“Boerenlandbouw”: peasant farming in the Netherlands

Introduction

Over the last 50 years, the scale of agriculture in the Netherlands has grown enormously. Production is increasingly geared towards export and relies ever more heavily on damaging inputs. Meanwhile, the number of farmers on the land has declined, damaging rural communities. However, there is a powerful and growing counter-movement, led by small farmers and their communities, to develop a human-scaled, environmentally attuned and place-based agriculture. On 23 March 2019 more than 100 farmers, policy workers, organizers, academics, and others met at the independent dairy farm The Eemlandhoeve, near Amersfoort, to discuss this vision and work on building a movement towards a sustainable, farmer-centred food system in the Netherlands.

The first “Boerenlandbouw” - “peasant farming” - conference was a full-day workshop to share experiences, challenges and inspirations, and to build networks and develop a stronger and more united movement for a just and sustainable food system. The term “boerenlandbouw” refers to farming which is people-centred, human-scaled, and locally adapted; built not around production for profit and export, but around supporting livelihoods, communities, and ecosystems.

The conference opened with a welcome from the hosting farmer: Jaap and his family have been farming ecologically at the Eemlandhoeve for 25 years, seeking to develop a regenerative and biodiverse farm in the face of a financial and economic system that has a much narrower definition of value. He shared some of the struggles that this has involved, and ended with a rallying cry for sustainable small-scale farmers to come together as a movement and let their voices be heard.

After the initial welcome and introduction, organizers led an exercise to see who was in the room. Participants split up and moved around to indicate their region, and quick informal polls revealed the diverse ways in which attendees were involved with agriculture: farmers, gardeners, farm workers, aspiring farmers, network-builders, and more had come together for this discussion. Diverse networks and organisations within the Dutch sustainable agriculture movement, and beyond, were also at the table. Representatives gave brief introductions to: CSA Network Netherlands, Permaculture Gardeners, the BioVegan Network, ToekomstBoeren (Farmers of the Future), the Organic Gardeners Association, Food Otherwise, The Food Transition Coalition, Nature Inclusive Farming, the Transnational Institute, and the European Coordination of Via Campesina.

The moment has come to build a more consolidated movement. Ever more vibrant, energetic local initiatives are springing up around the Netherlands, but Dutch agricultural policy still favours large-scale, export-oriented, resource-intensive agriculture, with innovative sustainable solutions existing around the margins. However, we are moving towards a critical mass and the range of actors gathered at this conference highlighted the possibilities for growing an even stronger movement, equipped to move farmers, eaters, and the environment to centre stage.

The conference was divided into eight workshops: four parallel sessions in the morning and the afternoon provided small groups with the opportunity to work together to exchange knowledge, share inspiration, and build strategies for transformation. The morning workshops dealt with agroecology: what it is, what it stands for, how participants experience it, and how we can build a shared language around it. This round of workshops was followed by a plenary sharing the outcomes of the workshops, and reactions to them. The second round of workshops tackled practical solutions and next steps, exploring initiatives on the ground today and how they can be defended, shared, and scaled up or out. The group reconvened for a final “world cafe,” splitting into small groups to develop concrete action plans for advancing farmer-centred food systems in the Netherlands. The day finished with conversations and network building in the spring sunshine.

Workshop Round 1: Agroecology: farming with nature, community, and autonomy

Plant-based Fertilization

Presenters: Jan van Arragon – De Bioakker & Valérie van Dijck – De Veldhof

Jan van Arragon and Valérie van Dijck shared two experiences of successful “vegan” farming, relying on compost and green manure, without use of animal manure or artificial fertilizers to maintain the

fertility of their soils. The Bioakker in Zutphen is a long-established market garden of some 6 ha. In addition to selling directly in local farmers' markets, Jan has also established a pick-your-own section of the farm, and sells locally adapted and heritage seeds. He relies heavily on broad beans (tuinbonen) to maintain the soil fertility, regularly planting these beans, which have been cultivated for centuries in the Netherlands, and tilling them under to add nitrogen to the soil. He studied organic farming in Germany but has, above all, learned from his own experiences and experiments on his land. The farm relies on appropriate modern innovations, using fabric covers to keep off pests, and a drip-tape irrigation system which was installed last summer with financial support from customers and community members. At the same time, however, natural systems are utterly central: all of the interventions are geared towards feeding the soil and the life in the soil, leading naturally to healthy and robust vegetables. Weeding is kept to a minimum, aiming to give plants light and room to grow rather than clearing all weeds. On the whole, Jan advised farmers to trust their own instincts and observations and adjust their practices as needed, rather than listening to the "myths in agriculture," following rigid systems of rotation, or trying to calculate the nutritional needs of their crops in the abstract.

Valérie van Dijck shared her experiences from a much younger farm – De Veldhof – which was established near Zutphen in 2015. The farm is run as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project, delivering a packet of vegetables and fruits to members 46 weeks a year. Like Jan, Valérie tills the soil to suppress weeds to some degree, but also advocates a relaxed approach which sees weeds as part of the overall system. To enhance and maintain the fertility of their soil the farmers at the Veldhof rely on compost (both their own and purchased); green manure, especially winter rye and winter purslane; and mulching with cuttings and woodchips.

While the two farms were using different strategies and techniques, both pursued an approach of putting soil health first; treating weeds as part of an overall system, to be regulated and controlled rather than eliminated; prioritising biodiversity; and treating their farms as sites for ongoing experimentation, innovation, and improvement. Their combined decades of experience show that a variety of techniques are possible to build rich, healthy, fertile soils and grow vibrant, healthy plants without relying on animal manure or artificial fertilizers.

Local products in growing wholesale markets

Presenters: Judith Vos – De Nieuwe Graanschuur; Joop de Koeijer – De Zeeuwse Vlegel (ovb); Hans-Piet van Sprang – Voedselcooperatie de Korenmaat

The organic wholesale sector, supplying organic retail shops in the Netherlands, is increasingly concentrated. Through a series of mergers and acquisitions, just two major organic wholesalers remain: Odin and Udea. Increasingly, managers of local shops affiliated with these wholesalers are unable to make direct local orders but are obliged to work only through the wholesalers, even as shops seek to promote and sell more local goods. This workshop aimed to explore initiatives for bringing local products to people.

Joop de Koeijer discussed the initiative "De Zeeuwse Vlegel," launched some 30 years ago by a group of young farmers to grow wheat without artificial fertilizers or pesticides, and produce bread from the

wheat, to be distributed locally. After decades of success the organisation is struggling – while early-adopters of organic agriculture joined gladly, young farmers today prefer to work individually. Although it is painful for those who invested their time and work in the project, this must be seen as a success story. De Zeeuwse Vlegel was a stepping stone towards a well-developed organic food system and, in building such a system, it has made itself less necessary.

Judith de Vos is a shopkeeper at “The New Granary” (De Nieuwe Graanschuur) in Amersfoort, a “minimal packaging” shop that gives priority to local, organic products. They developed a food cooperative in 2011 in order to work directly with local farmers. This led to the founding of a shop selling products from the co-operative alongside a broader assortment of “ordinary” - but limited and seasonal - goods. The New Granary aims to bring together growers and shops to make logistics more efficient, but it also provides an opportunity to educate consumers about seasonality, local food systems, and how to cook and enjoy local products.

Finally, Hans-Piet van Sprang has been farming organically for some 40 years, at “de Korenmaat” (the Bushel) in Zeist, and elsewhere. The Korenmaat was founded 35 years ago out of concern for the economy, food, and agriculture, with the goal of moving from a “supply economy” towards a “demand economy”. The Korenmaat buys locally as much as possible, also from wholesalers, but strictly on the basis of customer orders: they do not keep stock and therefore avoid waste. The project aims to change the economy radically, re-grounding it in an ethic of fairness and sufficiency.

One conclusion from the workshop is that we need to strive for diversity in food distribution: every store should look for its own added value, with each serving different customers, needs, and goals. To support this, a “small wholesale” system is needed alongside the existing wholesale suppliers. Educational programmes like the “Subsidie Jong Leren Eten” can also help to raise more sustainable and thoughtful future consumers.

Access to land: leasehold constructions

Presenters: Alies Fernhout - de Boterbloem; Siem Ottenheim – Meerbosch; Leonardo van den Berg – Toekomstboeren

Alies Fernhout works as a farmer and market gardener at De Boterbloem (The Buttercup). She shared the struggles the farm is facing today. “What is your lease situation?” “At the moment you could say that our situation is comparable to squatting, because all of the agreements [that we had] have been cancelled”. De Boterbloem, the only organic farm in Amsterdam, is threatened by the expansion of a nearby business park. “We are close to the municipality of Schiphol, so our ground is worth its weight in gold”. Unfortunately, De Boterbloem has no long-term contract and the municipality, who rented them their land, have arranged everything from the outset so that the farmers, apparently, have no rights to their land. Although the farm is a much-loved member of the community and contributes towards a vision of a socially and environmentally sustainable city, even the Green Left party seems powerless against the market logic at work in displacing the farm. “It seems that even the Green Left councillor has given up” says Alies. However, she herself is far from giving up, and feels supported by a large group of citizens who are drawing attention to the situation and demanding action. “There is a

broad movement of Amsterdam citizens, and Wageningen University is also supporting us by mapping the value of the polder".

Leonardo van den Berg, from the organisation Toekomstboeren (Farmers of the Future) presented the report "Grond van Bestaan" (A Living Countryside), a collaboration between the Transnational Institute and Toekomstboeren. The report presents original research drawing attention to land issues in the Netherlands today. "One survey asked future farmers what their motivation was for going to work in agriculture. Not one of them said 'I want to earn a lot of money,' or 'I want to produce a lot'. And yet, the whole system is designed for this...".

Finally, Siem Ottenheim shared his experiences with different ways of accessing land. Siem manages a CSA which was able to purchase 1.3 ha of land through crowdfunding. In addition, together with the municipality of Nijmegen, he has planted a four hectare "food forest". A food forest is, in principle, for the long term. However, this piece of land is regulated by a land-use agreement with a notice period of just three months. Siem shared "This report and this conference support me in my work; I feel that I am not alone in my work. The municipality should guarantee a sustainable food system for Nijmegen." With the report in hand, and the experience of De Boterbloem in mind, he will consider and discuss with the municipality how they can work together for that long-term goal. "Property isn't what matters to me. I am worried about security as a farmer."

Biodiversity and soil quality

Presenters: Bregje Hamelynck – Ús Hôf & Alex Schreiner – De Voedselketen

Bregje Hamelynk began the session by sharing her experiences with agroecology on her small farm Ús Hôf in Northern Friesland. When she took over the 2ha farm, she commissioned soil tests which revealed that the soil was made up of a clay layer between 80 and 120 cm deep, with a peat layer underneath. The water table was just 21 cm below the surface and the samples found almost no worms. An initial deep ploughing with heavy machinery was therefore necessary to break up the clay layer, but since this they have worked the land almost entirely with hand tools. They have used many agroecological strategies to enrich and improve the soil including: heavy use of green manure; digging pools and drainage ditches to better regulate the water level, creating gentle rolling slopes in the field (traditionally known as "ekers" in Dutch farming); making active use of the fertile 20m border between forest and farmland by designating half of it for perennial crops and half for two-year crops; not tilling or ploughing, to keep root structures intact; using trees to provide cover and protect against evaporation; and using fungus (mycorrhiza) to rebuild the soil. Some of these strategies are very long-term, requiring patience and showing effects after five years or longer. Active consultation with the neighbours was also important, as many were initially worried about the tree-planting plans. Today, the farm grows 50 sorts of vegetables, as well as 15 kinds of herbs and ten types of berries.

Although they have had some struggles with pests, the diversity of the farm provides protection: usually only one plant type is affected, and customers understand. The parts of the permaculture zone set aside for wild nature also help to promote a balance. They use methods like companion planting

and chickens to limit pests and are working with other, more experimental, methods like introducing pigs.

Alex Schreiner from the market garden ‘de Voedselketen’ (The Food Chain) had just a few minutes to present the second case and shared the highlights from her work. The Food Chain works with direct sales, and entirely according to permaculture principles, relying on the health of the plants and the ecosystem to protect against pests. Half of their land was already between wooded banks when they took over the farm, and little needed to be changed. The remaining half was an open field with grass, which they needed to break up with machinery. Because organic manure is hard to come by they rely on compost collected from the surrounding area to maintain fertility. Alex suggested that more opportunities for knowledge exchange and more research, into compost, biodiversity, soil fertility and more, would support more agroecological farmers in the Netherlands.

Plenary: responses from perspective of Scenario 2040 – Meino Smit

After the first workshop round, participants came together to share the main insights from their workshops. Dr. Meino Smit, an organic farmer whose 2018 PhD dissertation set out a vision of a sustainable future for Dutch agriculture, responded to the workshop findings. In his doctoral work Dr Smit investigated the energy needs, especially, of Dutch agriculture between 1950 and today, and argued that sweeping changes are needed to make Dutch agriculture sustainable by 2040. In his “Vision 2040” he envisions an agricultural landscape with far more human labour, smaller and more diverse farms, and a commitment to “circular” systems (“kringloop landbouw”). How did the workshop results fit with this vision?

In response to the workshop on plant-based fertilization, Dr. Smit emphasized the importance of circularity, returning all waste products to the land to maintain soil fertility. While he celebrated the uses of crop wastes and compost, he suggested that ultimately, we also need to tackle the problem of human waste and find safe and viable ways to “close the loop” of our food system.

In response to “Local products in growing wholesale markets,” Dr. Smit agreed that linking consumers with local producers was of paramount importance. We need to reduce our energy use enormously, and one important way to do this is with more regional consumption and production. We should strive to find, always, the shortest path between producers and consumers.

The Access Land group shared an urgent call for action: in the weeks following this conference a discussion was planned on farmers’ access to land in the House of Representatives; a group was formed to prepare a letter, bringing concrete proposals from farmers. In response to this, and the key findings from their workshop, Dr Smit emphasized the role that the government plays in shaping access to land, and the impacts that this has on agriculture: for example, historically Dutch agricultural leases included obligations to maintain or improve the soil. Policy and legal reforms will play a key role in building a system made up of many more small and independent producers.

Finally, in response to the Workshop on Biodiversity and Soil Health, Dr Smit celebrated the small-scale biodiverse projects showcased in this workshop. He declared them to be “future-ready” with one exception: generally, tilling and soil preparation is still carried out with the help of fossil fuels. While hand labour is important, we must also seek out more technological solutions to lighten the load on farmers.

The plenary session concluded with a Q&A about the “Vision 2040”, touching on, among others, how to build less exploitative labour systems, what role international trade should play in the food system, and the role of technology in future farming. Dr. Smit ended by calling for ambitious strategic thinking by this movement: scientific research and beautiful projects are important to lay the groundwork for transformation, but they do not bring about political change on their own. Rather we need to bring social and political pressure to bear. And, in order to do that, we need to unite ourselves for the common political goal of a just and sustainable food system.

Workshop Round 2: Strong farmers for sustainable agriculture

Schools of practice and regional knowledge exchanges

Presenters: Els Hegger & Stefan Hanstede – De Mobiele Gaard; Hanny van Geel –BoerenVuren; Alex Schreiner – Kennisuitwisseling in Brabant

Els Hegger and Stefan Hanstede began by sharing their experience with De Mobiele Gaard – the main conclusion is DO IT. They did this themselves, launching their project using other people’s land, on various small plots, and with different plants and animals; all small-scale and based on what was possible for them at the moment while still making enough income. Many people get stuck, making ambitious plans and setting a lot of requirements before they begin. The way to really realize your

project is to get started; learn along the way, adjust, adapt, and come up with creative solutions outside the box.

Alex Schreiner shared experience organizing knowledge exchanges in Brabant. They have had a good experience establishing a knowledge exchange: a group of farmers and market gardeners regularly share questions and knowledge on practical matters from cultivation techniques to working with customers, and organize collective purchases. They work informally over an email list.

Finally Hanny van Geel, a board member of Future Farmers (Toekomstboeren) shared two experiences, the "Farmers' Exchange" programme of the European Agroecology Knowledge and Exchange Network (EAKEN), organized by the European Coordination of Via Campesina, and the "BoerenVuren" sessions organized by Future Farmers. In these meetings, participants share practical farming knowledge, but also political and policy matters that impact the lives and practices of farmers. All the different levels are addressed, and connected to each other.

The main conclusions were: How a network takes shape and works is important. Both "inward" and "outward" directed activities are necessary. In respect to "inward" looking activities there is a huge need for knowledge-sharing. The knowledge needed is not only practical – personal development and learning about how to work with people and communities is also key. Gaining hands-on experience, meeting each other face-to-face and sharing inspiration, for example on farm visits, is key. At the same time, though, digital exchanges are very useful: is there a possibility to create a platform for farmers to meet and share knowledge, not controlled by facebook or other large corporate platforms? In terms of "outward" directed activities, it is important to bring farmers into contact with the broader society, with governments from local to national, with clients and eaters, with other organisations, and with researchers. Rebuilding relationships with research especially can help to produce knowledge and research which is guided by practice and by the needs of farmers. Growing and sharing this knowledge can help to strengthen the movement.

Short food chains, food cooperatives, and multi-product CSAs

Presenters: Bregje Hamelynck – Ús Hôf/ Ús Iten; Wietse Bakker – Land in zicht; Jeroen van der Kooij – Rust-hoff; Rick Huis in 't Velt – Melkbrouwerij

Pick-your-own projects are wonderful, but what more can we do in the domain of direct sales and Community Supported Agriculture? What if you sold milk yourself, or processed it yourself, in a mobile dairy? What if you shared the mobile dairy with other producers? How can you bring your products to the market?

Bregje Hammelynk set up the food collective Ús Iten, and is working on a nationwide software system that anyone can link to their webshop. Witse Bakker expanded his vegetable CSA by cooperating with a small-scale chicken producer, and has built links with other local producers to supply meat and dairy for his shareholders. Jeroen van der Kooij is building a mobile dairy for milk processing, together with two other natural farmers, while Rick Huis established his own brand for marketing milk - "The Milk Brewery".

All of these initiatives, as different as they are, show the importance, and the skill, of reaching out to customers directly. Wietse already had a successful pick-your-own garden with engaged shareholders when he decided to expand and offer more. “People can sign up, and then I pick up [the dairy and meat products] myself from the farm and bring them to the garden on harvest day”. As of this year, there is also a flock of chickens on the farm, managed by a co-entrepreneur, and shareholders receive a share of the eggs along with their vegetables. Like Wietse, Bregje also began from the position of a successful pick-your-own CSA, but saw that customers wanted more: “We discovered that alongside their vegetables customers wanted local eggs, dairy, and bread.” They established Ús Iten as a co-operative where clients can place orders online and pick up their products alongside their vegetables. They are working now to develop a more independent and streamlined web system, that can interface with other inventory and ordering systems. They want to share the system with other groups to help realize their vision of “a food co-operative in every village.” Sharing resources is also foundational to Jeroen van de Kooij’s initiative – he is partnering with other local farmers and investors to build a mobile dairy to process milk from many small farms into yoghurt, butter, cheese, and buttermilk. Finally, milk from The Milk Brewery is sold in local stores throughout Appeldoorn and Deventer, but locals can also join as members and pick up their fresh, local, organic milk – from heritage Meuse-Rhine-Issel cattle – at the farm through a special self-service system.

The shared discussion touched on regulatory challenges – while vegetables are simple, dealing with meat, dairy, and eggs involves many more rules. Because of the complexity, it can be difficult for small-scale entrepreneurs to know which set of rules they fall under. But, despite the challenges, these initiatives point the way towards a more complete, co-operative local food system.

Starting without the bank, with community

Presenters: Gijs Nauta - Het Proefveld; Hillie en Henk Bunskoek - De Zonnehorst

Agroecological farmers are generally smaller-scale and more diverse than conventional farmers, which can create financial challenges. Two farmers shared their experiences and strategies for financing without borrowing too heavily from the bank.

Since 1980 Hillie and Henk Bunskoek have been running “The Zonnehorst,” a biodynamic farm set on 5.5 fertile sandy hectares in Punthorst. They grow a variety of vegetables, outdoors and in a 700m^2 cold frame. They sell the vegetables through subscriptions, a farm shop, a local market, and wholesale. In 2003 the land was transferred to a land management foundation (Stichting Grondbeheer) and in 2010 an additional 1.8 ha was added. In 2008, with the founding of the “friend-circle of Zonnehorst” (VriendenKring Zonnehorst) it became possible, among other things, to plant a walnut orchard and, in 2013, to build a solar roof at a total cost of 35,000 eur. Many people from the surrounding area support the initiative financially; they feel a strong bond with the organisation and are eager to participate. Financial support takes different forms: people can lend money and be repaid (with interest) in product vouchers but others donate outright.

After first-generation farmer Gijs Nauta completed his biodynamic agriculture education at Warmonderhof, he worked for different market gardeners, then began his own initiative in Groningen. Because of the relatively low up-front costs, he opted for a pick-your-own garden and CSA, constituted as an association (vereniging). Through “the Biotoop” in Haren, he found one piece of land and this spring he is starting a second pick-your-own garden in Zuidlaren. With this project, in addition to purchasing an annual membership (275 euros for “all you can pick”), or a donation-share (50 euros a year for a 50% discount on all purchases), visitors can buy vegetables by donation, on an

honour system – there is a donation pot and a suggested donation for each product. With 66 subscribers, Gijs is making just enough to get by. His goal is to get a few more subscribers so that he can earn a decent living from the two projects. For now, subscribers invest at the beginning of the year, understanding that if the year is good everyone will benefit. But, people also come together when things are hard – when his garden shed was robbed, Gijs received new tools from all sides.

Both presenters agreed: you can find innovative ways to finance your work. Sticking to your vision and principles is important. You should look for commitment – and financing – as locally as possible. The success of social funding depends on a strong connection with the community and the farmers' enthusiasm and ability to connect to and inspire people is critical. The recipe for success is: make your plan, be lucky, dare to experiment, and dare to make mistakes.

Finally, Marijtje Mulder, board member of the new CSA Network for the Netherlands, suggested that payments need not only be for vegetables; farmers can be paid for other services provided, like natural recreation, health etc. Above all, financing projects and finding land requires creativity.

The Commons and co-ownership of land

Presenters: Kathinka en Wouter Kamphuis –Leeuweriksveld; Natasha Hulst – Schumacher Center for a New Economics; Wytze Nauta – Eemweide

Eleanor Ostrom, winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics, argued that the "commons" was not a tragedy at all – according to her, the beauty of the commons is that there is a shared social interest in the sustainable management of natural resources. This workshop examined solutions for access to land, especially those that envision land as a kind of commons.

Natasha Hulst first shared some of the Schumacher Centre's research on Community Land Trusts (CLTs). The Center argues that "the high price of land is standing in the way of sustainability". The CLT model has its origins in the US, linked to the civil rights movement. CLTs involve setting up a legal trust or cooperative, made up of users, CSOs, and investors. The trust manages (and in some cases owns) the land and concludes long-term leases with users, tied to certain conditions. Today there are a number of examples of Land Trusts in the Netherlands, including Land of Seattle, Commons Oost, and the work carried out by the Werkgroep Eigentijds Eigendom van Grond (WEEG). However, we need to push for better recognition of this model in politics.

Wytze Nauta shared his story about trying to access land near his home. He found that his work was often misunderstood and undervalued by local regulators and politicians, who seemed to give priority to financial and speculative interests. His inspiration was "de Genneperhoeve" in Eindhoven, where small-scale, multifunctional farming is practised near the city. Wytze tried to bring this vision to fruition near Amersfoort, where he initially began with small-scale chicken farming. However, he encountered a lot of resistance from local councillors, and regulators who argued that this was not "the right kind" of farming for the area. Although he had some allies within the municipality, many different interests were represented. Today, he is practising guerilla farming.

Wouter Kamphuis shared a somewhat more hopeful experience – thanks to a successful crowdfunding campaign, which raised 100,000 euros in donations and interest-free loans, Wouter and his wife Kathinka have been able to access land for their farm - ’t Leeuweriksveld – in Emmen, Drenthe. The money raised by their “a thousand times a hundred euros” campaign was put into a trust, or foundation - “Mensen voor de Aarde” (People for the Earth) - which then purchased 3 ha of land. ’T Leeuweriksveld also makes use of 2.4 ha which belong to Wouter and Kathinka, but which they hope to transfer to the foundation in the long term. The idea is to remove the land permanently from the market, taking away the pressure of both speculation and rent.

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Although there are still many challenges, and although local and national regulations and laws today may hinder, rather than help, these kinds of projects in the Netherlands, thinking of land beyond the market can help to clear the way for sustainable agriculture.

World Cafe: What now?

In the final session of the conference, participants split into small groups to discuss the next steps, and how to continue moving forward together. Based on the discussions from the two rounds of workshops, and the plenaries, participants suggested eight burning issues for further discussion. They broke into small groups to discuss these questions in practical terms, and identify concrete next steps for action:

1. Access to land: current leaseholding systems are a problem for farmers. What can we do?
2. Agroecological Knowledge Exchanges: how can we develop more spaces for farmers to share knowledge?
3. Model farm: shouldn’t we make a model farm, to show policy makers how we work?
4. Take land off the market: building on the discussion in the Commons workshop, how can we take land out of the economic system to protect environmentally and socially sustainable use?
5. Food safety - regulations & rules: understanding and addressing challenges for small farmers
6. Short Food Chains: building stronger systems
7. Growing inspiration: how do we build community around agroecological farms? Drawing on the discussions from “Starting without the bank,” the discussion identified the importance of coaching, training, and supporting farmers to trust and develop their own inspiration.
8. Federation: we need to act collectively, and let our voices be heard. This conference is a good source of input, inspiration, and motivation to further develop our work as a federation.

After the conference, representatives from the organisations involved came together to see how to bring the ideas, inspirations, and proposals from these working groups, and from the conference more broadly, forward in their work. The energy and inspiration from the 100+ participants will be carried forward in new initiatives, projects, and collaborations in the season to come.

Conclusion:

This conference provided a valuable space for small-scale farmers with a transformative vision of the future of farming in the Netherlands to come together. This gathering showed the strength, dynamism, and creativity of the movement for human-scaled, ecologically grounded and community focussed farming in the Netherlands, and allowed participants to learn, exchange their experiences, and draw inspiration from each other. Traditional, young, new, and future farmers are playing a pivotal role in pushing this movement forward, with innovative projects, techniques, networks, and strategies. At the same time a growing number of engaged eaters, and other actors from all along the food chain, are coming on board, interested in knowing more about their food, protecting the ecosystems in which they live, creating a vibrant and diverse "foodshed," and supporting the farmers who make that possible.

However, in spite of this great energy, the primary focus of Dutch agricultural policy continues to be on large-scale, energy- and input-intensive, export-oriented agriculture. To "future proof" Dutch farming and make a vision of diverse, sustainable, just agriculture a reality, radical changes in policy at the local and national level are needed. Thus, this conference is not the end of a process, but the beginning, one step along the way towards building a powerful and cohesive movement for farming for the future.

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