

Slow Food preserves traditional regional products → Educational farm
for young children → Entrepreneurship in the border region →
Support for rural entrepreneurs → Cittaslow encourages quality policy

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ENVIRONS



'The Campine conference
can be an enormous boost
for new collaborations'

STREEK 3 | volume 3 | september 2010 | translated

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Credits

'Environs' is a publication of Netwerk Platteland, the Dutch Rural Network. It alerts and informs about new developments in rural areas and presents the people who are committed to the countryside and rural development.

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Netwerk Platteland

Netwerk Platteland (Rural Network) is a Dutch network run by and for people who work for a strong and attractive countryside. We put organisations in touch with each other and with government bodies, and give them an opportunity to learn from each other. We also highlight new, likely initiatives for agriculture and village development, for nature and social cohesion, for quality of life and a say in what goes on. And we encourage regional committees in their work for rural areas. We do this by means of meetings, consultations, publications, a project database, a website, workshops and a newsletter, and by listening closely to the needs of network members.

Partners

Netwerk Platteland is facilitated by Adviesbureau ETC b.v., CLM Onderzoek en Advies b.v., Communicatiebureau de Lynx, Aequator Groen & Ruimte and Movisie on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, the twelve Dutch provinces and the EC. Where possible, we work together with organisations from the rural world.

Publications

Netwerk Platteland presents itself on a packed, active website which includes up-to-date news, reports of meetings, an events calendar, an interactive forum, the innovative practices database, an information centre and background information. See www.netwerkplatteland.nl. The digital Newsletter highlights important events and innovative practices in rural areas and the activities of Netwerk Platteland. This e-mail newsletter is produced eight times a year.

NETWERK PLATTELAND

STREEK

STREEK is the network magazine for all country dwellers in the Netherlands. Published four times a year, it highlights and reports on rural developments and presents the people working to support the countryside and rural development.

Project database

Netwerk Platteland is constantly on the look out for innovative practices which contribute to a strong and livable countryside, such as new arable farming techniques, surprising collaboration in sociocultural areas, unusual forms of nature management and projects run by and for young people. In the database on our website, we classify these practices by province, theme or target group. For each project, we post a brief description and list success factors and potential problems, websites and contact details. Anyone can submit their innovative experiences online. Subject to approval, these experiences are incorporated into the database.

Netwerk Platteland, involves, acts, stimulates and enriches
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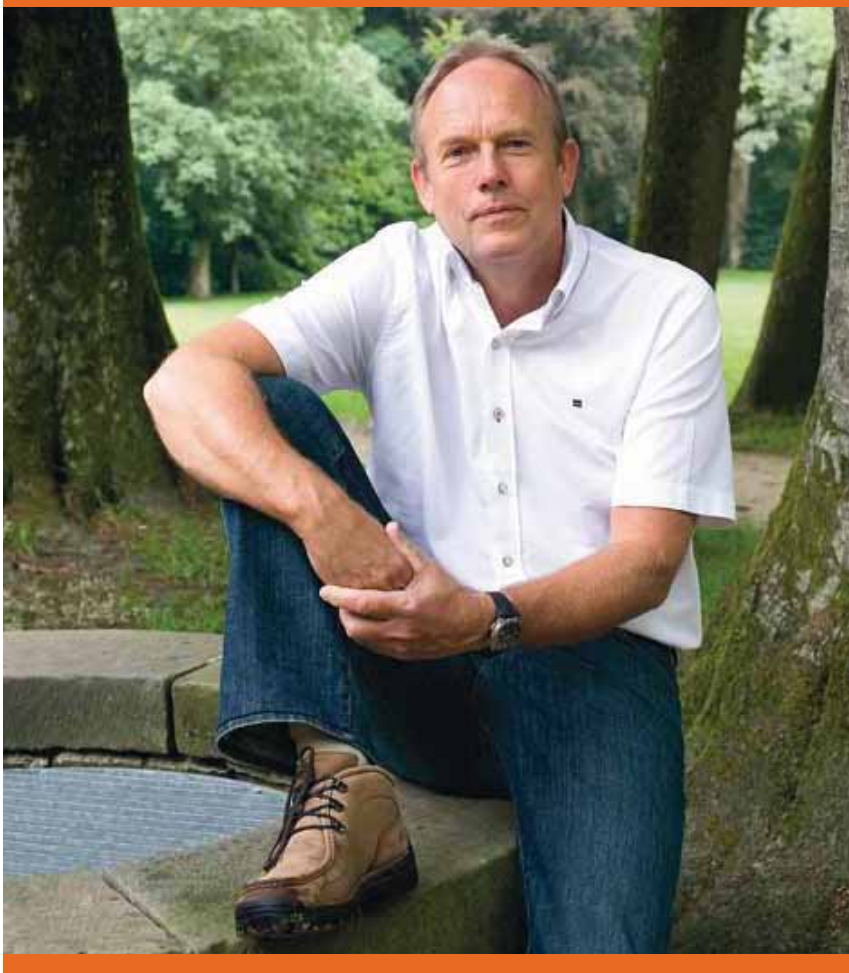


Photo: Antoinette Borchert

Cor Eenkema (LEADER East Groningen):

‘Support for the entrepreneur’

Quality of life and rural economy are the themes of LEADER. In East Groningen – a typical shrinking region – the main focus is on the rural economy. Cor Eenkema, LEADER coordinator in the region, is helping to set up support centres and entrepreneurs’ collectives together with project leaders from *Plattelandshuis Oost-Groningen*. ‘We are creating an environment for entrepreneurs that is as enjoyable and practical as possible, and they are enthusiastically taking advantage of it.’

In the East Groningen region, in the north-east of the Netherlands, entrepreneurs could use a bit of support. Nevertheless, remarkably large numbers of entrepreneurs there are in the small and medium-sized business sector. Tourism and recreation in particular provide numerous opportunities, according to Eenkema. ‘But entrepreneurs in other sectors could equally benefit from a bit of help.’ Start-ups and established entrepreneurs who have got into difficulty can count on direct support. To realise this Eenkema has significantly expanded the Regional Entrepreneurs Institute (ROI), which was set up in 1987. ‘Businesses at risk of going off the rails can get support here from specialists. They may be dealing with a threat of bankruptcy, creditors, tax problems or licensing issues. Start-ups can

get help with their business plan. The ROI employs three experts who, if necessary, can refer entrepreneurs to specialised businesses in the same office block.’

Initiative

Eenkema doesn’t always support the individual entrepreneurs himself. ‘As LEADER coordinator, I take or support initiatives financed by LEADER funds. A lot of support is provided via foundations and partnerships. For example, in addition to the ROI we now have Stipo. In Dutch, Stipo is an acronym for ‘stimulating innovation in rural enterprises’. It’s an initiative of the Dutch Chamber of Commerce (KvK) and the sectoral organisation for small and medium-sized businesses (MKB-Noord). To avoid too much money being spent on overheads,

seven contact officers from the East Groningen municipalities act as Stipo coaches, as they already have contact with the entrepreneurs. Behind them is a team of experts composed of people from the KvK, ROI and MKB-Noord and three innovative entrepreneurs. It kicked off on 1 September, and I am very curious to see how it goes.’

Stronger together

‘Another example is the support of entrepreneurs’ collectives. These are groups of entrepreneurs from the same region who boost each other by offering products or services together. In the field of leisure, for example, you have *Blauwe Lint*, a group of around twenty-five entrepreneurs from the Oldambt region. *Westerwolde* is home to *Waar Westerwolde*, a collaborative association of twenty entrepreneurs.’ ‘Tourism and leisure are playing an increasingly important role throughout the province. For example, the *Veenkoloniën* area has invested heavily in water-based recreation. New sailing routes have been developed from the city of Groningen to Germany, as well as links with the Wadden Sea. This offers new opportunities for entrepreneurs. They are now receiving support based on the knowledge and experience of *Blauwe Lint* and *Waar Westerwolde*. LEADER facilitates this exchange of knowledge.’

Mountain biking

When he spots new opportunities, Eenkema is keen to help entrepreneurs set themselves up. For example, he was able to convert the lack of good mountain biking routes in nature areas into new opportunities for leisure and catering businesses. ‘As part of the *Ecolo-gische Hoofdstructuur (EHS)* or National Ecological Network, new nature areas are being developed which are also suitable for recreation. These areas attract a lot of mountain bikers, but they sometimes bike in vulnerable places. I brought nature conservation authorities, four mountain biking associations and the chairman of *Waar Westerwolde* together to look at how we can create mountain biking routes that avoid the vulnerable parts of the EHS but do pass near catering establishments. Then you can start to think about setting up tourism packages – it works both ways.’

LEADER encourages the application of high-quality strategies for sustainable development and promotes partnerships and networks where experiences can be exchanged. LEADER is part of the Rural Development Programme (POP2) for 2007 – 2013, which is the embodiment of the opportunities that European rural development policy holds for the Netherlands.

Urban development in shrinking regions

Every year the Dutch master's courses in architecture, urban development and landscape architecture put their best final projects forward for the Archiprix NL. One of the 2010 nominees was Emiel Arends, an urban development graduate of the Rotterdam Academy of Architecture, who developed a design strategy to manage the uncertainties resulting from population shrinkage in the Dutch region of South Limburg. Arends listed these uncertainties and reduced them to the two most important ones. Combining these led to four

socioeconomically charged planning scenarios. These serve as a guide for urban developers, architects, policy makers, administrators and housing corporations seeking solutions to specific problems. In addition, an analysis of trends, policy, ongoing processes and feasibility gives a look ahead to the medium and long term. <http://tinyurl.com/archined>

Social quality of life and LEADER projects

The countryside is in demand as a place to live. However, increased mobility, disappearing facilities

and falling numbers of inhabitants are putting pressure on the quality of life there. Rural development is one way of improving quality of life. To what extent do the LEADER programmes subsidised by Europe affect the social quality of life in the countryside? This has been investigated by MOVISIE, a Dutch organisation which aims to promote participation by citizens and their ability to do things independently. Almost 28% of the projects have a social objective. But in addition to objectives, they also have knock-on effects. If we take these into account, 63% of the projects have an effect on the social quality of life in the countryside. Further information: www.movisie.nl.

Problems of succession in multifunctional agricultural businesses

Many agricultural entrepreneurs have trouble finding a suitable successor. The Agricultural Economics Research Institute (LEI) and Applied Plant Research (PPO) of Wageningen University and Research Centre have published a report entitled 'Successors wanted to take over farms'. In it, they describe the problems of finding people to take over businesses in the organic and multifunctional farming sector. As reasons for the lack of suitable successors, the LEI cites: a mismatch between the candidate's skills and the business, an adverse climate for entrepreneurship, inadequate process management by external experts, insufficient capital to take over the real estate, and lack of familiarity with the legal side of an agricultural enterprise. Professional coaching, training and matching supply and demand are among the recommendations made in the report. The report is available at www.infoketplatteland.nl

PUBLICATIONS

Landscape Character Assessment comes to the Netherlands

The 'Landschap in zicht' [Landscape in view] method gets inhabitants involved in their landscape: they set off themselves to record the features of their environment.



This helps them to contribute better to planning and influencing local policy. 'Landschap in zicht' was inspired by the 'Landscape Character Assessment' method used in the UK, a set of guidelines for anyone connected with landscape. It helps with decision making with respect to landscape management. It is also a technique for making the landscape visible to all,

as it enables people to discover characteristics of their environment.

Both methods are of direct use to professionals from the sectors of nature, landscape and rural development. But they can also be used by inhabitants and volunteers with an interest in the living environment. In the province of Friesland, for example, there are specific plans to use the method to help village residents contribute to new regional plans. Through first discovering the added value of the local landscape, residents become so closely involved that they want to work to maintain and develop that landscape.

Further information: <http://tinyurl.com/Landschapinzicht>

Extension of the Liberation Route to Brabant

Locations which played an important role in the liberation of the Netherlands by the allied troops in 1944 and 1945 are part of the Liberation Route. In 2008, in the province of Gelderland, a route was plotted which takes in places of historical interest in Arnhem and Nijmegen. Vrijetijdshuis Brabant, the organisation responsible for executing leisure policy in Brabant, drew up a plan to include their province in the route. Historical sites in Brabant are marked by audio stations where the visitor can listen to plays about events from liberation times.

The Brabant Liberation Route aims to reach different target groups: people who lived through the Second World War and people with an interest in the war years. The route is also meant to attract tourists from both home and abroad. Presenting the information in the form of a play appeals to young people. The story is told from a personal perspective and its immediacy makes it engaging for younger visitors. Vrijetijdshuis Brabant's plan is available at www.vrijetijdshuis.nl (in Dutch).

International partnership Vital Rural Area

What would you like to know about regional branding, empowerment of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) or optimising services? The website of the European cooperation project 'Vital Rural Area' shows three work packages about these subjects. Those will help SMEs to stay up-to-date and to make the shift from rural economics towards a knowledge economy. This website gives the opportunity to learn from each other about how to take new chances



demographic situation or a slower development of the tertiary sector. By creating a network, there is a better chance of good solutions and remedies. www.vitalruralarea.eu

Shrinkage, a European issue

Cities are expanding while the rural population is shrinking. It's an issue that affects many countries. So why are innovative solutions from other countries still so under-used? Fortunately, the use of such solutions is increasing. For example, the European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) organised a conference in Budapest on the effects of demographic change on urban structures, with themes such as shrinkage, population ageing and migration. The conference provided ample opportunity for interaction between stakeholders,

and how to take care of the groups that are losing ground. This international partnership is always on the move to develop and enhance new structures in the rural population. Vital Rural Area consists of 13 project partners from six countries. These partners come across more or less the same socioeconomic problems in their own region, like lower levels of income, unfavourable

policy makers and experts. The Netherlands decided to look across the border as well. RUIIMTEVOLK, an independent platform and network for the debate on town and country planning and quality of the living environment, organised a three-day study visit to Germany for professionals in early October, visiting Berlin, Leipzig and Dessau. Among other sites, the participants

visited an empty shopping district and an area that once was designed as an Olympic village, but never used. During the excursions, participants had ample opportunity to discuss their findings, experiences and perspectives and to identify useful pointers for their practice in the Netherlands. www.eukn.org www.ruimtevolk.nl



PUBLICATIONS

EU Rural Reviews, what else is going on in Europe?

For the fourth time, the European Network for Rural Development (EN RD) has published the EU Rural Review.



Each edition has a separate theme, such as Rural Diversity and Climate Action. For professionals and other interested parties, each themed issue has a variety of content from different countries. For example, you will find subjects such as Sustainable farming in Flanders and Climate change effects in Spain, Nordic rural areas or Poland's countryside.

Each issue focuses on developments, inhabitants and research.

Editions can be ordered in several languages and are distributed free of charge throughout Europe. Further information is available at <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu>

'Le plat pays' disappears

Many countries are struggling with shrinkage in the countryside, but in Flanders the countryside itself is shrinking. The federal directorate for statistics investigated how many municipalities meet the definition of 'rural municipality', and found only three! The criteria used were those of Eurostat and the OECD. According to the OECD, the (less strict) criterion is 'a maximum of 150 inhabitants per square kilometre'. By this criterion, Flanders still has ten rural municipalities. Remarkably enough, the number of inhabitants has remained

virtually unchanged since 1977. The Flemish countryside is undergoing a marked process of subdivision and fragmentation. Due to this neglect of town and country planning, the official countryside is disappearing, according to Erik Grietens of the Bond Beter Leefmilieu (Federation for a Better Environment). Grietens believes that the residential extension areas are the culprit; these are areas set aside for house building when space runs out within the built-up area. In his view, these areas are quite unnecessary and often badly polluted. This makes them unpopular when building land is needed. Pasture land is much easier to convert into residential areas.



Photo: Florien Kuijper



Photo: Guy Ackermans

The Campine region is a central theme of the Rural Network's autumn conference. And with good reason: the Campine is a special region, lying partly in Belgium and partly in the Netherlands. At one time a border was drawn straight across the region, but it is a single entity with the same landscape and a shared history. The region is keen to put itself on the map. Does the border represent an obstacle, or indeed an opportunity?

The Campine: the border as economic driving force?

Why is cross-border collaboration so important for the Campine? 'European policy is strongly focused on regionalisation', says Jan van den Berghe of Strategic Plan Campine (SPK), a Flemish organisation which aims to promote the social and economic development of the region. 'Every region wants to present an image of itself. The most successful regions are the ones that have a good story and also offer authentic products and services in keeping with that story. The Campine is a single entity in landscape terms, with woods, heathland and the same type of agriculture. You can only develop a good story if the Campine presents itself as a unit. But you mustn't deny the border; it's the border that makes the region special.'

Genuine Campine

How can businesses get the Campine story across to the public? According to Van den Berghe, 'A product is only a genuine Campine product if it gives a sense of place, and if the production process is embedded

in the landscape, history or nature.' A successful example is the regional beer Gageleer, which is brewed using locally grown ingredients. 'Gageleer' or bog myrtle, a shrub which is found in wet heathland and is therefore typical of the Campine, gives the beer an unusual flavour and an additional Campine touch. 'It's nice how a typical feature of nature in the Campine is used in making a regional product', says Van den Berghe. 'Gageleer involves businesses on both sides of the border, another factor that makes it a 100% Campine product.'

Stronger together

How can you encourage businesses to capitalise on the uniqueness of the Campine? By bringing them together, because together, businesses are stronger. SPK promotes collaboration by setting up regional networks for entrepreneurs, heritage managers and farmers. Elisabeth Koch, policy worker with the Dutch province of North Brabant and LEADER

coordinator, also highlights the importance of collaboration between entrepreneurs and between entrepreneurs and local authorities. 'As a province, you must recognise the importance of rural entrepreneurship', she says. 'Successful rural businesses maintain the quality of life in a region, ensure that people want to live there, and that facilities continue to exist. We should therefore take a more entrepreneurial attitude as a local authority, by encouraging smart public-private partnerships.'

One example is the 'Land van de Hilver' visitors' market, which started as a LEADER project and is now an independent network of entrepreneurs centred on the town of Hilvarenbeek. The entrepreneurs get together to organise tourism packages. A visit to an asparagus grower, for example, combined with an asparagus-themed dinner in a restaurant, an overnight stay in a B&B and a trip to De Beekse Bergen safari park. Similar



Photos: Thomas van der Pluijm

initiatives are also being developed across the border.

The border: obstacle or opportunity?

The border can be a boost if it is used as a unique selling point. Van den Berghe cites the example of the Merkske nature area, where a nature route has been created that crosses to and fro across the border. Entrepreneurs on both sides of the border can associate themselves with it. Koch cites the example of historical smuggling routes, which offer tourism tie-ins. However, the border can also be a barrier if the rules and procedures on either side are different. Van den Berghe cites the example of the Kempische Heideschaap. This is a regional product with a historical context and an everyday role in nature conservation. The meat from this breed of sheep is sold as an exclusive quality product to regional restaurants and is available from the better regional butchers. 'The Netherlands has more generous subsidy schemes, which makes it easier for a Dutch entrepreneur to set something up', says Van den Berghe. 'In addition, the different veterinary requirements in Belgium and the Netherlands mean that a flock on the heath can't cross the border just like that. SPK wants to help find a solution to these problems. In so doing, you strengthen the Campine region and encourage the cross-border regional economy.'

Local authorities

The involvement of local authorities often stops at the border. They are not very aware of their role in encouraging cross-border collaboration. Van den Berghe hopes that the Campine conference can do something to change this. 'With positive examples of transnational collaboration,

we are trying to make local administrators more aware of problems and opportunities. As a spin off from the conference, we are aiming to set up a network of local administrators on both sides of the border, like the entrepreneurs' network. Local authorities too can benefit from exchanges and collaboration.'

'It looks set to be an inspiring meeting'

'The Campine conference can be an enormous boost for new collaborations and, as a province, we are delighted to be involved in it', adds Koch. 'A lot of parties are attending the conference: local authorities, entrepreneurs, regional development associations, the regional agricultural and horticultural organisation (ZLTO), LEADER areas, and all sorts of individual projects. It looks set to be an inspiring meeting, both for this region and beyond.'

Further information about SPK: www.spk.be

The Campine region is a central theme of the Rural Network's two-day autumn conference. The first day focuses on successful entrepreneurial initiatives from the Campine region. The second day looks at ways in which local authorities and networks can successfully support regional entrepreneurs. This international conference is also part of the Walloon Rural Network's Conference on Green and Blue Services. The Contact Point of the European Rural Development Network (ER DN) is also contributing.



‘Sustainability and nature conservation by farmers’

What type of business do you have and why did you decide to broaden your activities?

‘Landgoed de Hoevens was originally a country estate. It developed into a modern dairy business, until we made the change in 1992. Increasing numbers of people were walking and cycling through the woods in the surrounding area. Sustainability and nature conservation were becoming increasingly important issues for farmers and were issues that spoke to us. We decided to make the move to leisure, nature development and nature conservation.’

What is the innovation?

‘The farming elements on the estate have disappeared. We restored many aspects of the landscape

such as wooded banks, avenues and pools. The estate is now an inspiring location for businesses. We also have a luxury group accommodation and a natural campsite with log cabins and a tepee. On the estate, we offer a range of workshops, such as djembe drumming, yoga and cooking with regional products. We are a leisure business with a story: we work with natural regional products and have cattle grazing on the estate. We then provide the farmer with straw and feed, in turn completing the circle.’

What does the Campine mean to you?

‘De Hoevens is just south of Tilburg and is part of an extensive nature area. The region has enormous sig-

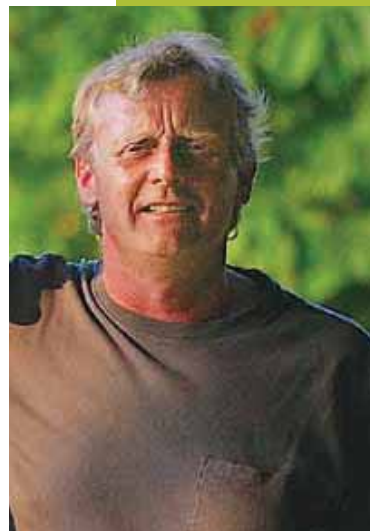
nificance for us. We are currently looking for even better collaboration with, for example, Kempen Goed, an organisation representing green businesses with a multifunctional branch in the Campine.’

What influence does the business have on the region?

‘We have become reasonably well-known in the area and can therefore contribute to local education and recreation. One way to improve agrobiodiversity in the region is to allow flocks of the unique Kempische Heideschaap breed of sheep to graze naturally on the estate. By accompanying the shepherd, people can learn more about the role these sheep play in managing the landscape.’

FLORIS VAN DER LANDE

Landgoed de Hoevens, Alphen (NL)



REGIONAL

LUC NOUWEN

Sint Jozefhoeve, Balen (B)

‘Pepping up the image of agriculture’

What type of business do you have and why did you decide to broaden your activities?

‘We have a dairy farm with 65 milking cows and 45 calves. My wife and I are socially minded and opted to broaden our social, educational and recreational activities rather than increase our scale. It was a very gradual process. First, we set up information boards about agriculture and horticulture along a long-distance cycle path. Later on, people and schools were keen to come and visit our farm. We converted the hayloft into a meeting room and devised a range of activities such as cow-related games for children and team-building for adults.’

What is the innovation?

‘Facts such as: ‘A cow drinks eighty

litres of water a day’ go in one ear and out the other. We get the children to experience that information. We stack up twelve-litre buckets until we get to eighty litres. We do the same with other, abstract concepts, such as comparing a hectare with a football pitch. The experience even starts before the schoolchildren arrive at the farm. We pick them up five kilometres away using a cart. The cart is painted with pictures of cows, sheep, pigs and chickens and is filled with straw.’

What does the Campine mean to you?

‘The landscape here is beautiful. We work with rural organisations and the tourist information office to let people experience that beauty, for example by means of

an interactive trail through the grasslands and fields and a tourist package involving sheep. Through activities like these, we aim to pep up the image of agriculture.’

What influence does the business have on the region?

‘Due to the broadening of our educational and recreational activities, we are now hosting over 3000 people a year for school trips, meetings or team-building activities. We are also a social care farm for problem youngsters. One young person spends eight weeks on the farm, from Monday to Friday. We ensure structure and respect while he or she works with us on the farm.’



'Animal welfare and education'

What type of business do you have and why did you decide to broaden your activities?

'We have a closed pig farm. That means that the piglets are born here and stay here until they are ready for slaughter. We never buy in any animals. For our pig feed, we obtain natural products from the food industry and mix them to make a liquid feed. We aim not just to produce meat, but also to show people what happens on a modern farm. In the year 2000, we decided to diversify as a visitor farm. There was a lot to think about, such as hygiene rules for visitors and windows between visitors and pigs to reduce the risk of pig diseases.'

What is the innovation?

'We are at the forefront in animal welfare. Our sows can roam around freely, although that won't become compulsory until 2012. And we vaccinate the boars, so they don't have to be castrated. The visitor farm is also an innovation. I took a course to become an agricultural guide, something that doesn't exist in the Netherlands yet. I lead tours of the farm and we sell our own quality pork through our farm shop.'

What does the Campine mean to you?

'The Campine is above all else a wonderful, peaceful, rustic environment. Our farm, Wolkenhoeve, is next to the Zegge

nature reserve. We think that nature and agriculture go very well together. It's great that this area has grown out of the marsh that was here sixty years ago.'

What influence does the business have on the region?

'We give people an insight into the origins of our food, how agriculture works today and what its ecological footprint is. For example, our pigs only leave the farm for slaughter and the carcasses are then returned. We raise people's awareness and make sure they have a positive impression of farming life. We also give them an insight into the other things a farmer does, such as maintaining trees and protecting swallows.'

RIA PEETERS-NOUWEN

De Wolkenhoeve, Geel (B)



PEOPLE

REGIONAL people profiles four individuals working for a strong and attractive countryside. This issue focuses on four rural entrepreneurs in the Campine.

WINO VAN LIESHOUT

Landgoed de Biestheuvel, Hoogeloon (NL)

'From farm to leisure and nature area'

What type of business do you have and why did you decide to broaden your activities?

'This estate used to be a mixed pig farm. The first step towards leisure began with the conversion of a barn for the 25th wedding anniversary of the then farmer and his wife. In 1996 they faced a choice: expanding in the leisure sector or getting more pigs. They chose the leisure sector. By then their children were also involved in the business. The estate continued to grow. In 2006 an outdoor branch was added. We now have 230 beds in the group accommodations. And we are constantly modernising. In the past, you had one shower and one toilet to twenty people but that's not enough any more.'

What is the innovation?

'It's innovative to develop an estate from a farm to a freely accessible nature area with an insect hotel, a maze, shelters and a walkers' trail. We have enhanced the landscape and are creating new natural areas. The farming elements have disappeared. To maximise the leisure opportunities, we have installed sturdy benches.'

What does the Campine mean to you?

'I was born and raised here. That's already a bond. The Campine is a region with features that we can use to put it on the map, what we call 'regional branding'. To do this, we work with organisations such as Streekhuis

Kempeland and Land van de Zaligheden. And we try to use suppliers from the Campine.'

What influence does the business have on the region?

'Our attitude is: we're going to do it and we're going to make sure our ideas get off the ground. For example, we restored the Kleine Aa river to its original course dating back to around 1900. This was one reason why we were awarded the 2010 Kempeland Trophy. Another reason was almost certainly the fact that we do everything ourselves.'



Where food producer meets consumer

What do thwarted plans to set up a McDonald's in the heart of Rome have to do with the preservation of the standard tree orchards in South Limburg? Plenty. The Slow Food movement was born in Rome as a reaction to the advance of fast food. Since then, Slow Food has supported the preservation of high-quality regional products both in Italy and elsewhere, such as apple and pear syrup from South Limburg.

In 1986, Carlo Petrini got worked up over plans to set up a McDonald's right next to the Spanish Steps in Rome. 'What's wrong with our own traditional cooking?', he wondered. He mobilised public opinion so effectively that the fast food giant was forced to abandon its plans. That was the start of the Slow Food movement which now has supporters in a hundred and sixty countries.

Slow stands for tasty, pure and honest food

Slow stands for tasty, pure and honest food: it should taste good, be produced with respect for people, animals and the environment, and generate a fair income for the producer. Slow also stands for a lifestyle: eating together is an aspect of

the culture and promotes social cohesion. The Slow Food movement mainly aims to raise awareness among consumers, but also promotes collaboration between producers and contact between consumers and producers. Regional production and consumption are at the forefront.

Ark of Taste

A figurehead of Slow Food is the Ark of Taste (see box). Products have to meet strict criteria to be admitted to the Ark of Taste. For example, they must be:

- produced according to traditional methods and on a small scale,
- gastronomically interesting,
- historically and culturally linked to a region or town,
- at risk of dying out.

For example, in South Limburg there are only four syrup makers left who turn the fruit of the local standard tree orchards into the traditional Limburg syrup. Other Ark products include aged artisan Gouda

cheese, ossenworst sausage from Amsterdam and Leiden butter. But Dutch breeds of domesticated animal such as the Drents Heideschaap and Dutch Belted (Lakenvelder) cattle are also included in the Ark of Taste.

Does Slow Food perhaps have something against modernisation in the countryside? 'Not at all', says Ton Jansen, a Slow Food External Relations officer. 'But in the Ark of Taste we want to keep what is good and at risk of disappearing.'

Salone del Gusto

The makers of an Ark product can form a presidium to promote their product jointly. For example, they can present their product at the international Salone del Gusto food fair set to be held for the eighth time in Turin this October. According to Jansen, 'Together with the Terra Madre conference being held at the same time, it's the only place in the world





Photos: www.slowfood.com

where farmers and traditional food producers, chefs and scientists, experienced gourmets and other interested parties can come together, make contacts and develop friendships.'

Entrepreneurship

Slow Food supports entrepreneurship on the part of food producers, for example in the field of marketing, networking and working together with customers and local authorities. This ultimately benefits the economic vitality of an entire region.

Ton Jansen himself is closely involved with the Drents Heideschaap. He enthuses about this special breed of sheep and the pride of shepherds in the Balloërveld heathlands. 'But regional sales are

Slow Food supports entrepreneurship on the part of food producers

stagnating', he says. 'Drenthe people have traditionally not been eaters of lamb. So for sales in the region you have to focus on the tourist restaurants. You have to promote it as a regional specialty, perhaps even as a seasonal product. They slaughter around the turn of the year, so the best time to enjoy this lovely meat is January and February. Slow Food helps in making contacts with restaurants, and with promotion. With this approach, we can help to secure the shepherds' contin-

ued existence and hence preserve the Drents Heideschaap. For their part, the shepherds are working to broaden their activities: bringing not only the meat onto the market, but also the skins and horns.'

New directions

Slow Food is always looking for new ways to raise consumer awareness and to

promote contact between regional producers and consumers. A recent development is the Earth Markets: regional farmers' markets in towns which aim to connect town and country (and hence consumer and producer). It also seeks collaboration with other organisations in order to gain more political influence through strength in numbers.

Ark of Taste

In a bid to rescue traditional regional products and breeds from oblivion, Slow Food admits them to the Ark of Taste and documents their growing and production methods. The aim is to obtain more publicity and recognition for these products. The Ark of Taste contains around 750 products worldwide, fifteen of them in the Netherlands.

Presidia

A Presidium consists of a group of producers of a product included in the Ark of Taste. They operate in accordance with strict quality rules. By working together, they can promote and market their product more effectively.

Food communities

A food community is a regional group of producers. They are linked with their region from an environmental, socioeconomic and historical perspective. Their aim is to get together to bring their quality food, produced on a small scale, to the consumer in the region.

Convivia

Slow Food's regional chapters are called convivia. A convivium (Latin for 'banquet' or 'feast') brings Slow Food members together and promotes contacts with food producers in the region. For example, a convivium organises cookery workshops, dinners, tastings and excursions.

Further information: www.slowfood.com, www.terramadre.info.



Photos: Guy Ackermans



A municipality that's a nice place to be

A small boat glides along the reedy Vlaardingervaart canal. Behind the reeds is a low bank – the old towpath. And behind that, peat meadows, stretching to the horizon. At the helm is the mayor of Midden-Delfland, Arnoud Rodenburg, proudly giving his guests a guided tour of his municipality, the first Cittaslow municipality in the Netherlands.

Midden-Delfland is a rural municipality in the green heart of the Netherlands between the urbanised areas of The Hague, Delft, Rotterdam, the Nieuwe-Waterweg area and the Westland glass-houses. The urban sprawl looms on the horizon. Around one and a half million people live and work there. The authentic farming landscape of Midden-Delfland is an oasis of peace where more and more town dwellers are coming to walk, cycle or sail. Rodenburg points out the three-hundred-berth harbour that has recently set up a waiting list, and the tourist ferry that carried its millionth passenger this summer.

Regional vision

What made Midden-Delfland want to become a Cittaslow municipality? 'The municipality was formed in a merger in 2004', Rodenburg explains as we sail past the Vlietlanden nature area. 'As a new municipality, we wanted to develop a regional vision together with all of the

parties involved. It became a major event: with 150 people from 63 different parties, we spent three whole days talking in an enormous barn somewhere in the middle of the polders. One of the participants mentioned that all of our plans were within the scope of Cittaslow. At the time no-one knew what that meant. A year later, we wanted to develop a village vision to preserve and reinforce the characteristic values of our villages. And again,

'Cittaslow is a quality system that allows you to test your policy.'

Cittaslow was mentioned. Then I decided to investigate it. I contacted the Cittaslow organisation in Italy and it fired me up. It is a quality system that allows you to test your policy. Cittaslow's criteria were in line with the development direction we

had chosen. Six months in, we were able to sit an 'exam'. Since April 2008, Midden-Delfland has been the Netherlands' first Cittaslow municipality.'

Raising awareness

In mid-2010, the municipalities of Borger-Odoorn and Alphen-Chaam were admitted to the elite ranks of the Cittaslow municipalities. Other municipalities are interested, according to Rodenburg. 'Our aim is to have a national network with a member for each province. Many municipalities see Cittaslow as a marketing gadget, but it's much more than that. Of course it can be used as a marketing tool, but you can only obtain and retain the mark if the whole municipal policy is based on the Cittaslow principles. This calls for a raising of awareness and a readiness to take responsibility. The municipality takes the lead of course, but industry and local residents have to contribute as well. As a result, the municipality consults widely with entrepre-



neers and encourages new developments. 'In a brainstorming session on the concept of hospitality – one of the pillars of Cittaslow – it emerged, for example, that there are few places to stay overnight in the municipality. So we set up a foundation (with a subsidy from the municipality) to encourage people to establish more Bed & Breakfasts.'

Collaboration

'Cittaslow meant that we had to start thinking differently as a local authority', says Rodenburg. 'It's usual to ban everything that doesn't fit in with your vision, but it's much more challenging to look at how you can organise it cleverly to make things possible. As a result, we are also happy with the collaboration that is now developing between the Dutch Cittaslow municipalities. We are small municipalities, with similar budgets. We're not neighbours, there's no competition, but we can work together in the area of marketing and tourism policy. For example, discussions are taking place about the WMO (Social Support Act) and exchanges between entrepreneurs are getting underway.'

As the mayor speaks, meadows full of cows glide slowly by under the imposing cloudy skies of the Netherlands. He points out the windmill, the old courthouse and the original little bridges. In the picturesque village of Schipluiden we visit a shop full of regional products. Midden-Delfland is a nice place to be.



What is Cittaslow?

Cittaslow is the international mark of accreditation for municipalities that score top marks in terms of surroundings, landscape, regional products, hospitality, environment, infrastructure, cultural history and preservation of identity. It was created by the mayors of a number of Italian municipalities that were already active in the Slow Food movement. Only municipalities with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants are eligible.

Quality of life

In these times of urbanisation and generalisation, it is important for authentic areas to guard and strengthen their identity. Guarding and promoting the quality of the living environment is the top priority for a Cittaslow municipality. This means that a healthy environment, enhancing the qualities of the landscape and a good infrastructure are high on the agenda, as are cherishing local traditions and cultural and historical heritage, and promoting regional products.

Progress while preserving history

Cittaslow promotes a raised awareness among policy makers, institutions, entrepreneurs and local inhabitants. The mark encourages them to take responsibility for the development of the municipality. Alongside its focus on the authentic, Cittaslow promotes the use of new techniques that facilitate the desired progress. Cittaslow offers a framework for the future while preserving history.

Further information: www.cittaslow.net.

Photo: Google



regional idea

What do you do if you notice that there's a lack of good outings for the infants? Martine Peeters and Dany Verheyen combined their pig business with an educational visitor farm. Peeters' background as a nursery teacher and the farm's wonderful location in the Flemish Campine region have made Ollemanshoekje a success.



Photo: Thomas van der Pluijm



Photo: Thomas van der Pluijm

Preschool pig-cuddling

Martine Peeters stands at the gate with the children. She introduces herself: 'I'm using a microphone because if the peacock starts screeching and the cock starts crowing you won't be able to hear what I'm saying.' She asks the children if they

'We are unique because we only work with the infants'

can lend a hand. The pigs, sheep and chickens need some bread and they like to be stroked as well. 'But the donkeys can't have any bread, it makes them much too fat. When we get the bread, we hide it behind our backs and walk carefully past the donkeys, to the pigs.'

Taking the step

'I was a nursery teacher', says Peeters, 'and when we went on outings with the children, there were always problems. The place wasn't secure

for the children, there weren't any clean toilets or they couldn't go inside if it was cold and wet. Especially with the very youngest, the three-year-olds, that's not easy. You constantly have to keep an eye on them.' Eleven years ago, Peeters and her partner Dany Verheyen took over her parents' pig farm. She got the idea of starting up something she'd want to go to with her infants. 'I had a permanent appointment at a school here in the village. So I put it off for a few years, because you'd lose the security you have. But, in the end, if you have an itch you've got to scratch it.'

Unique

The concept of a farm school is fairly well-known these days. More and more schools are keen to bridge the gap between education and agricultural and horticultural practice. Peeters and Verheyen talk about a twilight zone between recreation and farming. When they started the visitor

farm seven years ago, they first approached the countryside section of the Flemish Environment, Nature and Energy Department and received positive advice. 'We are unique because we work only with very young children', says Peeters. 'When we submitted our plan, they initially didn't like the fact that we were only taking the infants. But from my nursery experience I knew there was a gap there. I had a goal.'

Farm teaching trail

On the farm, the schoolchildren can follow a teaching trail. At the end they receive a certificate. 'They have to answer questions about the farm animals and plants, such as swallows and maize. The trail is clearly marked out, so children can follow it themselves. And if they can't read yet, the teacher helps by reading questions aloud.' The method transcends classes; nursery and primary school pupils can work together. Peeters

column

Karel Lhermitte

$$E = mc^2$$



This formula is written on a board in a school in Leuven. Einstein? Nuclear energy? Is it a school for physicists? No, the formula meant something new here. 'E' stood for education, 'm' for motivation and 'c' meant coaching.

In my sphere of work, rural development, I am always looking for the fundamentals. Not because I'm a fan of theory, but because I can use it to improve my practice.

A 19th century scientist once said: "Doing without thinking is stupid and thinking without doing is a waste of time". That saying helps me to tackle a problem: many entrepreneurs in the countryside are not coping. Statistics tell us there are plenty of start-ups, but they don't keep going. Five years down the line, many entrepreneurs have given up. It goes like this: a person starting up a business has an idea that he or she will go through hell for. The adrenaline is pumping, everyone is friendly, flowers at the opening event and then... usually silence. Doubt creeps over the entrepreneur. Why aren't they buying/coming? Have I made the right decision? How long can I go on? What if the market collapses?

The formula is helpful at this stage of entrepreneurship, especially because the 'c' is squared. If the 'E' stands for empowerment, the formula says that the entrepreneur has to believe in his own business (in this case the 'm' means intrinsic motivation). The entrepreneur needs to get help from a trusted external force who will empathise with him through his ups and downs. Nowadays, such a person is called a coach ('c'), in the past it was a good friend. If the 'm' or 'c' is zero, the result is zero as well.

Rural development looks for the right entrepreneurs in the countryside. But if they've started up, we can't leave them to their fate. That's why you see learning networks, support centres, agro-coaches, practical groups, et cetera in practice.

So you see, formulae work.

Karel Lhermitte

Rural development adviser, Farmers' Union - National Guilds



Photo: Narda van der Krogt

laughs heartily when asked about her plans for the future. 'I'm still brimming with ideas. I don't think it'll ever be finished, not really. But the first thing we want to do is develop a winter programme. And we are increasingly attracting the lower primary school classes.'

At the end of the educational tour Peeters spurs the children on: 'And now run back to the gate.' After

'If you have an itch, you've got to scratch it'

that they can play on the farm to their hearts' content. Racing with the tractor, playing in the straw or learning in the play loft. As Peeters says, 'When the children leave here they are worn out, especially in the spring. They've been sitting indoors all winter and now they have to walk, run and play. And that's a good thing. Children spend more than enough time indoors.'

Further information:
www.hetollemanshoekje.be

Scanning the European Landscape

European landscapes are an essential expression of European identity, reflecting natural and cultural heritage for today's and tomorrow's European citizens. The importance of landscape is formulated in the European Landscape Convention (ELC), signed and ratified by most EU Member States. The EU has no formal role in spatial planning and did not sign the ELC. However, it is believed that EU policies, such as CAP and Structural Funds have an impact on European landscapes, either directly or indirectly.

In a working paper CLM Research and Advice, commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, explores whether a proactive role of the EU in enhancing landscapes is necessary and feasible.

Download this report via: <http://www.clm.nl/publicaties/html/EUlandscape.html>

EU Rural Cooperation Fair 23-24.09.2010

Rural Scotland demonstrated its merits on an international stage in organising the 2010 EU Rural Cooperation Fair in Edinburgh.

Minister for the Environment Roseanna Cunningham welcomed over 270 local rural development practitioners from 23 EU Member States to the event to share their experience of developing rural communities in the face of economic challenge.

It was an interesting meeting as the workshops were organised in such a way that the LEADER groups worked together on specific international cooperative projects.

For further information, see: <http://tinyurl.com/ruralgateway>

Rur@l News

Want to keep up to date with international developments? Try the European Network for Rural Development (EN RD). Rur@l News is EN RD's electronic newsletter. Frequent editions of Rur@l News are available online and by subscription.

They usually contain:

- up-to-date coverage of activities from the rural networks
- new policy initiatives affecting the EU rural development world
- regular news about EN RD developments
- reports from the Member States regarding the implementation of RDPs
- reports on recent events of interest to EN RD stakeholders

They are available in six languages (DE, EN, ES, FR, IT, PL).

Subscribe on line via <http://tinyurl.com/ruralnews>

WWW.NETWERKPLATTELAND.NL

Energieland-Biores

Interreg projects are one form of international cooperation. For example, in the Dutch-German border area known as EUREGIO, a cross-border project is concerned with energy from biogenic residues. The main focus of the project is on ways of increasing the use and energy output of biogas technology and on optimising the related incoming and outgoing flows of material. To this end, it will produce an overview of supply and demand and the availability of biogenic residues from agriculture in EUREGIO.

The project also aims to investigate and test technical possibilities and solutions for increasing overall energy efficiency in biogas use.

Information about the project (in German) is available at:

<http://tinyurl.com/biogenic>

2.12.2010 → Periurban European LEADER meeting

Two-day meeting including workshops on infrastructure, markets and planning.

Organisation: ADREPES (Rural Development

Association of Setubal Peninsula)

2-3 December 2010

Alcochete, Portugal

<http://tinyurl.com/adrepes> (PDF)

04.12.2010 → Agriculture and Rural Development Day 2010

This day will bring agriculture sector adaptation and mitigation strategies to the forefront of the global climate treaty negotiations. It will clearly demonstrate that agriculture is where climate change, food security, and development intersect. It informs the climate change negotiations and calls for a COP decision on a 'work programme for agriculture'.

The one-day event will feature keynote speeches, roundtable discussions, a marketplace of ideas and exhibits.

4 December 2010

Cancún, Mexico

www.agricultureday.org

06.12.2010 → International Postgraduate Course 'EU policy for agriculture, food and rural areas'

Objectives:

- to provide a broad and up-to-date overview of the key issues of the CAP: how it works, what the main current and future policy issues are
- to place the CAP in the wider framework of rural and regional policy
- to assess the future international trade relations in relation to the CAP (GATT/WTO-commitments)
- to gain insight into the working and the policy consequences of the application of the Lisbon Treaty

6 to 10 December 2010

Costs: € 2150 incl. full board

Wageningen, the Netherlands

www.wbs.wur.nl

16.12.2010 → New ruralities, new public policies

Accessibility and mobility, economic activities, spatial management, territorial innovation.

Language of the event: French

16-17 December 2010

Agen, France