen has been sentenced to 80 hours of community service, 20 of which are suspended. The punishment is for his role in the assault on a Chinese PhD candidate on campus in April 2024. Three perpetrators threw stones at the PhD candidate and beat him up. One of the other perpetrators was sentenced to community service back in January. A third suspect, who is a minor, was acquitted in the juvenile court in February. The perpetrators also have to pay damages to the PhD candidate. The assault provoked fear and anger among the international community in Wageningen. Some of them said they had felt unsafe for a while due to the intimidating behaviour of 'local youths'. In a joint letter to the municipality and the university, they reported that international students had had stones and eggs thrown at them on previous occasions too. There have also been incidents involving verbal abuse and other forms of aggressive and undesirable behaviour.** LZ

# 1,757

That's how many plants and animals were spotted by 'Team WUR' during the annual BioBlitz, which took place from 30 April to 27 June. WUR came second among the 18 universities taking part, after KU Leuven in Belgium, which found 2,194 species. There was also a parallel 'Team Wageningen', which all the town's residents could join. That team spotted 2,331 species, so we kind of won gold after all. <sup>LZ</sup>

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## 'Universities are too dependent on commercial tech companies'

**The Young Academy, a group of 50 young academics, warns that universities are too dependent on tech companies, which poses a risk to the core values of academia. The Young Academy has published a manifesto calling for a radical change of direction.**

Academic and applied universities often outsource their digital infrastructure to tech companies. These companies collect personal and other data, and it isn't always clear where the data ends up. Students also regularly have to share personal data when using software for education purposes and exams. This inevitably entails risks, warns the

**'Universities should ensure a safe digital ecosystem for their staff and students'**

Young Academy. The association of young scholars calls for a 'fundamental change of direction'

### Losing control

Higher education institutions often outsource the development and administration of digital systems and they have little IT knowledge in-house.

That makes them vulnerable to 'vendor lock-in', where it becomes almost impossible for them to switch to a different IT supplier.

This goes against the core values of science such as autonomy, responsibility and academic freedom, says the Young Academy. The group also argues that universities have a duty of care 'to ensure a safe digital ecosystem for their staff and students'.

The Young Academy therefore calls upon universities to prioritize consideration of the ethical impacts when

selecting IT applications and give less weight to cost and convenience of use. 'Individual freedom, the right to privacy and the long-term autonomy of academic institutions' should be the key considerations. The manifesto also has a warning about AI technologies: it is not always clear what data was used to train AI models or how the models were trained.

Two weeks ago, an open letter was published that also called on higher education institutions to take a more critical look at the use of AI technologies. The letter has gathered over 600 signatures to date, including from lecturers, researchers and professors. HOP

# Doing an internship in the Med

**Diving off the coast of Crete sounds like a holiday, but it's actually an internship for Forest & Nature Conservation Master's student Inge Franse (24).**

She is working with PhD candidate Davide Bottacini (Behavioural Ecology) on a study of why lionfish often swim in close proximity to one another without interacting. Bottacini is carrying out a larger study of the invasive fish species. 'Davide wants to find out why the fish is so effective at reproduction and catching other fish,' explains Franse. 'My inter-

**'I really enjoy diving and doing research'**

action research is a mini-project within that larger study,' Franse and Bottacini spent two weeks diving twice a day in waters off a remote rock that were home to various lionfish. 'We followed each individual fish. That way, you know which is which and how the population moves around the rock.'

Then Bottacini and Franse placed open-sided blocks — like new-builds for lionfish — near the rock. They put

three lionfish they had caught elsewhere in some of the blocks and watched to see how the lionfish that were already living there reacted to the unfamiliar structures and newcomers. About half of the original population demonstrated curiosity about the new structures, says Franse. 'The rest were happy to stay where they were.'



Photo Davide Bottacini

three lionfish they had caught elsewhere in some of the blocks and watched to see how the lionfish that were already living there reacted to the unfamiliar structures and newcomers. About half of the original population demonstrated curiosity about the new structures, says Franse. 'The rest were happy to stay where they were.'

Franse doesn't yet have an explanation for this behaviour, but whatever the final results are, she already knows one

thing: she likes diving for research. 'It's a very intense internship as we can be diving several times a day, seven days a week. But I really enjoy diving and doing research. After I graduate, I hope to do a PhD in this field.' LZ

*For more photos and info about the study, see [www.resource-online.nl](http://www.resource-online.nl)*

## STUDENT VOLLEYBALL TEAM OFF TO BUDAPEST

**Wageningen's women's volleyball team did so well in the Dutch student championship last academic year that they will be competing in the European Universities Volleyball Championship in Budapest, Hungary.**

The team will be competing in the Championship (27 July to 4 August) as the WUR university team rather than as the student volleyball club WaHo. 'That's because a few of our players are members of a different club that plays at a higher level,' explains volleyball player Stella Omtzigt. 'They are allowed to compete because they are also WUR students or recent graduates.'

The team will be taking the train to Budapest at the end of July. Omtzigt: 'The journey will take about 20 hours. Some people don't like flying and it's partly a financial choice too as flying would have been more expensive. It's also easier to take a lot of luggage when going by train.'

'In Hungary, we'll be playing volleyball powerhouses like Italy and Germany,' says Omtzigt. 'We aren't expecting to win everything, But even the losers in the group stage play each other for a final position.' The team's coaches have experience coaching at the national level. Omtzigt: 'They are helping us prepare for

the Championship on a voluntary basis, which we're really grateful for. They will even be going with us to Budapest.' DV



The women's volleyball team during a training session.  
Photo Guy Ackermans

# More fishing, fewer mussels

The Dutch marine fishing industry achieved a modest profit of almost 20 million euros in 2024, but that does not mean the industry's financial concerns are over. That is the conclusion of the report 'Fisheries in Figures 2025', by Wageningen Economic & Social Research. Text Marieke Enter



Last Friday saw the presentation in Scheveningen harbour of the annual update by Wageningen on the status of the Dutch marine fishing industry. According to the provisional figures, the industry recorded a net profit of nearly 20 million euros. That does not mean the sector is thriving, explains the report. The lack of financial headroom and uncertainty about the long-term future are preventing investments in the fleet, which is ageing further as a result.

The catch of fresh fish from the North Sea that is landed in the Netherlands has been declining for years, in part due to the shrinking fleet. Dutch fish processors and wholesalers are therefore increas-

## The catch of fresh fish from the North Sea that is landed in the Netherlands has been declining for years

ingly importing fish and shellfish. The EU remains the biggest market, with a share of 80 per cent, with Nigeria and Egypt as other important destinations. In terms of value, the export of fish increased to 6.4 billion euros in 2024 (a rise of 3 per cent), while the volume increased by 5 per cent. The import value rose to 5.2 billion euros (up 4 per cent) and the volume increased by 11 per cent.

## Boats and mussels

The fleet of Dutch fishing boats shrank last year for the fourth year in a row. However, the decrease — from 216 to

212 boats — was much less than in the 'rationalization year' 2023. Twenty years ago, the fleet numbered 367 boats. The number of fishing days recorded by the remaining boats increased slightly compared with 2023. The catch was also higher. Partly because of this, the fleet of fishing boats ended 2024 with a net profit of almost 15 million euros. The 2024-25 season was not a good one for mussel farms, which suffered an estimated loss of around 12 million euros. The sector recorded a profit of 6 million euros in the previous season. The size of the mussel fleet declined from 45 to 42 boats, while the catch fell from 33 million kilos to 21 million (a decrease of 36 per cent). Revenue fell from 54 million euros to 36 million euros (down 33 per cent). The average price per kilo rose slightly (up 5 per cent).

## International tensions

According to Wageningen Economic & Social Research, the fishing industry is affected by international tensions such as the war in Ukraine and the attacks by Houthi rebels in the Gulf of Aden. The latest challenge concerns the effect of Trump's import tariffs on the EU's fish exports. 'The EU currently exports a lot of salmon to the United States,' says fisheries researcher Geert Hoekstra.

There were losses too for deep-sea fishing, although at four million euros this was less than in the previous year (with a loss of nine million euros). The size of the fleet remained the same with eight active trawlers. The catch increased by 13 per cent to 236 million kilos, and the associated revenue increased by 8 per cent to 107 million euros. However, that required an increase of 11 per cent in the number of days at sea.



Illustration Shutterstock

## [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, it's Entomology postdoc **Rody Blom**.**

Text Nicole van 't Wout Hofland • Illustration Stijn Schreven

'One of my studies for my PhD involved catching mosquitoes in built-up areas and the floodplains, counting them and classifying them. I wanted to find out how mosquito activity varies depending on the location and the season. I bought six modern mosquito traps, cone-shaped units that use CO<sub>2</sub> to attract the mosquitoes and suck them in with a fan. A counter records how many mozzies have been caught.

**'We couldn't keep up with the numbers of mosquitoes; the study was suffering from its own success'**

'I placed the traps in the environment. Each week, I emptied them and put the catch in the freezer. Although the traps counted the mosquitoes automatically, I wanted to do a manual check. That meant counting each individual mozzie and identifying the species. A student helped me. When I opened the freezer one day, my hands full of mosquitoes to add to the contents, I realized the it was almost

full. We couldn't keep up with the growing piles of insects. But I remained optimistic, assuming it was just a question of working hard. It was only when my second student was unable to complete his task within his project period that I realized I wasn't going to manage it. Counting by hand took too long and the study was suffering from its own success. Together with my supervisor, I took the decision not to include the study in my thesis. It was a shame, because I knew I'd collected some valuable data. 'Four years later, the study is still unfinished. I'm really annoyed with myself for misestimating how much work it would be. These days, I have more experience and I can judge how many mosquitoes — and therefore how much work — you get from a trap. I don't want to give up, so I'll just use the mosquitoes we counted earlier to validate the trap counter. Initial results show mosquitoes are more active at dusk, as we suspected. It's a pity, because if I'd made that decision earlier I could have included this finding in my thesis.'



## Overweight when young is risk factor for bowel cancer

**Being overweight when very young — even at birth — increases the risk of bowel cancer later in life. This finding comes from research by the Human Nutrition & Health postdoc Moniek van Zutphen.**

'We already knew that overweight in adults is associated with bowel cancer. Now we wanted to know what the effect is of overweight in earlier phases in life,' she explains. She looked at research results from previous studies, analysed the relationship for various age categories and got

**'Every 1,000 grams over a birthweight of 3,000 grams increases the risk by nine per cent'**

a panel of experts to assess the strength of the evidence.

Van Zutphen looked at the weight at birth and the life phases of toddler, child, teenager and young adult (ages

18 to 25). She found a clear linear association between the birthweight and the young adult BMI (weight relative to height) on the one hand and the risk of bowel cancer on the other hand. 'Every 1,000 grams over a birthweight of 3,000 grams increases the risk by nine per cent. In young adults with overweight, the risk increases by 12 per cent for every five BMI units above 18.5 kg/m<sup>2</sup>,' says Van Zutphen. 'This confirms the importance of prevention from a young age.'

The Wageningen postdoc carried out the study for the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF). An international panel assessed the strength of the evidence of her analyses. 'They found the evidence very strong.'

### Starting point

Associate professor Dieuwertje Kok, who was closely involved in the research, makes a caveat. 'We see strong associations but we can't conclude from this data that being overweight when young directly causes bowel cancer. It could be that people who are overweight when young are also more likely to be overweight later in life. Or perhaps being overweight for long periods plays a role, or maybe hormones, genes or environmental factors cause both overweight and bowel cancer.' Kok says the results are useful above all as a starting point for further investigations. She emphasizes that being overweight at some point isn't necessarily a problem. **dv**

# Humane livestock farming agreement signed

After a long period of preparation, the Humane Livestock Farming agreement was signed last week. WUR was one of the parties that was asked to provide input. The ministry has also asked animal scientists at Wageningen to obtain a picture of what questions and dilemmas still need to be addressed. Text Marieke Enter

**T**he Humane Livestock Farming agreement is a product of the Animals Act, which was passed last year. It stipulates that livestock farming must be 'humane' by 2040. What that concept entails in practice is set out in the sector plans for the four biggest animal categories: pigs, poultry, cows and (in an as yet unfinished plan) calves. The arrangements are given legal force in what is termed an 'order in council'. A consultation round on this order in council started at the end of June. WUR is one of the parties asked to provide input. That is quite a tricky position, says Livestock researcher Karel de Greef. 'Our task is to do research and then, based on that, explain the situation for the animals, how they perceive things, how the farmers can deal with that and how to compensate for any deficiencies. We can indicate bandwidths: when do we see signs of positive animal welfare, what values do we find associated with discomfort and at what point could there be damage to welfare or health? But ultimately it is up to politicians to set the norms.'

## Political

'What norms to set is a political choice,' agrees animal researcher Fleur Hoorweg, 'but the scientific perspective is still needed to set the right norms. Animals' requirements can't be seen in isolation. Other interests also have to be taken into consideration in the Humane Livestock Farming agreement, such as economic

aspects, the practical feasibility and the impact on the environment. It is up to us as animal scientists to work out the consequences for animal welfare of certain policy choices.'

Outgoing Agriculture minister Femke Wiersma (BBB party) called the agreement 'a step in the direction of further improvement without asking livestock farmers to do the impossible'. Animal rights organization Wakker Dier — not a signatory to the agreement — gave a critical response. 'The planned welfare improvements are minimal, the transition periods are too long and the get-out clauses too numerous.' The

Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals acknowledges the agreement is not perfect but points out that the new arrangements 'can radically improve the lives of millions of animals.' Humane livestock farming is easier said than done, concluded Wageningen Economic Research (officially Wageningen Social & Economic Research as of January) last autumn in a socioeconomic impact analysis of the agreement.

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## **'Ultimately it is up to politicians to set the norms'**

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The minister has earmarked 51 million euros for the implementation of the agreement. She is also setting up a Humane Livestock Farming Authority, which will assess the progress in 2028, 2033 and 2038. It is not yet known what form the Authority will take. The same applies to the assessment framework.



One of the agreements is for cows to be put out to pasture more. ♦ Photo Resource

## PhD theses **in a nutshell**

### Sweet tooth

If you eat sweet things a lot, you get used to the taste and will be more likely to prefer consuming sugary products and therefore have a higher calorie intake and gain weight. Right? Eva Marija Čad got her test subjects eating hardly any sweet products, a moderate amount or lots for six months, after which she looked at how their preferences for sweet food had changed. Participants who had eaten a lot of sweet food were no more keen on sweet products at the end, while participants who had eaten hardly any such products were just as fond of sweet flavours as before. So you can't just kick the sweet habit. DV

*Sweet tooth: nature or nurture? Assessing the Role of Dietary Sweetness Exposure on Sweet Taste Liking.* Eva Marija Čad ◀ Supervisor Kees de Graaf

### Cannabis in colour

The active substances in medicinal cannabis are mainly found in the plant's female flowers. Mexximiliaan Holweg studied how to maximize the efficiency of plant growth — in terms of flower yield and cannabinoid concentrations — by altering the light intensity and fine-tuning the colour composition of the light. He found that the plant grows well in white light containing two different wavelengths of red, for example. The plant doesn't like to get too hot either. DV

*Photobiology of medicinal cannabis. Pharmaceutical Compounds and Crop Morphology.* Mexximiliaan Holweg ◀ Supervisor Leo Marcelis

### Combating plastics

Louise Schreyers' doctoral thesis shows that our rivers are full of macroplastics — and not just the rivers that flow into the sea. She obtained a picture of how, what, where and why. Pieces of plastic get caught in plants, infrastructure, river banks and floodplains, and end up buried in sediment layers. Floods can increase the discharge of plastics by a factor of two to three. That makes clearing up after a flood a very effective measure, but more is needed to clean polluted rivers. The planned United Nations Plastics Treaty, which will be legally binding, could help reduce the influx of plastics at the source. DV

*Lost in transportation. Macroplastic retention in rivers* Louise Schreyers ◀ Supervisor Martine van der Ploeg

## THE PROPOSITION

PhD candidates explain their most thought-provoking proposition. This time it's **Elien Versteegen**, who received her PhD on 23 May. Her study was about the effects of psychopharmaceuticals on the behaviour of aquatic organisms. Text Ning Fan



‘Living sustainably does not make one morally superior to others.’

‘We should all do our best to make sustainable choices, but those choices aren't a reason to judge others or feel morally superior. Thinking you make better choices than others won't motivate or inspire anyone else to live sustainably; it's just judging. ‘These days, there's often subtle pressure to make the “right” choices. But we have to acknowledge that not everyone has the same resources. Financial limitations, geography and social inequalities all affect your ability to make sustainable choices. As a PhD candidate, I had a salary and flexible holidays, so it was easier to take the train, which is often a more time-consuming and costly option compared to flying. But for students or people

with fewer resources, that choice isn't always easy or possible. But that doesn't mean that they care less about the environment.

‘To me, sustainability isn't just one action like taking the train. It's a broader way of living that is also shaped by intention and circumstance. The point isn't to compare or judge, as this can alienate people and drive them apart. The goal should be to inspire, not to judge. Sympathetic conversations are a great way to exchange ideas and encourage others to explore sustainable choices.’

# Into the forest



## Guido Camps

Life can be tricky if you have a vegetable garden. I'm against using Roundup, Exirel and Tracer on principle, but sometimes I feel that I'm feeding the local slugs rather than my family. It's a typical Wageningen dilemma. Another example of large-scale gardening is the food forest hype. Food forests are sprouting up everywhere like organic fungi, often financed via crowdfunding among oat-milk-cappuccino-drinking urban folk hankering for a rural idyll. The idea is great:

**'Isn't a food forest just an allotment on a larger scale — an XXL vegetable garden with better PR?'**

an edible paradise where nuts, berries and fungi thrive almost effortlessly,

a place bursting with biodiversity and free from artificial fertilizers or toxins. Intrinsically appealing initiatives that also help you offset the mortgage on your new second home through crowdfunding.

Food forests get an impressive amount of support from politicians and celebrity chefs,

and people in Wageningen seem keen on them too. A project page tells me 'Food forests fit with a new agricultural system with more diversity. They should have a role alongside other forms of sustainable agriculture.'

But the fundamental question bugging me is whether food forests can ever be more than a fun hobby. When I read the literature, I don't see any solid scientific studies showing that food forests can generate sufficient yields to give you a decent income. Quite apart from the question of how to harvest, package and sell the food (getting the blackberries off 40 shrubs in a dense hazelnut forest seems quite a challenge for any machinery).

Isn't a food forest essentially just an allotment on a larger scale — an XXL vegetable garden with better PR? If the main aim is biodiversity and CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration, fine. Go ahead with your food forests, but put them on land that isn't suitable for farming. Don't use the ultra-expensive Dutch fields, which are in short supply anyway and where the main challenge is to get the current farmers to switch to less intensive practices.

As far as I'm concerned, until proven otherwise, a food forest isn't real agriculture: it's a land-intensive hobby for people with a lot of space and idealism. Nothing wrong with that, but what *is* wrong is presenting the food forest as a solution for feeding the world without any proper evidence.

### Pays off in 70 years?

Following some detective work, it turns out that Stijn Heijts, the chair of the Dutch Food Forest Foundation, has data that can be used to make a comparison. He says, 'The average investment in a food forest is about 20,000 euros per hectare: 8,000 in plant material, 8,000 for the design and 4,000 for permits and working the soil. After planting, the forest takes ten years to mature so you hardly have any income until then, but you don't have costs either. After that, the estimated revenue is 12,000 euros per hectare per year. That is about 20 per cent more than the revenue per hectare of conventional farmland, which is about 10,000 euros.'

Based on these figures, a food forest farmer would have no revenue for ten years but would have invested 20,000 euros and lost out on 10,000 euros per year that they could have earned with conventional farming. This difference of 120,000 euros would be wiped out by the higher revenues in a mere 60 years. So according to this data the food forest pays off after 70 years!

Guido Camps (40) is a vet and researcher at Human Nutrition and OnePlanet. He enjoys baking, beekeeping and unusual animals.

## Alcohol and drugs among students not living at home and society members

# ‘We can all do stupid stuff’

Students who don't live with their parents and are student society members consume far more alcohol and drugs than the average student, according to the recently published report ‘Under the Influence’. Not a surprising conclusion perhaps, but still relevant. After all, Wageningen is the university town with the most students living away from home who are also members of a society (23 per cent). Does that mean we are all massively into drink and drugs? Text Marieke Enter • Illustration Valerie Geelen

‘**U**nder the Influence’ is intended as a supplement to the authoritative Monitor on Students’ Mental Health and Use of Alcohol and Drugs in Higher Education, produced by the Trimbos Institute. The 2023 edition of the monitor concluded that students’ use of alcohol and drugs is influenced by the social context they live in. However, the monitor didn’t provide many details on this topic, which made the organizations behind ‘Under the Influence’ (see inset) curious to find out more. With around 2,000 student respondents, their survey is on a smaller scale than the Trimbos monitor. Even so, it offers more information and some striking findings from a Wageningen perspective. *Resource* asked two Master’s students to comment on the report. They are both in a position to compare Wageningen with other places: N. has experience of Delft student life and W. was part of the Enschede student scene (full names known to the editors). But first let’s consider the national

picture. The group the survey looked at – students living away from home who are members of a student society – turned out to consume more alcohol and drugs and smoke more than the average for the student population as a whole. Figures for recent use (in the past year) of XTC/MDMA, cocaine and ketamine were four to six times higher. But do the respondents find that a problem? Yes and no. Forty-two per cent think excessive alcohol consumption is part of student life and 37 per cent see drug use as a completely normal thing to do. Even so, 50 per cent say they are concerned about the level of drug use in their circles.

### Flat parties

Interestingly, the survey shows drugs are mostly consumed at festivals and parties in student flats; there isn’t much snorting or pill-taking on society premises. ‘That’s a direct consequence of societies’ strict anti-drug policies,’ says N. ‘Some societies in Delft have

quite a strong drugs culture but in Wageningen you risk being thrown out if a society catches you using drugs. They don’t like that here.’ But people regularly snort something or take a pill at parties in student flats, according to the survey. W. can confirm that. ‘There simply isn’t much nightlife in Wageningen. So you’re more likely to go to parties in student flats because that’s somewhere to meet up with other students. It’s all too easy then

#### Under the Influence: for and by students

The student organizations Lieve Mark, Time Out and Waar Trek Jij De Lijn? produced this report based on joint research into the use of alcohol, tobacco/vapes and soft and hard drugs in student houses and student societies. They carried out the survey with and for students, aiming to give them a voice and show their perspective — without being judgemental. ‘It’s crucial to hear honest accounts from students,’ say the initiators.



to have one more drink or try some drugs thinking “one more won’t hurt” – especially because there are always people around to help you if things go wrong. You never get into serious problems if you get really drunk, stoned or high at a party in a student flat. There’s a good safety net if you’re on the brink of doing something stupid.’ Not all flat parties are like that, says N., putting things into perspective. ‘It depends on what scene you’re in. If that particular student flat is about hardcore partying, people can sometimes get pretty extreme. Personally, I’m in a scene where consumption is not so bad. My crowd see drugs more as a means of self-discovery.’ W. also hears that a lot. ‘Wageningen is a place where people are curious about the effect certain drugs have from the perspective of spiritual development.’

Alcohol is consumed in vast quantities among society members who live away from home. On average, they drink 29 glasses of alcohol a week. Seventy-six per cent of the men and 60 per cent of the women are in the category of excessive drinkers; defined as consuming 21 glasses or more per week for men and 14 or more for women. Male students are the worst boozers, drinking twice as much a week on average as female students. The younger students are the worst of all, with alcohol consumption half as much again as that of older students.

### Wageningen stands out

When reasons for consuming drink or drugs are considered, Wageningen scores above average for peer pressure, or ‘being sociable and joining in.’ N. agrees, up to a point. ‘I live in quite a big student house where most of the occupants use drugs – some more than others. I think I’d find it harder to get along with my housemates if I didn’t

## ‘It would be nice if students were more willing to try an alcohol-free beer’

use drugs at all. Some housemates would find that odd. But if you decide not to join in anymore, that doesn’t have any consequences, so I don’t experience peer pressure in that sense. That is even less so with alcohol. Nobody sees it as a problem if you decide to stop drinking alcohol.’ Wageningen stands out in another respect too: a particularly low level of





awareness of addiction care. Only eight per cent of Wageningen students know they can turn to addiction care services for help or advice. Babs Cornelissen, the Vallei Region coordinator at Iris Care, is surprised the figure is so low. 'Perhaps students find it easier to speak to a study adviser or the university's student psychologist,' she says. 'We are not so close by – literally, because we're in Ede.' Cornelissen acknowledges that the threshold for getting proper addiction treatment from Iris Care is quite high: you need a referral from your doctor. 'But we also offer a lot of advice, precisely to avoid the situation where someone needs treatment. That preventive service needs to be as accessible as possible. I see this survey as a reason for investigating how we can improve our links with the university. We're ready to help students as soon as they suspect their consumption is getting out of hand, rather than only once they are really unable to cope.'

N. gives another reason for the relative lack of awareness of addiction care. 'I think people are more likely to go to one another for help. Doing drugs is socially

acceptable here, so it's not hard to talk to someone about it if you think it's getting problematic. It isn't a big taboo subject.' Even so, he knows things don't always go well. 'For a while, I had to keep the drugs other people were using in my room to make sure they couldn't get to the drugs easily. I also know someone who did a three-month treatment for marihuana addiction. It's quite a tough struggle for some people.'

### Experimenting safely

One of the recommendations in 'Under the Influence' is to give older students a role in guiding younger students. N. and W. say that essentially already happens in Wageningen. Older students don't discourage consumption – quite the opposite sometime – but they do keep an eye on it. 'My student house is a safe environment for experimenting a little,' says N. 'The more experienced housemates give the younger students a serious introduction because you need to know what you're doing when you drink alcohol and mix various kinds of drugs. Sometimes the older students will take the younger ones aside if they're overdoing it, and go for a walk round the block or whatever. You can always

## 'My crowd see drugs more as a means of self-discovery'

## 'There are always people ready to help if things are going wrong'

go to them for help if you are having problems.'

According to W., bouts of excessive drinking are a way for younger students to prove themselves. 'But you do need to know your limits. People who have drunk too much can be very irritating. That was a reason why I decided to cut down on my alcohol consumption, because I don't want to be like that. I was also fed up with the hangovers and brain fog. Anyway, I don't know anyone who genuinely enjoys being completely legless. And yet we still do it. Of course, that is the effect of alcohol: it makes you take dubious decisions. There needs to be more awareness of this in the student alcohol culture. Drinking vast amounts and doing stupid stuff is not hard – we can all manage that. It would be nice if students were more willing to try an alcohol-free beer occasionally.' ■



# The comeback professor

‘Lifestyle professor’ Emely de Vet left for Tilburg University two years ago to become dean of the University College. But now she is back in her old home. ‘I naturally take an interdisciplinary approach.’



Text Marieke Enter

**B**efore she left for Tilburg, De Vet held the chair of Consumption & Healthy Lifestyles, the group she set up. Now she is returning as a professor holding a personal chair ‘with a focus on behavioural change, health and the living environment, in particular in the urban context’, as the appointment announcement puts it. That means she is more or less back in her old home. ‘My professorship is funded by two groups, Consumption & Healthy Lifestyles and Urban Economics, for three and two days a week respectively. Through that position, I am also a principal investigator at the AMS Institute,’ she explains (see inset).

## So Tilburg wasn’t Wageningen?

‘I was dean of the University College at Tilburg, an institution that offers a specific form of interdisciplinary education covering the liberal arts and sciences. I thought it would be the perfect place for me. I am good at working across disciplines and boundaries, I live close to Tilburg and after ten years at WUR — where I had done a lot in research and management — it was only logical to look for something else and put more emphasis on the education side. But it turned out not to be such a good fit. A lot of my research is about how the environment

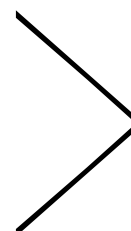
determines people’s behaviour and how a certain context leads to certain outcomes, and that was exactly what happened to me now in my job. I was the same person, but I couldn’t achieve as much because of the interaction with the Tilburg context in terms of culture, the institutional setting and leadership. I simply don’t thrive in an environment with a lot of fixed procedures and structures. I hadn’t really realized that beforehand. To be clear, I left on good terms and I hope to be able to collaborate with Tilburg University in future in my new job.’

## Did you consider moving to another organization?

‘Of course, and I had options too. But I chose Wageningen because I realized that’s my area of expertise, that is where I have added value and it’s an environment where I thrive. I find health sciences combined with the life sciences more interesting than with a more medical context. The most urgent health issues facing us now and in the future, such as obesity, microbial resistance and climate change, are ones that require input from Wageningen’s fields of expertise. They are about how we produce food, deal with animals, plants and nature and design the living environment. Another factor in my decision was how easily you can connect and collaborate with others here and start up new things. WUR gives people more scope to be enterprising and creative than a lot of other places.’

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‘Doing something meaningful is important to me’



‘WUR gives you more scope to be enterprising and creative than other places’

**You are returning as a personal professor with the urban aspect as a new focus area in your research. Tell us about this.**

‘My research has always been about the interaction between how the environment is set up – in terms of the physical, social, economic and organizational aspects – and its effect on people’s behaviour. A city is an ecosystem in which various social developments come together. What’s more, a city is a demarcated living environment in which you can study specific issues relating to health and behaviour. For example, health inequality tends to be greater in cities because you have people living there on very high incomes and people with very little money. The urban food environment is also quite different: you have eateries everywhere, you have Uber Eats, so you can get whatever you want at any time. Climate change can also have a big health impact in cities – take the heat island problem. In cities you have all kinds of dynamics interacting between people, infrastructure, plants and animals, all taking place in a relatively small area with an awful lot of people. I find that a fascinating puzzle to figure out.’

**So can the city serve as a canvas on which to do the kind of ‘broad-based’ research you have always done?**

(She laughs) ‘It’s true my projects are getting ever more complex, comprehensive and broader. That is probably because of how I think. I was trained as a health scientist and that teaches you to look at health from

multiple perspectives. For example, you study courses on healthcare law, health economics and health sociology. Then I started to involve the behavioural science as well. That seems only logical to me, but of course you need to keep it all connected. I want to be able to explain why I’m interested in resistance to antibiotics *and* in exercise among the young *and* in preventing infections *and* in the food environment. The urban environment is a good overarching context in which to study all my “hobby horses” and keep my research field clearly delimited.’

**Now you can write new research proposals to your heart’s content?**

‘That’s right. I still had various PhD candidates and ongoing projects here, for example on the effect of interventions in the food environment. I’ve also brought a couple of projects with me from Tilburg. One, on crop protection, was a joint project with Wageningen anyway. And I am indeed busy on various new proposals. I know some people hate that task but I love it; my main challenge is not to go overboard. At any rate, I will be able to concentrate on the subject matter again. Over the past few years, I’ve had managerial roles in large teams, and it’s nice that I don’t have to be managing a team any more.’

**AMS Institute**

The Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Metropolitan Solutions (AMS Institute) is a science institute run jointly by WUR, Delft University of Technology and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). It aims at urban innovation, with the city of Amsterdam as a living lab and Amsterdam municipality as a partner. It focuses on science-based solutions for climate change, health, energy provision, food security and mobility, specifically in the urban context.

**Have you already got ideas on how you will be shaping your research?**

‘It will definitely have a strong interdisciplinary component because that comes naturally to me. And it needs to be something new: I always want to be tackling new things. That might reflect the fact that as a person I’m easily bored, but as a researcher my preference for innovation is a strength. I’m always having new ideas and making lists. In addition, my projects are always about some complex social problem that I don’t just want to understand thoroughly – regardless of where I need to get the necessary knowledge, whether that’s in the field of

economics, psychology or sociology – but where I also want to find tools that can help us deal with it. I don't just want to build knowledge, I also want to make an impact and help policy-makers. In Tilburg, it wasn't common practice to look beyond the university and see which organizations could benefit from your knowledge. But that's second nature to me – and typical of Wageningen, I now realize. I think WUR is far too hard on itself in that regard. We are already very advanced in terms of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches.'

### **What will your role be in education and in other WUR projects?**

'For the time being, I'm mainly providing all-round support for Consumption & Healthy Lifestyle and Urban Economics. The emphasis will be on teaching about consumption and lifestyles, health economics and health inequality. Both groups teach courses for a lot of different degree programmes. That means they

are sometimes short of staff, and I'm very versatile. I will also be doing a bit of networking, bringing in partners, publicizing the amazing health research we do here and making connections with other professors and groups. Both Eveline and Harm (Eveline van Leeuwen, professor of Urban Economics, and Harm Veling, professor of Consumption & and Healthy Lifestyles) know I like to help the organization with more strategic and overarching issues. I want to add value to the organization. Doing something meaningful is important to me.' ■



Professor Emely de Vet: 'My research has always been about the interaction between how the environment is set up and its effect on people's behaviour.'  
Photo Duncan de Fey





## BIKE LAB

Is the heat stress on heathland really greater than in the neighbouring woodland? And if so, by how much? Soil, Water & Atmosphere students Janne Smidts and Jesse Bosma were able to give accurate answers to these questions thanks to the delivery bike Meteorology & Air Quality researcher Bert Heusinkveld converted into a mobile meteorology lab. They can use it to measure air temperature, wind speed, humidity, solar radiation and thermal radiation, for instance. A little solar panel on the pannier rack supplies the power. Heusinkveld created this bike lab years ago for a study on urban climate. 'But I also use it in practical activities. I enjoy teaching students how to use it because they already spend so much time on computers.' ME

Own photo

WANDER lab built a Dutch shopping street for food research

# SHOPPING SCIENTIFICALLY IN A VIRTUAL CITY

You can make whatever changes you like in a virtual world. For example, you can decide how many fast-food ads someone sees when they walk home down a high street. The virtual reality lab WANDER has designed a Dutch shopping street that Consumption & Healthy Lifestyle researchers can use to try out realistic scenarios.



Text Dominique Vrouwenvelder

**A**t the end of last year, associate professor of Consumption & Healthy Lifestyles Maartje Poelman approached WANDER XR Experience Lab. In her research, Poelman investigates whether we are tempted to adopt unhealthy eating habits by outdoor advertising, such as for chocolate at bus stops, ice cream at public swimming pools and beer at sports venues. Poelman was interested in creating a virtual world where she could manipulate the environment and expose test subjects to food ads and fast-food outlets to varying degrees. WANDER developer Timon Verduijn took up the challenge. He built a virtual reality (VR) shopping street with realistic bollards, post boxes, waste containers

and so on to make it look like a typical Dutch street. He based his shopping street on Diezerstraat in Zwolle, Amsterdamsestraatweg in Utrecht and Kalverstraat in Amsterdam. 'The instruction was that it should take about five minutes to walk down the VR street,' explains Verduijn. 'Based on that and average walking speed, we worked out how much street we needed to design. The answer was roughly 500 metres.' He gave the street some bends rather than making it straight. There is a practical reason for this. 'If you make a straight VR street, you can see it disappear endlessly into the distance and so you need an immense length of shopping street to fill the image. Having a street with bends also saves on computing power because the computer doesn't have to load the entire virtual street in one go; it just loads the street gradually as you walk

along it. Anyway, it's more realistic as the Netherlands hardly has any completely straight streets.'

## Blocks

The design of a virtual world often starts with grey blocks. Verduijn was able to connect up various virtual blocks to quickly create something that looked like a street with shops. Then he added bends in the street, plus shadows, colours and textures. 'For example, the street has normal cobbles down the middle, then a gutter to collect the water and then a pavement. We can do whatever we want but the trick is to make it realistic.' Once the street was finished, he started on the buildings. Verduijn: 'One firm requirement was to make the street look Dutch, with Dutch buildings and shops.'

When making a design, developers prefer to use ready-made 3D models built by other developers from all over the world, explains Verduijn. 'Because that means you don't have to start from

3D

### WANDER XR Experience Lab

The WANDER lab was set up to assist with the use of 3D visualization and experiences in research and education. WANDER previously worked with the Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Metropolitan Solutions (AMS) and Amsterdam municipality to get a picture of the complex anatomy of tree roots in the city. That way, people working on restoring canal-sides would know how to avoid damaging tree roots.

scratch every time when programming. But the only shop facades available were for American shops and a few British and German ones. So we had to build at least a hundred different Dutch shop facades ourselves.'

### Street furniture

Verduijn opted for a modular design for reasons of efficiency. 'We created the roof, first and second floors as separate elements, with a couple of variants for each element.' He was then able to easily create a lot of different buildings by combining the variants in different ways. 'We even have a kind of 3D shop window with a slight reflection so you get the feeling you can really look inside the shop. Then we needed just one click to create virtual shops that look like what you would find in a Dutch shopping street.' Verduijn was in luck when it came to the Dutch street furniture. 'Someone else

had already designed Dutch post boxes, waste containers and the typical black bollards. We added lamp posts, tables and benches to give people somewhere to sit and eat in the virtual world.' No shopping street would look right without shoppers. To create them, Verduijn used virtual people from a digital library. He used code to give them instructions that let them move autonomously around the virtual world. They keep their distance from one another and the buildings, and they know not to walk into the post boxes. Verduijn: 'But I needed to digitally close off the start and end of the street, otherwise they would escape.' 'Finally, we gave the shops brands. For example, we created a Kruidvat

pharmacy, a Domino's pizza place, a McDonald's, an Albert Heijn supermarket and a phone repair shop, all with the appropriate advertising. We did that using data from Maartje Poelman, who has an overview of the most common shops in Dutch shopping streets.' The software Verduijn wrote has an option that lets you vary the number of healthy or unhealthy shops in the street. Poelman is currently using this in her research. The first results are expected this autumn. ■

## 'WE HAD TO BUILD A HUNDRED DIFFERENT DUTCH SHOP FACADES OURSELVES'



Photo WANDER

Young people want a place for art, music and getting together

# ‘WAGENINGEN NIGHTLIFE LACKS BEATING HEART’

Wageningen nightlife needs a proper centre that combines culture, art and crazy parties, according to a group of the town’s young people. They have united to form the *Wageningen Culture Collective*, which aims to set up a cultural centre run by and for young people. Biology student Lars Verhoeff (23) is one of the people behind the initiative. ‘I love the magic of dancing, parties and coming together.’ Text Luuk Zegers

**A** goes on in Wageningen, according to Verhoeff. ‘Raves, parties at student societies and in student houses, themed events and festivals. Then there are the music collectives like MiniCulture. In other words, the place is a hive of activity.’ Yet something important is missing, he says. ‘We don’t have a centre where people in the various scenes can easily meet. Somewhere you can perform as a DJ or with your new band, or where anyone – student or otherwise – can organize a party or workshop. There is a nightlife culture but what’s missing is a beating heart where it all comes together. Changing that is the aim of Wageningen

Culture Collective – a group of young people who want to encourage the nightlife scene.’

## How do you plan to do this?

‘In December, we handed the municipal council a manifesto calling on them to help us create such a centre (signed so far by 1,193 people, ed.). They were unanimously in favour of our plan. Now we have weekly meetings with the municipality to discuss possible next steps with them. We are also in discussions with cultural initiatives such as PopUpop about their requirements for such a cultural centre, and we’re looking at cafes and venues as possible locations.’

## Do you already have locations in mind?

‘A new building would be fantastic but that costs a lot of time, money and hassle. For now, we’re considering existing

locations, which often already have things like permits and parking, at least to some extent. We are looking at various sites in Wageningen and we’re talking to organizations such as Superette, Unitas and the International Club.’

## What does your ideal location look like? A music venue like Doornroosje in Nijmegen?

‘Definitely not. Doornroosje is for major artists. We want something for the people of Wageningen who don’t want to become famous but are more interested in being creative. So small-scale gigs, parties and workshops.’

## And the ideal audience?

‘Both students and non-students. They are separate worlds at the moment. Non-students often aren’t welcome at student parties whereas it would in fact be great to bring people from the various

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‘YOU HAVE MORE  
INFLUENCE IF  
YOU’RE THE  
NIGHTLIFE MAYOR’



Lars Verhoeff using a barrow bike to DJ on campus as publicity for the 0317 Festival. ♦ Photo Resource

scenes together. I sometimes go to the skate park in Wageningen Noordwest and you don't have that segregation there; it doesn't matter what you look like or whether you're a student. People have a drink and chat together and skate together. You see the same fraternization at the illegal raves. Everyone's there for the same thing: to have an unforgettable party. We want to create a culture where everyone's welcome.'

### **You want to become the 'nightlife mayor' to get things moving. Will that help?**

'I believe so. If a group of young people speak up, they're just a group of young

people. But you have much more influence if you're the nightlife mayor. I see the nightlife mayor as someone who organizes a protest in an energetic party atmosphere with music and dance, something everyone wants to join in with. I think our message would be stronger and we would reach more people if one of us had that role. And given how much an advocate I am of nightlife – I love the magic of dancing, parties and coming together – I thought maybe that person should be me.'

### **Nightlife mayor Tim Horsting**

Resource asked the current nightlife mayor Tim Horsting for a comment. 'I can relate to what Verhoeff is saying. I spent years working to improve Wageningen's nightlife and night culture, for example by organizing festivals and variety events and by lobbying the municipality for a nightlife society centre. But I often ended up mired in bureaucracy, which was really frustrating. Then I had the idea of becoming the nightlife mayor. That was ten years ago. I talked to the nightlife mayors in other towns and cities, including Jules Deelder in Rotterdam. I couldn't keep up with his drinking and he talked a lot of rubbish, but it was all very sociable. 'I was made nightlife mayor of Wageningen in 2023 by the local cultural initiatives Schrijversharten and Lijntje Poëzie. But my career as a magician took off soon afterwards and my wife and I had our second child. In other words, I was incredibly busy. That meant I wasn't able to devote so much attention to the nightlife mayor role, which wasn't going smoothly anyway. That's a shame. If Lars can breathe new life into this role with a fresh injection of energy, I'm all for it. As far as I'm concerned, Lars can take over the mayoral regalia and get lobbying. We should however organize something nice for the handover. At any rate, I'm open to the idea.'

*To be continued.*

### **How do you get that role?**

'That's a good question! We looked into this and discovered Wageningen already has a nightlife mayor: Tim Horsting. I don't know him personally but I have a lot of respect for what he does. He's a magician who is famous in the Netherlands and beyond. But I'm not sure how much effort he is putting into Wageningen's nightlife at the moment. Perhaps we can convince him to hand over the title to me as his successor.' ■

Falling intake, increasing competition

# Group advises on future of degree programmes

The University Guide has ranked Wageningen as the top Dutch university for 20 years in a row. But how do you stay the best in times of increasing competition and falling student numbers? An internal working group is drafting recommendations on structural changes to the study programmes for the Executive Board. 'If school leavers see 21 different degrees on our website, they no longer see the wood for the trees.'

**W**e currently have 20 Bachelor degrees; 21 as of September with Data Sciences as well,' says Joost de Laat, the general director of the Social Sciences Group.

He heads the internal Portfolio Analysis working group, which reviewed the range of BSc degrees on offer. 'Many of these degree programmes have been around for a long time and are highly valued. But the world is changing; other universities are now also offering degrees in our domain and student numbers are falling. We want to make sure we act before it's too late. Our working group is looking at how to keep our degree portfolio in robust health, both in terms of the content and in terms of the appeal to students.'

## How are you tackling this?

'In 2023, the education consultancy NIDAP carried out a quantitative analysis of our degree programmes: intake, market share, demographic trends, the appeal to students, competitiveness and so on. That analysis gave a good impression of the status of the various degrees and also included recommendations for the future of each programme. In the past few months, our working group has aimed to get a good qualitative picture too by talking to a wide range of people within WUR and beyond, such as programme directors, teachers, students and people involved in student recruitment.'

## What were your findings?

'For example that it's difficult to implement major changes in a degree programme. We innovate a lot within modules but it's harder to make changes to the overall curriculum — for instance replacing a large module with a new course. That's because of how the education is financed: the



Tex Luuk Zegers

programme organizers buy education services from the chair groups. Let's say they decide to stop a course given by chair group A and replace it with a new course given by chair group B. Group A then ends up with financial problems. So we stick cautiously to the status quo, even if that inhibits innovation.'

'Another finding was that WUR's mission — to explore the potential of nature to improve the quality of life — is seen as important in the degree programmes, but it's often not clear what the mission means in practice for the programme. Our vision of educating responsible change-makers can also mean something different in each programme. We need to make that explicit for each degree programme so that the organizers can show clearly how they apply the WUR mission, and so prospective students know that if they do that degree, they will be trained for those jobs.'

## Do we have too many degrees?

'We offer a remarkable number of degrees, given how many students we have. The average annual intake per Bachelor's degree nationwide is 140 students, compared with 65 here. Some programmes are larger but many are

## **‘We want to make sure we act before it’s too late’**

smaller. What’s more, we expect to see declining numbers for most degrees. So we need to do something about that.’ ‘Name recognition is another issue, a recent image monitor has shown. Many secondary school pupils don’t really know what Wageningen is about. If they’ve heard of us at all, they associate us mainly with agriculture. And when those school leavers see 21 different degrees on our website, they no longer see the wood for the trees. The range of degrees on offer needs to be more manageable.’

### **How could that be achieved?**

‘One of the ideas is to divide our degree programmes into three clusters. For example, you could have ‘Fundamentals of Life’ with degrees like Biology, Plant Sciences and Animal Sciences. Then an ‘Innovation & Design for the Potential of Nature’ cluster with Agrotechnology, Biotechnology, Food Technology and Biosystems Engineering. And finally a cluster ‘Bridging Nature & Human Wellbeing’, with degrees such as Health & Society and Economics & Policy. These are provisional names. In the end you

should use labels students can relate to. The clusters can help create a clear WUR profile so that students get a better idea of what they can study at Wageningen. It could also make collaboration between degree programmes easier.’

### **Do you also want to reduce the number of degree programmes?**

‘Yes, that is one of our suggestions. Fewer options — for example, 12 to 16 degrees — would make it all clearer. That doesn’t need to be at the expense of study options: some degree programmes could be merged to form a broader programme with specialist modules. The first year would be broad, after which you would choose a specialization.’

### **What would fewer degrees mean for the teachers? Will jobs be lost?**

‘I don’t know. We want to keep the small-scale nature of the teaching. That’s one of WUR’s strengths and an explicit objective in the educational vision. However, we want to make the education more efficient and more flexible. We also hope that offering fewer degrees with a clearer profile will let us continue to attract enough students in the future.’

### **What is the next step?**

‘We’ve been asking people what they think of our findings. The reactions are overwhelmingly positive, although some people do have concerns. Now we are drafting a set of recommendations for the Executive Board: what specific assignment should the board give the programme organizers?’

### **Will that also suggest which degrees could be merged?**

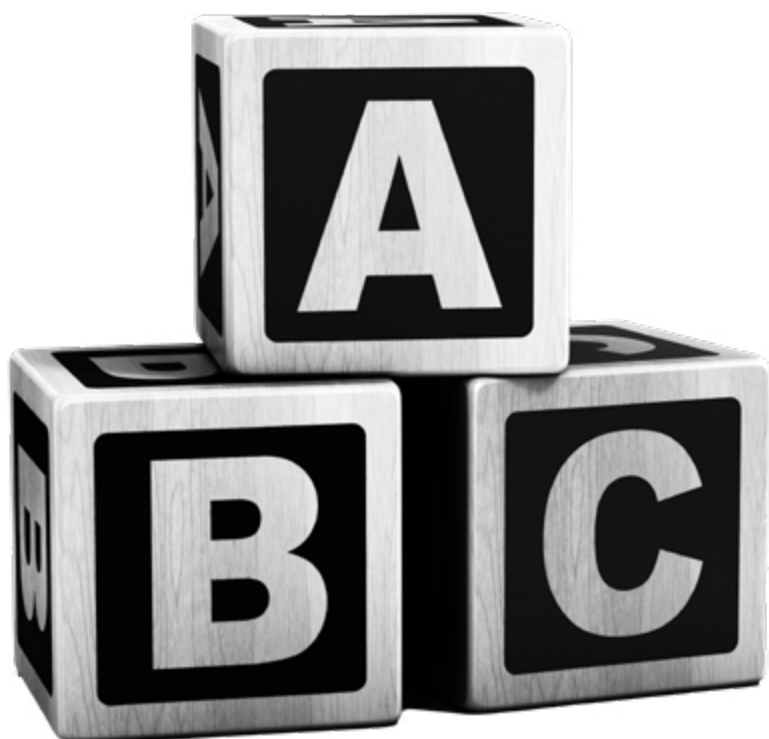
‘Among other things. We are looking at which degrees have a lot of overlap but don’t yet have a shared mission. We are also considering the viability of the degrees with relatively few students if they remain independent, against including them as a specialization within a broader programme. And more generally, what those broader programmes should look like.’

### **That is undoubtedly a sensitive issue.**

‘Absolutely. Change can be frightening, but everyone wants robust, future-proof degree programmes. WUR staff realize the small degrees can’t stay that way. There is a lot of animus for an update, but we need to take action. Doing nothing is not an option.’

### **When will this happen?**

‘If the Executive Board approves the plans this summer, we will need to work out the details together from next year. The changes will gradually alter the portfolio of Bachelor’s degrees over the next few years.’ ■



## Widespread food myth disproved

# ULTRA-PROCESSED FOOD DOESN'T MAKE YOU FAT

The idea that eating ultra-processed food is always unhealthy and inevitably makes you fat is a widespread misunderstanding. New WUR research shows that the speed you eat at is what matters. Text Dominique Vrouwenvelder

**M**ore than 70 per cent of the products in Dutch supermarkets are ultra-processed foods (UPF). They include soft drinks, cookies, margarine, cold meats and bread. It is commonly believed that these products are unhealthy and at least partly responsible for the obesity epidemic. But according to assistant professor of Sensory Science & Eating Behaviour Marlou Lasschuijt, 'The category of ultra-processed foods includes a wide range of products, which you tend to eat quickly or slowly depending on their texture. Take a soft roll compared with a freshly baked roll with a crispy crust. If you are allowed to eat as much of that product as you want, the different texture affects how much you eat in practice.'

Together with Professor Ciarán Forde in the same group and a large research team, Lasschuijt studied the influence of food texture and the number of calories per gram on how fast we eat and how much. In mid-June, the researchers shared their first results at a conference in America. You eat far less of ultra-processed foods that you tend to eat slowly than of the foods that you eat quickly. The difference is 369 calories a day. Which is the equivalent of five bitterballen.

In this research project, the Wageningen scientists subjected 41 participants twice to two weeks on a diet that was 90 per cent ultra-processed foods. One of the diets consisted of meals and snacks with textures that the researchers knew encouraged slow eating, while the second diet consisted of food with textures that invite you to eat them quickly. For example, the participants got yoghurt for breakfast with either chewy or soft granola, rolls with either hard or soft crusts for lunch,

and burritos with chunks or a smooth sauce as the filling for dinner.

In both diets, the participants could eat as much or as little as they wanted. Lasschuijt: 'They were instructed to eat until they felt "comfortably full". After the first diet, the test subjects had a two-week break in which they could eat what they wanted, and then they switched to the other diet for the next two weeks.' The researchers made sure that the calories per gram of food, the portion sizes, total calories served and calories from ultra-processed foods were the same for both diets. That meant the researchers were able to attribute differences in amounts consumed to the speed at which people ate the food, depending on the food texture.

### **Five bitterballen**

'People ate almost twice as fast and consumed far more calories when on the eat-fast diet. During the two-week period, they ate 369 calories a day more on average than when on the eat-slow diet,' says Lasschuijt. That is about the same as a chocolate bar, a large slice of cake or five *bitterballen* — a day. Over the course of the two weeks, that added up to a difference of over 5000 calories. 'When on the eat-slow diet, the participants lost half a kilo on average over the two weeks.'

In another study that was published recently, Lasschuijt and her colleagues got 69 participants to have lunch on campus on five occasions to examine the independent and combined effects of eating speed and calories per gram on the energy intake during lunch. The researchers created five combinations of crusty or soft rolls with high-fat or low-fat chicken fillet and cheese, and varying



Whether you have a burrito filled with sauce or chunks makes a big difference to how many calories you eat • Photo Unsplash / Dushawn Jovic

amounts of mayonnaise and butter, lettuce and raw carrots.

Lasschuijt: 'The eating speed and amount of calories in the food each have an independent effect on how many calories someone consumes. When we manipulated the two factors simultaneously, we could add up those independent effects. When eating high-calorie food quickly, the participants consumed twice as many calories as when having a slow lunch with few calories. Even though they felt just as full after all the lunches and thought they all tasted equally good, the participants had consumed 600 calories more in one lunch than in another.' That is a difference of nine *bitterballen*.

### Adaptation

The researchers were amazed at the test subjects' ability to adapt. 'Almost everyone adapted their eating behaviour spontaneously without us having to give instructions. If we gave them an eat-slow diet, they really did eat more slowly — and therefore less. Normally, we see much more variation in how people respond to an intervention aimed at changes in behaviour.'

'Sensory aspects such as the taste, aroma, texture and colour play a crucial role when choosing what to eat and determining how many calories you consume during a meal,' emphasizes Lasschuijt. 'Nutrition research often ignores that. The research we presented in America shows that meals that are equally satiating are eaten

'Test subjects ate 369 calories a day more on average on the eat-fast diet than when on the eat-slow diet'

differently purely because they have a different texture. That means we can use the texture of meals to change consumers' eating behaviour.'

### Myth disproved

Professor of Food Quality & Design Vincenzo Fogliano spoke enthusiastically about the research results on LinkedIn. He has been arguing for a while that processed food is not necessarily unhealthy. 'This study shows once and for all that the association between ultra-processed food consumption and health outcomes is not related to the degree of processing but to the speed at which the food is eaten. It took four years, a lot of money, the efforts of dozens of students and researchers to deliver solid scientific proof, but it was worth it!' Lasschuijt agrees. 'You can eat ultra-processed food without putting on weight. Of course, the category includes foodstuffs you shouldn't be eating every day, but also plenty of foodstuffs that are fine in terms of overweight.' ■

# 'IT'S CLEAR WHAT IS A PFAS AND WHAT NOT'

Why chemical companies are fighting to redefine PFAS, and how WUR researcher Gabriel Sigmund is calling their bluff. 'I would say, if something doesn't break down and wasn't there in the first place, it should not be there. Period.'

Text Sarai Bisseling • Photo Shutterstock

**A**s the EU moves to finalize its groundbreaking PFAS ban, industry lobbyists are scrambling to muddy the waters.

Their goal? Change what 'PFAS' means on paper. Because if it's not a PFAS, it's not regulated. Gabriel Sigmund, an assistant professor of Environmental Technology, explained his views on the legislation of persistent pollutants in an interview with WUR Master's students. Sigmund recently published a bold scientific statement as part of a growing resistance against one of the most pervasive pollution crises of our time.

## Sowing doubt

The playbook is familiar. Deny the problem. Distract regulators. Distort scientific consensus. We've seen it before with tobacco, oil and pharmaceuticals. Now the same tactics are being used to weaken PFAS regulations. The EU is about to finalize its PFAS ban on over 10,000 man-made compounds. PFAS are found in a wide range of products, from pharmaceuticals like anaesthetic drugs and antidepressants to firefighting foam and pesti-

cides. In January 2025, journalists in the Forever Lobbying Project exposed intense lobbying efforts to create exceptions in the upcoming laws. The Forever Lobbying Project is a collaboration between 16 newsrooms across Europe and a follow-up to the Forever Pollution Project, which in 2023 revealed the extent of PFAS pollution across the continent.

## Definition war

At the heart of the debate is the definition of a PFAS. The OECD definition is widely accepted by scientists, but due to lobbying efforts, it is now being called into question. Sigmund and a global group of PFAS experts have published a joint scientific statement in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology Letters* to defend the OECD definition of PFAS and its application in the new European PFAS regulations. Sigmund stresses that, although regulatory decisions are of course made in political and societal contexts, scientific

truths must not be undermined. 'The question of what is or isn't a PFAS should not be up for discussion,' insists Sigmund. 'It is very clear.'

The proposed alternative definition would exclude many important polluting compounds, like fluorinated polymers and ultra-short chain PFAS. The tiniest and possibly most controversial member of the PFAS family is trifluoroacetic acid (TFA). It has been found everywhere on the planet, from human blood to remote ice cores in the Arctic Circle. TFA forms when other PFAS break down in the environment. Such

### EU BAN ON PFAS

In 2023 the Netherlands, together with Denmark, Germany, Norway and Sweden, submitted a proposal under the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) framework to ban all PFAS across Europe. The goal is to prevent banned PFAS being replaced by newer, equally harmful or under-researched PFAS. In 2024, ECHA completed its scientific evaluation. The European Commission is now preparing a legislative proposal based on these recommendations. In May 2025, the Commission confirmed its support for banning PFAS in consumer products, while allowing exceptions for industrial applications. A final decision is expected later in 2025. The new regulation is likely to come into force in 2026 or 2027.

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## 'TFA IS A POSTER CHILD FOR A WORST-CASE SCENARIO'

**PFAS**

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, better known as PFAS, are man-made chemical compounds that include incredibly strong carbon-fluorine bonds. This means that they don't break down and stay in the environment forever. According to the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) definition, PFAS are fluorinated substances that contain at least one fully fluorinated methyl group ( $-\text{CF}_3$ ) or methylene group ( $-\text{CF}_2-$ ).

'transformation products' are usually excluded from regulations. But Sigmund warns that banning only some PFAS won't solve the problem. In response to earlier bans, companies designed similar molecules that degraded just enough to pass the regulations. This led

to the creation of second- and third-generation PFAS. Although these newer molecules seem to break down, they just transform into smaller but still highly persistent PFAS, like TFA.

'TFA is a poster child for a worst-case scenario,' says Sigmund. 'It is the smallest, most mobile perfluoroalkyl acid. It doesn't stick. It doesn't break down. It gets everywhere, in the whole water cycle, and the baseline just goes up and up and up.' While its toxicity under chronic exposure is still unclear, TFA is now a baseline environmental stressor that can affect everything, everywhere. And when a chemical with such extreme persistence is under review for its toxic

effects on the liver and mammalian reproduction, the risks become difficult to ignore.

'Why would we risk putting something into the water cycle that we can never get out, ever, that doesn't break down? I would say, if something doesn't break down and wasn't there in the first place, it should not be there. Period.'

### Planetary crisis

Global chemical pollution has been called the third big planetary crisis, after climate change and biodiversity loss. In 2024, Sigmund joined the board of the International Panel on Chemical Pollution (IPCP). The IPCP is an independent body of scientists trying to put chemical pollution on the global agenda. The goal is to become for chemicals what the IPCC is for the climate: a trusted scientific authority that can guide international policy. And although science alone cannot solve this issue, it can help lawmakers stay grounded in objective truths in the face of external pressure. That's how scientists at WUR can make a real difference: by standing up for the facts when those facts are most under threat. The vision Sigmund is fighting for? A world where chemicals are safe and sustainable by design, and managed in a transparent and responsible manner across their life cycle. ■



#### About the author

The author of this article is WUR Soil Biology & Chemistry student Sarai Bisseling. Together with 15 fellow Master's students, she took the course Trending Topics in Biology and Chemistry of Soil and Water. Part of this course was a 'News Article' tutorial, in which Resource editor-in-chief Willem Andr  e gave a crash course in journalism and article writing. The assignment was to write a newspaper article on PFAS in soil, soil rewilding or the effects of beavers on the environment. The articles were evaluated by the course coordinator Professor Paul van den Brink and de Resource editorial team. Sarai's article was selected as the winner. This is her first journalistic article.

# One last 'Sjef AID'

In 2000 he was one of the AID freshers and since then he has been involved every year in organizing the event. Sjef Moling has seen the Wageningen introduction week grow from 600 students to 2,500, and the team of volunteers from 30 to 220. 'I enjoy giving new students a good start to life in Wageningen.' This is his last year. Text Luuk Zegers

**D**o we know yet how the AID freshers will get from the dyke to the street theatre?' asks Moling.

Student: 'You've got the stilt-walkers, right? Can't they direct people?'

Moling: 'It's a long way from the changing rooms to the dyke and then they have to walk along the dyke on stilts. How about putting up signs instead?'

It is the end of May, in a room somewhere in Forum. The students on the AID committee scroll through an Excel file with the details of the introduction week as they present their plans to Sjef Moling and his successor Maartje Kragtwijk. As the students talk about what exactly has been agreed, who has which tasks and what exactly still needs to be arranged, they are constantly interrupted by questions from Moling and Kragtwijk. 'What is your definition of heat?' asks Moling when they start discussing the heat plan. 'Uuhhh,' is the reply. 'The

crew will need to be clear on that so they know when they have to change all the plans,' says Moling. 'Oohh, this meeting,' sighs one of the students.

## From fresher to leader

Moling is currently a safety advisor in the Student Life, Wellbeing & Inclusion team, but a quarter of a century ago he too was a fresher taking part in the AID. Little did he know then that he would become 'Sjef AID'. What was his own introduction week like?

'My parents dropped me off at Unitas. Back then, you started the intro week at one of the student societies. I thought: what kind of a world have I ended up in? That week, I cycled to places in Wageningen that I've never been able to find since. The band Green Lizard performed in the stadium on Wageningse Berg; someone in my group was a big fan of theirs. It was an amazing week. The next year, 2001, I helped with the organization. It was so much fun that I've been involved in it ever since.' In 2005, Moling, then a Biotechnology student, joined the AID committee. When there were not enough people to form a new committee in 2006, the idea was aired of appointing a WUR employee to guarantee continuity in the AID organization. 'That plan wasn't implemented immediately,' says Moling. 'But when a student on the AID committee in 2010 ended up in hospital because he had too much on his plate, the rector decided a change was needed.'

In 2010, Moling, by now a PhD candidate in Molecular Biology, was appointed AID project manager along with Rolf Marteijs, Nutrition & Health programme director, who had been involved in the AID organization since 1995. They jointly organized the introduction week for five years. 'We made the whole thing much more professional. Safety, budgets, plans – everything

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'When I started, there were 30 of us organizing AID, and now we have 220 volunteers'



Sjef Moling and his successor Maartje Kragtwijk in the storeroom with the AID equipment. • Photo Guy Ackermans

was tightened up a lot. That was much needed as the number of participants had increased from 600 in 2000 to 1,500 in 2009. In 2019, we had as many as 2,500.' Marteijs stopped in 2015 and his successor didn't stay long. 'And they were never replaced,' says Moling. 'Since then, I've been doing the project management on my own, although Rolf still does a lot for AID.'

### Permanently on call

Moling: 'I'm permanently on call during AID week. If anything happens, they come to me. I can even get rung up in the middle of the night. It's nice but it's also tiring.' There haven't been any major incidents during all those years, says Moling. 'Twice, we had an AID fresher suffering a psychosis. That is quite hard to deal with if you happen to be in the same group but fortunately most AID freshers didn't notice anything.' The Covid crisis was also an unusual period. 'The rules were constantly changing, for example on how many people could meet up together. In the end, we were able to organize a few activities such as a sports day, a bike excursion and even a festival with assigned seating.' Moling's successor Kragtwijk helped out as project

manager for the first time in 2024. 'Maartje was on the AID committee in 2015. She has experience in coaching. I hope too that with her background in marketing [she has worked in the past for Newcraft and Oak in Amsterdam] she will be able to get all the new students taking part in AID. That would be fantastic. At present we have around 90 to 95 per cent taking part.' Moling also thinks it is time for a fresh take on the organization. 'When I started, there were 30 of us organizing AID. Now we have 220 volunteers. You want to get the best out of everyone, but that's not easy with such a large group.'

In August, Moling will be 'Sjef AID' for one last time. 'But Maartje will be in charge; I'll be following her lead. I'll be doing technical and safety stuff and making sure she knows whatever she needs to know.' Each year, it feels magical seeing all the months of preparation come to fruition in that one introduction week, says Moling. 'I enjoy giving new students a good start to life in Wageningen.' ■



*'It's hard to imagine an AID without Sjef.' Read what co-workers and students have to say about the end of the Moling era at AID.*

# Limelight



Wageningen can be very quiet in the long, hot summers but it's not completely dead. *Resource* has tips for people who have had enough of the Rhine beach, Torckpark and ice cream parlour. Text Coretta Jongeling

## What's on this summer?

### ► Montmartre on the Rhine

You'll think you're in France during the Montmartre on the Rhine event. French snacks, music and portrait artists liven up Bergstraat. **Saturday 16 August**, 11:00-16:00, Bergstraat [proefwageningen.nl/agenda/3085985566/montmartre-aan-de-rijn-1](https://proefwageningen.nl/agenda/3085985566/montmartre-aan-de-rijn-1)

### ► Nature trip down the Rhine

If you want to see the Rhine from a different perspective, book a trip on the *Blauwe Bever*, the boat run by Utrechts Landschap. Watch the sunset from the water near the Blauwe Kamer nature area or learn more about the nature along the Rhine during a guided tour. The tour is in Dutch but the guides can answer questions in English.

**Various dates in July and August**, 26 euros. More info: [deblauwebever.nl](https://deblauwebever.nl)

### ► Fête des Courgettes

'It's a joke that got out of hand,' according to one of the organizers. The third Fête des Courgettes will take place at the end of August, at the height of the courgette season. Take along your home-grown courgettes to win a prize for the largest or tastiest courgette, try courgette dishes and enjoy live music.

**Sunday 24 August**, 14:00-18:00, Creative Garden. [creativegardenwageningen.wordpress.com/fete-des-courgettes/](https://creativegardenwageningen.wordpress.com/fete-des-courgettes/)

### ► Music and cafe food at the new Superette

The popup cultural centre Superette has found a new spot in the building that used to house the Woningstichting. Some refurbishment is needed, but the plan is to restart the cultural programme during the summer with cafe food based on donations, bands, films and art exhibitions. Keep an eye on the website and WhatsApp group for updates. [desuperette.nl/](https://desuperette.nl/)

### ► Aperit-Ivo bij Ivo

Fancy a Friday afternoon drinks do during your hols? Former student Ivo's bakery offers cold drinks, fresh focaccias and other snacks from local suppliers.

**Every Friday 17:00-21:00**, Ivo's Bread & Pizza

### ► Ommuurde Tuin Summer Festival

The Ommuurde Tuin is in the woods near Renkum. The site used to be a vegetable garden belonging to King William III but now it's an ecological horticulture business. You can have tea in the garden, pick your own fruit and buy fresh vegetables. There will be soup, cake and a camp fire during the summer festival.

**Saturday 2 August**, Ommuurde Tuin, Renkum [ommuurdetuin.nl/evenementen/](https://ommuurdetuin.nl/evenementen/)



The *Blauwe Bever* boat on a trip down the Rhine near Rhenen ♦ Photo Cees van Doodeweerd



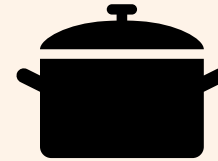
You can spot great-looking people and cool outfits on Wageningen campus. This column highlights some of them. This time, meet Food Technology Bachelor's student **Jolan Vissers (26)**.

Text & Photo Eva de Koeijer



'My style is basically lots of colours, lots of different patterns and as much gold as possible. I often build my outfits around my collection of flower-pattern trousers. Jewellery adds the finishing touch to an outfit – the more bling, the better. I find most of my clothes in second-hand shops. Emmaus is a classic, and there's a small thrift store at Droevendaal. I make my own clothes occasionally, but that's time-consuming and not easy anyway. I only got seriously interested in clothes a couple of years ago. I used to be quite conservative and didn't want to go too wild. But after a while, I thought what the hell, I'm going to wear colours. Now I'm more willing to stand out from the crowd; I feel comfortable wearing something I personally think looks good. I often get nice comments from people too. The other day, I wasn't wearing anything flowery for once and someone immediately asked, "Hey, what happened to the flowers?" To be honest, I still find my outfits quite restrained. Ideally, I'd be going around in a robe and it would all be even more exuberant, but I'm not always in the mood for people's comments and the looks I get. But I do go all out for parties. I like to wear stage costumes then – that's what I feel best in.'

In Wageningen kom je alle smalen van de wereld tegen. Ananya Doraswamy, masterstudent Communication, Health and Life Sciences en *Resource*-columnist, deelt een recept voor een zomers drankje uit India.



Flavours of WUR

## Coconut and melon drink

'This is a cooling summer drink commonly made in the Manglorean Konkani community of South India, where my mother's side of the family comes from. On a recent trip back home, a friend's mother made it for me, and I knew it would be ideal for a warm summer's day in Wageningen!'

### Bereiding

- 1 Cut open the melon, peel it and discard the seeds.
- 2 Cut about three quarters of the melon into pieces and blend into a coarse mixture in a blender.
- 3 Dice the remainder of the melon into very small pieces.
- 4 Place the coarse mixture in a container, add the diced melon pieces and the coconut milk. Stir and taste.
- 5 If you think it needs sweetening, add jaggery/sugar to taste and stir again.
- 6 Then add a spoonful of *nylon poha* or desiccated coconut. Stir well.
- 7 Grind the cardamom seeds in a pestle and mortar and sprinkle on top.
- 8 Leave the drink to chill in the fridge for at least an hour. The desiccated coconut will soak up the liquid and become smoother as well.

### Ingredients (for 6 people):

- 1 honeydew or cantaloupe melon
- Jaggery powder or sugar to taste
- Desiccated coconut, or nylon poha if available (a couple of spoonfuls to taste)
- Half a tin of coconut milk
- Cardamom seeds to garnish

### Tips

Use more coconut milk to make the drink more liquid. When less coconut milk is added, it makes a fabulous summer dessert!



Ananya Doraswamy



## Failing forward

I used to treat failure as a flaw; evidence that I wasn't smart enough, fast enough or simply good enough. My mindset was rigid: success meant getting it right the first time. Anything less felt like falling behind. But that mindset began to shift when I arrived in the Netherlands and encountered the Dutch academic system.

Here, failure is... ordinary. Resits are built into the structure, not as punishments but as planned pauses. If you don't pass a course the first time, you try again. No guilt. No judgement.

At first, I couldn't shake the unease. Taking a resit felt like announcing my incompetence. I was waiting for someone to call me out. But no one did.

That's when it hit me: it wasn't failure that was the problem; it was my fear of it. Slowly, I began to unlearn the pressure to be perfect. I realized that learning isn't linear, and growth rarely happens without a few stumbles.

A resit wasn't a sign of failure, it was an opportunity. A second chance to understand, reflect and do better.

In this learning environment, I have found something unexpected: peace. I have stopped equating my worth with my grades. I have started to see mistakes as a part of my progress, not as the end of it. Now, when I face setbacks, I don't internalize them. This academic structure didn't just teach me course content, it taught me resilience. And that lesson? Worth every retake.



Arohi Natu is a first-year Master's student of Food Technology from India. She likes to be creative and try out new things. She enjoys cooking, singing, painting and discovering new places.



## Meanwhile in...

### Hungary – The banned Pride

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, International Land & Water Management BSc student **Anna Gnaj** (23) talks about the Budapest Pride in Hungary on 28 June, which the government banned and which the organizers say was attended by 180,000 to 200,000 people. Text Machteld van Kempen

'In the last few years, Orban has taken numerous measures against the queer community to oppress them. I always felt ashamed of my country's political situation and frustrated to be associated with these views by being Hungarian. One of the reasons to leave Hungary for me was because I felt many people in rural Hungary had very conservative ideologies and I wanted to broaden my horizons. Living in the Netherlands has shown me that even older generations can be accepting. It has also allowed me to explore more of my own masculine side and sexuality.

'Unfortunately, there are still a lot of people who don't want to change their views, but this is not because they're inherently intolerant. It is because they are fed propaganda and one-sided narratives by the government, which controls the media. As someone who is living abroad, I believe we can influence social change from the outside because we have been exposed to different political systems and social norms, which has diversified how we see the world. By sharing these ideas back home, we can induce open conversations on these issues.

'Many people attended the recent Pride March in Budapest not just to support the LGBTQ+ community but also to take a stance against the erosion of our fundamental rights as citizens. The fact that it happened gave me hope, because it showed me that people are starting to see through the system and they are willing to speak up, even in these symbolic ways. I hope that the younger generations will keep pushing back and that they will keep questioning the system. The Pride March was a perfect example that it is possible. I hope it reminded everyone that even in a very controlled and polarized environment, resistance and solidarity can still emerge. And I hope we can slowly help shift the narrative about Hungary in this way.'



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**LAST MOVIE NIGHT**  
of this season

**16.07.2025 • 20.00 • [movie.wur.nl](https://movie.wur.nl)**

We show the last movie of the season, *The Teacher Who Promised the Sea*, in Spanish with Dutch subtitles on the 16th of July. We will be back on the 28th of August.

**filmhuis** Movie W

## Colophon

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Anyone can do their own research whenever they feel the urge. ♦ Photo Shutterstock



## Big cuts in research jobs following shift to DIY research

An estimated one in four research jobs will be cut at WUR next academic year. The domains of Nutrition & Health, Climate Resilience and Earth Systems & Global Change will be most severely affected. Many jobs are no longer needed now that more and more members of the public are doing their own personal research.

‘Given the times we live in, spending public funds on research is no longer justifiable,’ explains spokesperson Wan Billem Jol. ‘Whether you are talking about climate change, how bad is nitrogen really or the risk of hardcore sunbathing, these days everyone knows how to get to the truth of the matter by consulting YouTube, TikTok or their uncle Tom.’

The practice of members of the public conducting their own research has been increasing for years, says Forum security guard Nico Tiene. ‘It started about ten years ago, but it really took off during the Covid pandemic, especially among alert types like me. That’s what I reckon, and that’s confirmed by what I see in Instagram clips.’ There are several reasons why this societal development is only just starting to have consequences for Wageningen, says Jol. ‘Here at WUR, we don’t like to get carried away; we prefer to wait and see how things develop. Also, YouTuber WAKEUP\_RIVM\_stop\_the\_rot and Ricardo75

(TikTok) weren’t agreed on exactly how many people are doing their own research. They have both investigated this issue but while Ricardo75 drew on his intuition, WAKEUP asked her followers. Anyway, the precise numbers don’t matter because the truth is relative and you can have alternative facts.’ That is why the percentage of jobs that will be cut is mainly based on how much money will

**‘These days, everyone knows how to get to the truth of the matter’**

need to be saved due to the government’s policies. A cut in the number of researchers by a quarter will mean huge savings as of the 2025-26 academic year. WUR will still need to make more savings after that, though, so more research jobs will probably have to go later. Security guard Tiene doesn’t see that as a problem. ‘My neighbour says the number of people doing their own research will keep on increasing.’