

Resource

JANUARY 2025 VOLUME 19

The journalism platform for all at Wageningen University & Research

New petition
Protest not over

Campus cow
gets honorary title

Tattoo mosquito
wins Cover Prize

Facelift for
Winter AID

Gluten - fed insects
safe to eat

Children or not?
'A real conflict'
p.12



Contents

NO 5 VOLUME 19



20

Looking into the soul
of the Teacher of the
Year



23

Living with a landlord
'Preferably not in a
chaotic student house'



26

Everyone's a professor
and wearing gowns

7 Children on
meat substitutes

8 Live & Learn:
it'll all be OK

9 Misleading labels
on CBD oils

11 Guido Camps' column:
Hopeful start

30 Constantly drunk or
stoned? Read the tips.

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background stories at
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FOREWORD

Resolute

We have to be prepared for AI misinformation, extreme weather conditions and social polarization. All while struggling uphill, politically and financially. Sjoukje Heimovaara, President of the Executive Board, gave 2025 a somewhat sombre opening during the New Year gathering in Omnia. Understandably. Just take a look at The Hague. Although some of the Cabinet seem to have come straight from a satirical comedy programme, there's precious little to laugh about. Led by emotions, not facts. Wageningen feels the consequences of The Hague's clumsy government directly: drastic cuts in higher education, with Wiersma – the Agriculture minister – booting the nitrogen problem happily further down the road, just like her predecessors. It's no surprise that students are wondering whether they'll want to bring children into the world (p. 12).

But Heimovaara isn't staying sombre: she is hopeful and resolute. History tells us that universities in particular can influence society as it evolves. Stay connected, she says, and talk things through (but hopefully not too much let's explore, p. 4). Wageningen has its tasks, including educating students for the future. You can read how that is working on page 22, in an interview with 2024's Teacher of the Year, the enthusiastic Hannie van der Honing. As always, we aim to keep following WUR and everything that happens on the campus. Critically, too. Above all, let us know if anything is going on that we can investigate or if you come across neat science or student matters that we ought to be aware of!

Willem André
Editor-in-chief

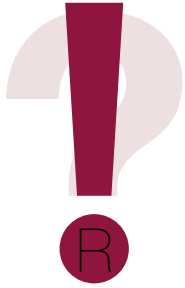




WINTER WARMTH

Brrr, where's my hat? With current temperatures around the freezing point, warm knitwear is extra useful, especially if you've made it yourself. Anyone who wants to learn the finer points of knitting can go to Ruur Boersma's 'Knitting Cafe' downstairs in Orion on Mondays between 11:00 and 14:00. And you're just as welcome if you'd rather socialize than knit. 'No, we don't only talk about knitting. My life experiences turn out to be useful during the conversation at times.'^{ME}

Photo Guy Ackermans



commentary

Firm decisions

Just before the Christmas holidays, an announcement was posted on the intranet saying 'WUR will be prolonging the temporary halt of its activities on X'. This was precisely 92 days after WUR had said it would be stopping sharing news via the social media platform 'for a trial period of three weeks'.

Once upon a time, Twitter was the place to be for the world-wide exchange of knowledge and insights among academics. It was a Valhalla for freedom of speech and democracy. Now it has a reputation for fake news and intolerance. Disinformation has run rampant after Tesla boss Elon Musk bought the platform for a cool 46 billion dollars and rebranded it X. Not something you want to be associated with. Utrecht University, VU University Amsterdam and the University of Twente have all already drawn that conclusion. As has the Guardian in the UK, saying that 'X is toxic'.

On 13 September, WUR said it would stop using X for three weeks. The main argument was the declining relevance. Three weeks turned into nearly 100 days. Then on 13 December a message was posted on the intranet saying WUR would be pausing its activities. Once again, the main reason given was the decline in the reach. The deliberate spreading of incorrect information and online intimidation were subsidiary reasons.

It seems the final decision will take a while to come, which is a recurring phenomenon in Wageningen: weighing up the options, postponing, talking. Choosing not to get rid of X is one example, and the lengthy hesitation about the pro-Palestinian activists' camp was another. WUR asked the demonstrators to leave on 14 July 2024 and the camp was then removed on 27 November, citing the risks in a storm. Or take collaboration with the fossil fuel industry. After six months of discussion including three Let's explore sessions and setting up an advisory committee, WUR announced in June 2023 that there would not be a strict cessation of cooperation. The gavel came down definitively on the committee's advice in February 2024.

Why can't the Board take a firm stance occasionally? No more hesitation: 'We're ditching X, we don't belong in that digital cesspit.' Clean and firm decisions are not always easy, especially in academic circles. Weighing up the options, shades of grey and 'yes but' are

all part of it.

In the case of X, for instance: yes, but should we then say 'No Teslas' either? Or yes, but what do we then do with Facebook, now that Zuckerberg is stopping fact-checking? Or what about TikTok? It used to be known above all for clips of dance moves, but is now a serious danger too thanks to a smart algorithm and general terms and conditions that fly in

the face of privacy legislation. But sometimes it's crystal clear, like now with X. WUR should stop hesitating and take a firm decision. For the right reason: Musk is a danger to democracy, so we're stopping.

This Comment presents the views and analyses of the editorial board, formulated following discussions among the editors.

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10

For the tenth time in a row, Martin van Ittersum (professor of Plant Production Systems) is one of the Highly Cited researchers in his field. The list for 2024 was announced this week. WUR scores well, with 27 researchers. Van Ittersum is in good company, by the way. Emeritus professor Ken Giller is close behind with nine successive mentions in the scientific hit-list. RK

Protest not over 'Cut the ties' petition and workshop

Clearing the camp on the bridge has not eliminated people's readiness to take action to force WUR to cut its ties with Israeli institutes: a new petition is circulating among staff, and there is a series of workshops about 'Cutting the Ties'. The wording of this petition goes further than the previous one. The signatories – over 300 so far – state for instance that if Israel continues to violate human rights, they will not supervise students at WUR from the exchange programme with HUJI once that becomes possible again. They feel that it would clash with academic ethics and WUR's own Principles of Collaboration. Those principles are also addressed by the three-part series of workshops 'Cutting the Ties', a collaboration between Scientists4Future, Wageningse Student Encampment and the Activist Academy. The first meeting is this coming Monday evening. ME

Mosquito wins Cover Prize

***Chasing Culex*, the thesis that Rody Blom received his PhD for in August, has won the 2024 Resource Cover Prize. Culex refers to *Culex pipiens*, the common-or-garden mozzie. Blom collected thousands of them for his research, from all corners of the Netherlands. The nine strong Cover Prize jury chose the mosquito cover as its favourite.**

'A symmetrical cover that has something of an old-school tattoo or tarot card about it,' says Ilja Bouwknecht, jury member and student editor. 'Nice to look at *and* effective: you know straight off that it's about mosquitoes and temperature in some way.' She's spot on: the design was made by the tattoo artist Renee Appelmans from Arnhem. It was obvious to Blom that there had to be a mosquito on the cover and that Appelmans had to design it. 'I really

love her work and that old-school style.' Blom's study is about how climate change is affecting the risk of disease from mosquito-borne viruses. 'The whole thing feels more like an artwork than a traditional thesis cover,' reckons Alfred Heikamp, jury member and designer of *Resource*. 'The cover is exciting, elegant and visually impressive. A super visualization of the theme.'

Art deco

For the jury member Anneke Groen (curator of Special Collections), Blom's cover has an art-deco feel to it. 'It could almost go straight into Special Collections.' But that's not where it's going to go: it's destined for Omnia's PhD graduation room. Its manager Chris van Kreijl wants to replace the portraits of professors currently on the walls there with posters of the last four Cover Prize winners.



Photo Resource

Ten theses are nominated for the Cover Prize by Resource's science editors. In second place behind Blom's cover came one by the Zambian Taonga Chirwa-Moonga (*Exploring Zambian Diets*) and *Timber Tales* by the Brazilian Bárbara Rocha Venancio Meyer-Sand came third. RK

Campus cow with an honorary title

For the first time in the history of the Dairy Campus, one of the Leeuwarder Frisian Holstein cows has been awarded a Star designation. That's a pretty exclusive honorary title, awarded annually to just a few hundred cows out of the total of over three million cattle in the Netherlands.

It's a particularly exceptional feat for a cow on the Dairy Campus to get an award like that, explains the communications adviser Milja Roosjen. 'They're looked after as well as possible, of course – they get extra attention from the staff and are tracked by all kinds of systems, but the research context does make it extra challenging. They move stalls regularly, for instance, and the feed they're given changes now and then. This award is a sign telling us we're on the right track, making everything go as comfortably as possible for the animals.'



Cow 0464 has star quality. • Photo Dairy Campus

The Star designation is given by the CRV, a large stud book and breeding organization for dairy farming. The award is specifically for mature dairy cows, animals assessed at age 9, 12 or 15 as well above average in terms of their external appearance (build) and milk production details, such as over-

all production and protein and fat content. Dairy cows in the Netherlands reach 6 years on average, after which they are slaughtered. Cow 0464 is 9 years old. ME

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Winter AID replaced by W' meet U days

There will be no traditional winter AID this year. However, there will be a winter variant of the W' meet U days (on 5, 6 and 7 February) to welcome new students.

The introduction days in February 2025 will be under the umbrella of the W' meet U days, which have been organized for several years now shortly after the summer AID, says Lisa Nguyen of the Student Service Centre. 'New students who weren't able to get to the summer AID then still get a chance to discover the town and the campus! They learn about traffic rules in the Netherlands, for instance, and meet other WUR students. 'Evaluations have shown that this programme is well received, so we're now repeating it for the February intake.' One of the reasons for the adapted programme is that fewer students have been starting at Wageningen in February in recent years. Nguyen: 'The lower number of participants means we can offer them the same essential items in a shorter time. On top of that, evaluations showed that students found the five-day winter AID very intensive, so soon before their studies started the next Monday.' DV

Surveying the opinions of young connoisseurs

DIY tasks, a face-to-face interview and a cooking workshop with classmates. Those are elements of a study by the PhD candidate Lotte Pater (Consumer Sciences). She is trying to find out in real-life contexts what young children think of plant-based meat substitutes. Text Dominique Vrouwenvelder

And that's not just a question of asking them, Pater explains. 'Exploratory consumer research is often done using structured interviews. But children often clam up when you unexpectedly ask them what they think about anything, because it feels like an interrogation.' She therefore developed methods in which the children get to know the question topic and can then express themselves in their own way. Pater gave children a play box of DIY and other tasks and various plant-based meat substitute products. 'Tasks like drawing, writing and colouring are difficult to interpret as research results, of course, but being involved with the subject matter in that way teaches the children about the material and gives them more self-confidence to talk about it. That helps them give their opinions later in the face-to-face

'This study shows that it's perfectly possible to involve children in scientific research'

and about what is known as the "mealtime context". Children rarely eat alone and never eat one product in isolation.'

'In the first instance, children were positive in particular about the analogues (see inset, ed.), because those look like what they know,' says Pater. 'Later, during the interviews and the cooking workshop, they found the substitutes and replacements more attractive. Part of that is because the analogues didn't come up

chats. During the cooking session at the end, we got to know more about the interactions with other children



Children making a pizza, under the watchful eye of PhD candidate Lotte Pater (left). • Own photo

to their expectations. The ham analogue doesn't taste quite the same as ham meat, so it's disappointing. For the substitutes and replacements, they hadn't expected them to taste like anything they already knew.'

Pizza

'Children are very open to new products,' says Pater, 'especially if you process them into a meal they already know. This was about various plant-based toppings for pizzas, but in another study I also looked at lentils as an alternative to meat in spaghetti sauce. If you involve children in the cooking and it is presented to them in a mealtime context, they are very positive.' Even about the less familiar substitutes and replacements.

'What this study also shows is that it's perfectly possible to involve children in scientific research, even if they can't participate fully in the standard research methods. If you first help them and

encourage them to get to know a topic in a trusted environment, they are then ready to be very open about it. Even to a complete stranger.'

Analogues, replacements and substitutes

Pater uses three different types of plant-based alternatives to meat in her study: analogues, replacements and substitutes. The analogues are the ready-to-eat meat alternatives, the replacements are the more natural alternatives to meat such as tofu and tempeh that have comparable nutritional properties to meat, and the substitutes are the alternatives to meat from other categories such as lentils and nuts that have comparable culinary properties. These all tend to get called 'vervangers' in Dutch.

A botched experiment, a rejected paper... such things are soon labelled 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 the turn of Roel Dijkma, who teaches Hydrology & Environmental Hydraulics.

Text Nicole van 't Wout Hofland • Illustration Stijn Schreven

'In 2019, the University of the Netherlands asked me to give a talk about Iceland and geysers. It would be on a stage in Amsterdam with a live audience and cameras. The editors wanted me to include an experiment. Together, we decided on an experiment that replicates a geyser eruption. That had previously been a theoretical experiment, so I went to the lab and collected things to build a mini-geyser. The result was a set-up consisting of two water reservoirs, one on top of the other, with a connecting hose. The lower reservoir is closed and if you hear it, pressure builds up, like in a pressure cooker. When the pressure gets high enough, the water vapour escapes through the hose into the second reservoir and then shoots up together with that water. In the lab, it all worked perfectly. 'Before recording started, I was given a strictly timed script. Immediately after my explanation of how geysers work, my experimental design would need to "erupt" to illustrate the theory. So I built my lecture to lead up to the crucial

moment, when... nothing happened. The water was boiling, but not enough. Fifty pairs of eyes and several cameras were all watching me. I thought: what now? I looked round the lecture theatre and said, "Hmm, now we're all watching water boil!". That made everyone

'When things go wrong, I stay calm; that's in my nature'

laugh. When things go wrong, I stay calm; that's in my nature. I also have plenty of experience teaching, where things don't always go smoothly either. As long as you know the theory, it's easy to improvise if something goes wrong, for example by interacting with your audience or by making a joke, as I did here. 'As for the recording, the camera team filmed a close-up of the air bubbles, which still looked good on TV. The experience has confirmed my natural optimism: if you don't look a fool on camera even when an experiment fails, that shows everything will be OK in the end.'



Gluten-fed insects safe to eat

Do insects have gluten if you rear them on a substrate containing gluten? Research by Wageningen Food Safety Research (WFSR) shows that they do, though the chance of an allergic reaction in anyone eating the insects is tiny.

'Insect farmers currently use substrates that are also allowed to be used as feed for other animals such as chickens,' says researcher Elise Hoek (WFSR). 'But we also want to be able to rear insects using waste streams, and that raises questions about food safety.'

One such question is whether allergens in the waste-stream substrates end up in the insects. 'Insects are reared on a substrate that they feed on,' explains Hoek. 'The waste stream might contain wheat or milk proteins. When you harvest the insects, their intestines still contain the substrate you grew them on.'

A group of WFSR researchers studied how much of the allergens can be found in the substrate, how much ends up in the insects and whether that could lead to an allergic reaction. That is because while in most animals you remove the gastro-

intestinal tract and only eat the flesh, in insects you eat or process the entire animal. In this study, the researchers looked at five waste streams, testing

'We want to be able to rear insects using waste streams and that raises questions about food safety'

for the presence of milk proteins and wheat. They also grew two different insect species on the various waste streams. Their conclusion was that hardly any trace of the allergens in the waste streams is found in the insects.

Low concentrations

Hoek: 'We don't expect anyone to get an allergic reaction from this. That means it won't be necessary to put the insects on a fast to empty the gastrointestinal tract. Anyway, insects are not usually eaten whole in the West; they are processed to be used in other products. So you only ever consume small amounts.'

Misleading labels on CBD oils

Cannabis products are popular – not just the ones that contain the THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) that makes you high but also the oils, chewing gum and vapes based on CBD (cannabidiol). CBD products contain little or no THC according to the label, but that is often untrue. Text Roelof Kleis

That is shown by research by Si Huang. She got her doctorate for developing new analytical methods for detecting CBD and THC. 'If you're using CBD for health reasons, you need to be sure it's not poisoning you,' says Huang. 'But there are a lot of dodgy products on the market.'

The cannabinoids CBD and THC are chemically very much alike. They are structurally extremely similar, and yet their properties are completely different. There are many other similar compounds too, and it is not easy to tell them apart using a chemical analysis. To find a solution even so, Huang exploited the differences in their affinity for silver.

'Silver ions like unsaturated double bonds,' explains Huang. 'CBD has two in its molecule, but THC only one. So silver ions bind more strongly to CBD than to THC. This difference in affinity let me develop various separation methods.' Some are simple methods that can be applied by non-scientists while others require expensive lab equipment.

Smartphone

An example of a simple method is separation using thin-layer chromatography (TLC). The compounds are separated on a silica plate treated with silver nitrate and then stained. A smartphone app then converts the colours into amounts of the active ingredient. 'Further validation is needed,' says Huang, 'but the method has a lot of potential, for exam-

ple as a way of distinguishing between marijuana and hemp.'

The TLC method doesn't require expensive equipment or lab expertise. A more advanced method developed by Huang is the paper-spray MS (mass spectrometry) method. This utilizes the difference in mass of the cannabinoids depending on whether or not they are bound to silver. Binding to silver leads to differences in mass that can be detected by the mass spectrometer.

Huang used this method to examine various consumer products, including ten CBD oils. She bought the products online or in the local cannabis café. The results shocked her. 'All the labels claimed the product was pure CBD with little or no

'Incorrect labels give a false sense of security'



THC. But my method showed that six of the ten oils had THC concentrations much higher than the value given on the label.'

A vape oil she examined was said by the label to consist of 40 per cent delta-10-THC, a THC isomer. To her surprise, it didn't contain any at all. This prompted her to conclude that it would be better for cannabis products to have no label than an incorrect label. 'Incorrect labels are a health risk because they give a false sense of security. What's more, they undermine consumers' trust in the industry.'

PhD theses **in a nutshell**

Informers

How do you check whether dangerous viruses are circulating, such as the West Nile virus or other viruses that are transmitted by mosquitoes? By detecting antibodies in the blood of animals. The vet Kiki Streng investigated the possibility of taking blood samples from dogs, horses, wild boars and even hens on children's farms and hobby chickens. The results are encouraging, which is good news for public health. ^{RK}

From Research to Preparedness. Kiki Streng ◀ Supervisors Wim van der Poel and Marion Koopmans

Mmm, tasty

The food industry is facing new challenges due to the protein transition — the shift from animal protein to plant-based protein. How do you make such new products tasty? Cristina Barallat Pérez, from Spain, studied how flavour molecules bind to proteins. She found that the binding depends above all on the properties of the flavouring; the protein itself, whether animal-based or plant-based, doesn't matter so much. Mucin, a key component of saliva, also plays a significant role in the release of aroma and taste components. ^{RK}

Behind the Scents. Cristina Barallat Pérez ◀ Supervisor Vincenzo Fogliano

Circular solution

Biodiversity is declining fast, partly due to our food system. But Felipe Cozim Melges from Brazil shows that is not inevitable. Circular agriculture is the solution. It is possible to boost biodiversity considerably by not using pesticides, not ploughing, doing without artificial fertilizer and using groundcover plants. What is more, the PhD candidate has shown in his model calculations that you can still grow sufficient healthy food, and greenhouse gas emissions are lower. But there is a catch. We would need to eat far less meat and more plant-based products. So it's possible but not easy. ^{RK}

Biodiversity in circular food systems. Felipe Cozim Melges ◀ Supervisor Hannah van Zanten

THE PROPOSITION

PhD candidates explain the most thought-provoking proposition in their thesis. This time it's **Helena Donner**, who received her PhD on 23 September for her research on aphid endosymbionts in nature and agriculture.
Text Ning Fan



'The ballroom dance world fails to take the lead when it comes to gender inclusivity.'

'I have been passionate about ballroom dancing for eight years and am involved in the Wageningen Ballroom Dance Association (WuBDA). I have lessons there and during my PhD I started teaching the beginner classes. Ballroom dancing is for couples, with a leader and a follower. Traditionally, the leader is a man and the follower is a woman. In student competitions, there is no rule about who should lead or follow. Men often lead, but it's not mandatory, and both same-sex couples and switched couples compete. But in official competitions, such as those organized by the Dutch Dance Board (NABD), the rules specify that the couple must be a man and a woman, and the described steps for the leader are named 'man's steps' and those for the

follower 'lady's steps'.

One common explanation is that the follower should ideally be shorter than the leader, and women are generally shorter than men. However, my own (male) dance partner, for example, is shorter than I am, showing that height differences are not a valid reason to impose such rules.

This regulation, in my view, is not only outdated but also sexist. In some sports the distinction between men and women is relevant because of the difference in muscular strength, but this is not an issue in ballroom dancing, which is mainly about technique, creativity and expression. By enforcing these old-fashioned rules, we miss the opportunity to make ballroom dancing a truly gender-inclusive sport.'

Hopeful start

As the old year came to a close (Happy New Year, everyone!), I searched for the global CO₂ emissions per person. Because CO₂ emissions are often expressed in absolute numbers — the only relevant figure where climate change is concerned — but a growing world population only makes an absolute decline even more of a challenge. You have to feed more people every year and keep

‘While we face a huge climate challenge, *per capita* emissions have fallen since 2010! And that is not the only bright spot’

easy to find emissions per person. So I did some calculations and sent my results to an energy expert to check. After all, you want to be sure you aren't coming up with some half-baked numbers.

I found that while we face a huge climate challenge (because *total* global emissions unfortunately increased again in 2024), *per capita* emissions have fallen since 2010! That is not the only bright spot: other indicators such as figures for poverty and child mortality have also been heading in the right direction for years. So we are able to improve health and prosperity while trying to live more sustainably and having less of an impact on the planet.

them warm while using fewer resources than the year before. But it wasn't



Guido Camps

In the EU, CO₂ emissions peaked back in 1990! Of course I can hear the criticism at once: ‘The EU has merely shifted its emissions abroad!’ But if 2025 turns out to be the year in which absolute global emissions fall for the first time (fingers crossed), the story is more nuanced. We have made serious work of greening production in Europe; it wasn't just about ‘outsourcing’ as a strategy. That is worth publicizing, especially if the Netherlands and Europe want to serve as an example to the rest of the world.

Here at WUR, we can be proud of that. It is no coincidence that we have been ranked the most sustainable university again. We do our best to show that science, education and innovation can help find real solutions rather than dumping the problem on other countries.

So let's start 2025 with renewed enthusiasm. We still have a long way to go, but there are hopeful signs. I hope that at the end of this year, in December, we will be able to look back on the first genuine fall in absolute global CO₂ emissions. That would be a New Year's gift worth having.

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

Students on wanting kids: 'I find it a difficult decision'

CLIMATE WORRIES BIG OBSTACLE IN BABY DILEMMA

Given all the worries about climate change, political instability and global conflicts, do Wageningen students still want to bring babies into the world?



Text Dominique Vrouwenvelder

She can't decide whether she wants kids. In fact, student editor Marte* (23) isn't even sure she should want kids. And she knows she's not the only one. Increasingly, she hears students in her circle pondering the dilemma of whether or not to have children. So Marte decided to investigate the matter further for Resource. Three other Master's students joined her in this soul-searching exercise. One of them is Ana (25), a Forest & Nature Conservation Master's student from Brazil. She grew up in a large,

noisy family. 'In Brazil, family is the top priority. Ever since I was young, I have dreamed of having a family. However, I've never had a maternal instinct, so that feels contradictory. My parents always talk about having grandchildren. It feels sad to tell them that might never happen. On the other hand, I think it's too much to have kids just so my parents can fulfil their wish to become grandparents. That feels too big a sacrifice.' 'My bisexual orientation makes the situation a bit more complex,' explains Ana. 'I'm not currently in a relationship, but I might end up with a woman and we might not be able to have children together. Luckily I can discuss these topics with friends who are also part of the LGBTQI community.'

Marte wants to have children, but for a long time she felt guilty about this. 'Sustainability is an important issue for me and I used to struggle with my responsibility for the ecological footprint of any offspring. Are you responsible as a parent for the ecological footprint of an entirely new human being? I've now figured out my own answer to that question and I feel it's ethically OK to have children to keep the population stable. If two people have two children, they are creating a new generation without increasing the world population.'

That is also how Jes (23), a Resilient Farming & Sustainable Food Systems Master's student from the Netherlands,

**'I AM OPTIMISTIC; I THINK
THINGS WILL BE ALL RIGHT
IN THE END'**



Illustration Valerie Geelen

sees it. ‘There are big issues facing society, and perhaps I’m being naive, but I have a positive attitude. As long as a Third World War doesn’t break out and no atom bombs fall, I see a life for the generation that comes after me. I try to be a good person for myself and the people around me, without too much of an impact on the environment, and if I can pass that message on to my kids then they can have a positive effect on their generation.’

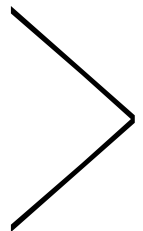
That is Marte’s opinion too. She also doesn’t feel quite so powerless thanks what she has learned from her degree in Climate Studies. ‘As a child, I found the environmental and climate problems

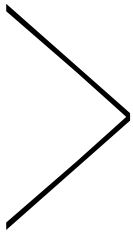
hard to get a grip on, which made them frightening. It’s like that song the children’s choir used to sing when I was young: ‘The Earth is getting too hot. So hot it’s melting. And if we don’t do anything, it won’t have long to go.’ Now that I’m an adult and have learned things through my degree, I don’t find the issues so hard to pin down, nor do I feel so powerless, and I realize I’ll be able to help make the world a better place later through my job.’

Crises

Ronja (24, from the Netherlands), who is doing the same degree as Jes, is finding it harder to decide whether or not to have kids. ‘It really feels like an

internal struggle. I can imagine it’s a very special experience to have a baby and have that parent-child bond with someone. However, I have doubts about whether I want to bring a new person into the world the way I fear it’s going to be in the near future.’ The future feels threatening and frightening to Ronja, even if she has difficulty imagining what it will look like exactly. ‘I think climate change will lead not





'YOU CAN'T CARRY THE WHOLE WORLD ON YOUR SHOULDERS'

'IT REALLY FEELS LIKE AN INTERNAL STRUGGLE'

only to less stable weather conditions but also to more conflicts and a less stable political climate. Even my generation will see that happen. I expect the various crises to exacerbate one another. Sometimes I get the feeling we won't live to see our fiftieth birthdays. At the same time, I realize my thoughts are influenced a lot by what I read and see here. But it feels weird to have to choose whether to bring someone into the world knowing they will have to endure all that.'

For Ana, fear of climate change is not the main factor in deciding whether or not to have children, although she is shocked by the impact climate change is already having. 'Paradoxically, that means some countries are encouraging couples to have children, even though there is global overpopulation. Perhaps adoption is ethically the best solution.'

Sign of love

All four students think it is human nature to want to reproduce. Marte: 'My grandmother sees having babies as a sign of love between two people and also as an expression of hope for the future; you can't carry the whole world on your shoulders. She would like me and her other grandchildren to be more relaxed about the baby dilemma; I find that touching. I notice that when I'm in

a good place, I find the negative aspects of society easier to bear. Then it feels only logical to want to share this world with a kid. And when I'm in love, my hormones and feelings take over from my rational side.'

Ronja also thinks it is in our nature to want to reproduce. 'But there are too many people on this planet to live together healthily. I don't blame anyone

else if they decide to have babies and I won't blame myself either if I give in to my human nature later. But I find it too difficult at the moment to decide whether to have kids.'

Hypothetical

Although these students are already thinking and talking a lot about whether to have kids, none of them



feels a need to bring children into the world at this stage in their lives. Maybe after they hit 30. Ronja: ‘I don’t believe either that women in the Netherlands have to have a baby to meet society’s expectations. Perhaps that’ll change when I’m 30.’

Even so, the topic has become somewhat more relevant recently for Ronja. ‘I am in a steady relationship and six months ago I stopped using an IUD as contraception because I had too many side effects. We are currently using condoms, which feels less safe as a way of preventing pregnancy. Pregnancy seemed a more distant prospect when I was still using an IUD. If I was to get pregnant now, I would

find the decision really hard. I don’t like the idea of an abortion either, although I totally understand that other people might go for that.’

Older

Jes: ‘I think I want children, but not yet. I’ll seriously consider the matter when I’m around 30. My brothers are about 10 years older than me and already have children. I can see how nice it is to be a parent, but I also see how draining it is on their energy and attention. At the moment, I’d rather spend my time learn-

ing and discovering things.’

Marte agrees. ‘My baby dilemma is a philosophical question. I think I’m too young at the moment to be a mother. That is partly because of my upbringing: develop yourself first, and you can always have children later.’

Ana’s mother in Brazil sees things differently. ‘My mother recently said that maybe I should consider having my eggs frozen. I don’t want that, even though it’s normal these days. My mother had me when she was 24. She may be worried that my childbearing days will soon be over. I’m not so worried myself — I still have all the time in the world.’ ■

** For privacy reasons we give only the students’ first names. Their surnames are known to the editors.*

‘IF I WAS TO GET PREGNANT NOW, I WOULD FIND THE DECISION REALLY HARD’

Falling birth rates

Family sociologist Katya Ivanova, an assistant professor at Tilburg University, read the interviews with the four WUR students. Ivanova does research on voluntary childlessness. She tries to understand how our views on the future and pessimism about society influence family planning.

‘I’m not remotely surprised by the students’ arguments given their ages and backgrounds. In empirical studies of the desire to have babies among students in their early to mid-twenties, we see similar arguments to what these students are saying. This is clearly something young people are thinking about nowadays. But what you say is not necessarily what you do. It is all still hypothetical for these students. Only one study has been published to date tracking young people over a longer period and collecting responses at multiple points in time about their wish to have kids. That publication showed that more climate-aware people were less likely to have kids than less climate-aware people.

‘A few years have passed since then and additional data is available on the same group of participants for follow-up analyses. The provisional results show that these people mainly postpone the decision to have children. Some do have babies when older, while others remain childless. Another factor is that the longer you wait to have kids, the smaller the chance of success because of the ticking biological clock. It might no longer be a voluntary choice.’

External influence

‘Even so, my own research shows that if people are pessimistic about the future, they are less likely to bring children into the world. With that in mind, you may wonder what the effect is of all the sombre reports of a world in flames that the media is constantly bombarding us with. Not much research has been done on the effect of the picture presented by the media on reproduction rates, but an Italian study from 2023 saw the number of births fall

when the number of news items about an economic crisis increased. So in that sense I can understand why WUR students are discussing with one another whether they want to bring babies into the world.’

Government action

‘The worries these young people have are seriously important. It’s easy to think that the youth of today can be a bit overdramatic at times and it’ll all blow over, but that’s not the case. From what I know and see, there’s nothing suggesting birth rates will rise again soon. So it’d be good if governments responded more to the trend of falling birth rates. After all, policy is aligned at a specific number of inhabitants paying taxes, for instance. Fewer children being born is already leading to retirement ages going up.’





WINTER ON THE MUD FLATS

There is no long-term research programme, oddly enough. Even so, Wageningen Marine Research has so far managed to keep sending a number of researchers in midwinter to Griend, an uninhabited islet in the Wadden Sea, to monitor the grey seals. Jessica Schop approves: 'We've built up a nice long-term dataset now and it'd be a shame if it stopped.' Schop, in the photo here, is one of the researchers who try to photograph as many of the individual seals on Griend as possible. Those photos allow the individuals to be accurately identified, as each animal's fur has a unique patterning. ME

Jessica Schop and her colleagues blog about their work on the mudflats. To see the blogs, use the QR code.



On green lawsuits and makeshift solutions

Should the Dutch state take more drastic action to cut nitrogen emissions faster? Next week, a court is due to give its ruling on this in a lawsuit brought by Greenpeace. The case is only the latest in a series in which a lobby organization has tried to enforce better compliance with the rules on nature, climate and the environment through the courts. Law lecturers Edwin Alblas and Chiara Macchi explain what is going on.

Text Marieke Enter

The Law chair group cannot complain about a lack of topical talking points. Examples include the recent case that Milieudefensie brought against Shell on reducing its CO₂ emissions (Milieudefensie lost on appeal) or the lawsuit Greenpeace filed against the Dutch state about the lack of protection against climate change for the inhabitants of Bonaire. Then there are the many minor court cases about issues such as the use of paintball guns against wolves who are not afraid of humans, or the toleration of nursery cages in pig farming (the courts ruled that neither was allowed). The Law chair group calls this phenomenon ‘strategic litigation’: lawsuits on a specific issue are filed as a way of forcing companies and governments to comply more broadly with national and international legislation and agreements.

Are lobby groups going to court more often, or does it only seem so? And is that happening more in the Netherlands than elsewhere?

Alblas: ‘Not all court rulings are published, which makes it difficult to quantify things. Even so, in our Effective Nature Laws research project, we asked some 60 NGOs about this and they told us they are going to court more often. However, they play down the impact. For example, government bodies rarely accept the initial court ruling. They nearly always lodge an appeal (or an appeal in cas-

sation) to gain time. The Urgenda climate case is a good example. It took nearly six years of litigation before the Dutch state finally agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions faster to comply with the UN Climate Convention.’

Macchi: ‘I’m doing research with a PhD candidate on climate lawsuits against companies. That shows it’s an international phenomenon. Not surprisingly, it is most common in countries where the democratic system functions properly. The Netherlands is one of the trendsetters. Relative to the population size, the courts are used relatively frequently here to put pressure on government bodies and the private sector.’

Does science play a major role in these cases?

Alblas: ‘Definitely, although the form that takes is changing. In the first climate cases, such as the Urgenda case, scientific proof of climate change had to be provided plus evidence that it is a problem. But in Climate Case Ireland, which I was involved in from 2018 to 2020, there was consensus on that among both the claimants and the Irish government. That case revolved around what science had to say about the precise effects and responsibilities for actions. But court cases about pesticides, for example, are often still about the basic issues: what does science tell us about whether pesticides cause cancer or Alzheimer’s

‘Government bodies rarely accept the initial court ruling’



November 2024 - Donald Pols, the director of Milieudefensie, speaking to the media at the court in The Hague. The court ruled that Shell cannot be obliged to reduce its CO₂ emissions by specific percentages. ♦ Photo ANP/Jeroen Jumelet

disease, and how does that relate to reports by the EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) and CTGB (Dutch Board for the Authorisation of Plant Protection Products) saying the pesticides are safe? The role of scientific proof is evolving constantly.'

Macchi: 'The case of Milieudefensie versus Shell showed how difficult it is to take generic, widely accepted scientific insights and turn them into arguments that are sufficiently convincing legally in a specific case. That was apparent in the Shell case. The court of appeal stressed it was convinced by the generic scientific arguments about the association between CO₂ emissions and climate change, but legally there were insufficient grounds to force this one particular oil and gas company to reduce its CO₂ emissions by the percentage requested by Milieudefensie.'

The Schoof Cabinet's plan, set out in the coalition agreement, is to make it harder for ideological lobby groups to challenge political decisions in court. What do you think of that?

Alblas: 'Certain environmental groups now have so much legal expertise that they are becoming quite successful in challenging the government in court. I can understand politicians being a bit annoyed that MOB for instance, an environmental lobby group that is very small but also very skilled, manages to defeat the State Advocate time and time again, which employs the most expensive lawyers in the Netherlands. But trying to restrict access to the law in response is a highly anti-

democratic reflex. You can't just do that, because the Netherlands ratified the Aarhus Convention in 2004. Regarding environmental issues, this convention sets rules on such matters as access to information, a say in decision-making and access to the courts.'

But as a matter of principle, does the Cabinet have a point with its criticism that these cases are increasingly letting judges take decisions that should be for politicians?

Macchi: 'No, and I find the fact that the Cabinet is saying such things a dangerous development. It is politicians who determine the laws and rules. The courts only check afterwards whether everyone — including the government — is keeping to the rules. That is the essence of the rule of law: citizens have to keep to the law, but so does the government. That's fundamental. It is not as if ordinary members of the public and NGOs win cases against the government easily. They only win if the law is on their side.'

Alblas: 'As the Council for the Environment said last summer, politicians only have themselves to blame for the increasing tendency to litigate about the environment: the government doesn't comply properly with the legislation and regulations. The lawsuits will stop once the government stops making policy aimed at makeshift solutions.' ■

Hannie van der Honing chosen as Teacher of the Year

‘That moment when you see the penny drop...’

A passion for plants and for teaching, always going above and beyond for her students — These were some of the reasons the jury gave for choosing Hannie van der Honing as Teacher of the Year. What is the story behind those words, who is Van der Honing and how does she see herself as a teacher?

A characterization in ten key phrases. Text Marieke Enter • Photo Duncan de Fey

► WUR roots

‘I too studied in Wageningen. I started out in Forest & Nature Conservation, but switched to Biology after a year. I decided to try it for one year and see how it went. During that year, I became fascinated by plants. That’s mainly thanks to the teachers I had: Wim Braakhekke and André van Lammere, who I eventually took over from. In my first year as a WUR teacher, I did virtually everything together with André. Later I gave the lectures and taught the practical activities myself, with him observing. It was a fantastic way to learn the ropes as a lecturer. Even now he helps out if necessary with the big plant modules, even though he’s been retired for nearly ten years.’

► Passion for plants

‘I’m a real fan of plants, mainly because of the tricks they use to survive in the place they happen to be — after all, it

is difficult for plants to move somewhere else. I find carnivorous plants in particular fascinating. They mainly grow in nutrient-poor soil and therefore have to get their nutrients from other sources. Plants such as the Venus fly-trap get nutrients from the insects they catch. Images were recently recorded of the pitcher plant *Nepenthes* in Borneo showing how tree shrews use the pitcher as a kind of toilet: while they lick the fluid produced by the plant, they poo into the pitchers. That’s how the plant makes sure it gets a supply of nutrients. That is so smart!’

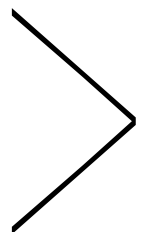
► Personal contact

‘As a student, I really liked the personal contact you get in Wageningen. Our teaching team tries to maintain that personal touch, even if the student numbers are much higher now. For example, we have over 550 students for Cell Biology. When there are so many students, I don’t always remember everyone’s name, but I do still try. It is easier with the students in the practicals and tutorials. We have much smaller groups for that, about a dozen people. I know all those students by name and recognize them if I meet them again

later. (Laughing) I certainly remember the students who ask good questions, and the ones who are often late.’

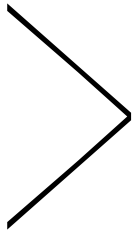
► Love of teaching

‘I discovered my love of teaching in the third or fourth year of my degree. We had a course then called “verbal presentation skills” and I liked that so much that I followed it up with the equivalent of today’s Education minor. What I like most about teaching is that moment when you see the penny drop — when you’re doing a practical activity or tutorial and you almost literally see someone suddenly grasping something they didn’t understand before. It feels like you are being incredibly useful as a teacher when you can help with that process. Research felt useful too — I did my PhD in the lab where I now work as a





'IF I AM DOING A PRACTICAL ACTIVITY WITH MY COLLEAGUES, IT FEELS ALMOST LIKE A PARTY'



teacher (the Laboratory of Cell & Developmental Biology, ed.) — but I found it lonely at times.'

► Back to the nest

'When I got my PhD in 2012, I had already asked whether I could stay on at WUR as a teacher, knowing that André would be retiring in a couple of years. But that wasn't possible because at that time everyone who taught at WUR had to do research too — and I didn't want that. So I did teacher training and taught at secondary schools for a while. Then HAN University of Applied Sciences had a vacancy for what was basically my dream job: Molecular Plant Biology teacher in the degree programme for Biology and Medical Laboratory Research. I was happy at HAN and would probably still be working there if WUR hadn't approached me in 2014: they needed someone to replace André, and would I be interested in applying? Everything fell into place. In part, it was because my husband and I really missed Wageningen after moving away. I hadn't realized this before, but I feel completely at home here.'

'I HOPE THIS DOESN'T THREATEN THE EXCURSIONS'

► Infectious enthusiasm

'We have a very enthusiastic teaching team. If I'm doing a practical activity with my colleagues Otto, Tijs and Peter, it feels almost like a party. Students tell us this too: "your enthusiasm is infectious" or "I never knew plants could be so much fun". I also get that feedback in the Botanical Gardens in Utrecht, where I give guided tours as a volunteer. If people find plants boring, it's mainly because they don't know much about all those amazing plant mechanisms. Once you tell people about that, they see plants in a different light.'

► Differing interests

'Not all students find plants or cellular processes as interesting as I do, but they still need to pass the course. So I do my best to motivate them by linking things to their interests or their field of work. In the Biology of Plants course, for example, I do that by offering different excursions and practical activities to students of Forest & Nature Conservation and of Agrotechnology. The pollination of orchids can seem quite irrelevant to Agrotechnology students, for instance, so with them I focus more on crops and edible plants. It's more work developing two variants and then two versions of the exam, but I think it's sufficiently important to justify the extra time and effort. I like seeing the students get enthusiastic because they realize how they can apply the course material in their future field of work.'

► Worrier

'I made some friends for life as a student at university — in particular, through Tartlétos, the student athletics club, where I was on the board. Some of those friends are back living locally and we always compete together in the Veluweloop relay race. My Tartlétos days were important for my personal devel-

opment but also simply for relaxation. I still enjoy doing things outside work and study. I am a worrier by nature; I can easily spend a couple of hours awake at night worrying about a lecture that didn't go well. I find it helps if I'm busy with fun things such as my running group, the guided tours in the Botanical Gardens or skating, which I do every Wednesday in winter.'

► Educational Sciences

'I am back to being a student myself now as I'm studying for a Master's in Educational Sciences at the Open University of the Netherlands. I want to develop the courses I teach further and try out new things. I had also been wanting for a while to do research into the effectiveness of certain teaching methods. Once I've got my Master's, I would love to be able to combine teaching plant science and doing research. I am up for a new challenge.'

► Pressure on education

'I recently heard that teachers in some groups feel they aren't valued as much as the researchers. I've never felt that here for one moment. Our chairholder Viola Willemsen has always encouraged me. Here, teaching jobs are considered to be just as worthwhile as research jobs, and colleagues treat each other as equals. However, I am a little concerned about what the planned cutbacks will mean for education. I hope this doesn't threaten the excursions. It would be crazy if our students barely spent any time outdoors. In my opinion, we shouldn't cut back on lab work either. Theoretical knowledge isn't enough in this field; you need to learn practical skills as well. I am actually rather worried about this.' ■



Students Maïke Voets (left) and Lina Neuens with their landlord Rik ter Horst.

GREAT, I'M A LODGER!

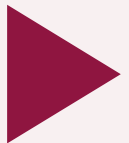
Housing minister Mona Keijzer sees taking in lodgers as the ideal solution for the student accommodation shortage. But what is it like renting a room in someone's home? And how does it feel having a lodger in your home?

Text Luuk Zegers • Photos Guy Ackermans

Home owners taking in lodgers sounds like something from a nineteenth-century Russian novel. But the Housing minister Mona Keijzer now wants to resurrect this rental option. She sees renting rooms in private homes as a way of solving the student accommodation problem in one fell swoop. About 33 per cent of Dutch people have a room they could rent out, and 8 per cent are actively considering doing that. According to the

minister, that could add about 100,000 rooms to the accommodation supply. Now Keijzer wants to start a media campaign to make people more aware of the lodger option. She also wants to make the option more attractive with proposed legislation for temporary rental contracts.

Locally too, efforts are being made to find people willing to rent out rooms. WUR is joining forces with Wageningen municipality and the online platform HospiHousing to persuade people to offer unused rooms to let for students and staff. There is definitely a demand for rooms in private homes, says HospiHousing founder Daan Donkers. 'There are about 500 people in the Wageningen region looking for a room through our platform.'





The platform also has around 50 landladies/landlords, about half of whom are currently renting out a room. ‘Not everyone rents out rooms for the whole year.’ Some only do so in the summer, for example, or at the start of the new academic year.

Exception

So at the moment, only a small number of WUR students are renting rooms in private homes. Environmental Sciences Bachelor’s student Maike Voets (23) is one of them. She rents a room from Rik ter Horst in Rhenen, which is quite a cycle ride from campus. ‘I find it OK,’ says Voets. ‘I used to have to cycle half an hour to my secondary school. I might eventually want a room in Wageningen, but I’m not particularly keen on a chaotic student house.’

Some fellow students think it’s crazy for Voets to be living in a house with an older man. ‘That is because many people aren’t familiar with this rental option. But Rik is incredibly nice. We often eat together and it’s sociable. I like having a clean, quiet home. One possible disadvantage compared to a student house is that it’s harder to get to know new people. But I meet a lot of new people through my degree programme and my student society Nji-Sri. This works for me.’

Familiar

Environmental Sciences Bachelor’s student Lina Neuens (19) from Belgium also rents a room in Ter Horst’s house. ‘Living with a landlord is very different to a large



Maike Voets

‘This feels like a home’

‘I’m not keen on a chaotic student house’

anonymous student flat,’ says Neuens. ‘This feels like a home. It feels familiar.’ In fact, she is very happy with her room. ‘Hopefully I can stay here a long while. The only disadvantage is the distance from the campus. That makes it harder to join a sports club or student society because I don’t like cycling back home alone at night. It would have been perfect for me if Rik’s house had been in Wageningen.’

Neuens also gets the impression lots of students don’t realize renting a room in a private home is an option. She doesn’t think it’s the right solution for everyone, either. ‘This option isn’t for you if you are going to be out partying and getting drunk every night. But it’s the ideal solution for quieter types like me.’

Professor

Incidentally, it’s not just students who rent a room in a private home. The new chairholder in the Philosophy group, Rachel Ankeny, is also doing this. ‘I recently moved from Australia to Wageningen for my new job. My family hasn’t yet joined me.’ Ankeny looked for temporary accommodation via the intranet and found a room in the home of Jochem Jonkman (a PhD advisor in the VLAG graduate school). From that base, she is hunting for a home where she can live with her family.

Ankeny is pleased to be sharing a home with someone who knows the ropes in Wageningen and the university. ‘We also have interests in common, such as food, cooking and supporting new migrants. And the house is big enough for you to do your own thing. He also has two fantastic cats, which makes me feel less lonely. I can’t actually think of any downsides.’

Responsibility

How do the proprietors feel about renting out a room. Jonkman says this isn’t the first time he has done this. ‘When I was doing my PhD research, I often hosted people who came to Wageningen on an exchange. The secretary in our group would ask me if I happened to have a room free for a couple of months. I’ve also had students staying, and a refugee. But I’ve never had a professor in the house before, like Rachel now.’

Jonkman feels a responsibility to help people. ‘There’s a housing shortage and I can help people out temporarily. For instance, last year I had two first-year students temporarily who could only move into their accommodation in October. Otherwise they would have been commuting for two and a half hours.’

Privacy

Although he enjoys having people in his home, Jonkman also likes to be alone sometimes. ‘That’s why I prefer to have people renting for a fixed period. That means it stays a fun way to get to know people from all over the world. You always learn something about the culture of the people you have living with you.’

Jonkman says you do have less privacy when you rent out a room in your house. ‘That’s why I’ve set up a special privacy room where I can retreat to, for example to work or read a book.’ How smoothly things go varies depending on the tenant. ‘It all goes well automatically with some people, but with others you need to draw up a cleaning schedule, and make agreements and have discussions about the simplest things.’

Big house

Rik ter Horst, who currently rents out rooms to the WUR students Voets and Neuens, hasn’t been doing this for very long. ‘My wife and I bought this house when I was still a WUR student. Our children grew up here. My wife passed away three years ago, and my youngest son left home a year ago. My house is pretty big for just me, but I don’t want to move. It’s a nice place and one of my children lives close by with the grandchildren. So I thought about taking lodgers. I started last year, renting out one room to a young student. Now I’m renting out two rooms.’

‘It’s a fun way to get to know people from all over the world’

‘My house is pretty big for just me’



Lina Neuens

It makes the place more lively when you rent out rooms to students, says Ter Horst. ‘The three of us often eat together, which is nice. And of course you have more money coming in. Perhaps it’s not such a good idea if you find privacy really important, but I always think to myself: I’ve got my bedroom for that. If I want to meditate in the living room, I just let them know. They’re fine with that; after all, they need to study.’ ■

Lodger facts

- In the larger cities, renting a room as a lodger is much cheaper than standard rents. In Amsterdam, the most expensive city, monthly rents for lodgers are 435 euros less on average. In Wageningen, you pay 338 euros a month on average as a lodger, which is 21 euros less than the average rent for an ordinary room.
- The majority of people looking to rent as a lodger are students (76 per cent).
- Research by the Ministry of Housing shows that 33 per cent of Dutch people have rooms suitable for renting out to lodgers. About 2 per cent of Dutch people say they definitely want to take in lodgers and another 6 per cent are considering this option.
- This potential supply of accommodation often remains unused because mortgage providers don’t allow homeowners with mortgages to have tenants. That is because houses with sitting tenants sell for less.
- You don’t need a permit to take in lodgers. However, the rooms must be at least 12m² and you can’t have more than two lodgers. You also need a rental contract and the place must satisfy fire safety regulations. Landlords do not have to pay tax on the first 5,998 euros per year they earn in rent (2024).

EVERYONE'S A PROFESSOR

A lecturer who can say they're a professor, be a supervisor and wear a gown? No problem at the Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e). Their colleagues at Wageningen think WUR ought to follow that example.



Text Roelof Kleis

The TU/e suddenly acquired hundreds more professors on 1 November last year. The number quadrupled. Not because the researchers were suddenly promoted *en masse* to full professorships, but because the university's *Everyone's a professor* initiative took effect then. That brought to fruition the wish of the Eindhoven professor Kees Storm, expressed in his inaugural lecture in 2018.

Storm's *Everyone's a professor* initiative aims to modernize the Dutch academic world and make it less hierarchical, and above all to align it better with the norms in neighbouring countries. A central point is what is known as *ius promovendi* (supervision rights): being

entitled to act as a supervisor, independently guiding a PhD candidate and helping them reach the finishing line. In the Netherlands, that right was reserved until recently for professors. They handle the supervision of PhD projects whereas the co-supervisors – largely assistant professors and associate professors – generally deal with the day-to-day guidance. Since 2017, the law has given scope to deviate from this rule, though. Storm's attack on system was well timed. The idea has simmered away at universities since then.

EXPANSION

Since 2018, both associate and full professors have been able to act as supervisors at WUR. To show they are competent to do so, the former must have guided at least three PhD projects in Wageningen. Within the new Academic Career Framework, that is a requirement for reaching the last tenure track phase before promotion to a full professorship. Three years ago, around a hundred associate professors at WUR had supervision rights. How often they actually took on the supervisory role last year is not known. There was one PhD graduation in December that did not involve any professors: neither the supervisor, the co-supervisors nor the opponents were full professors. Some assistant professors have also recently become able to request supervision rights. The same requirement of at least three PhD projects supervised applies.

Equality

In Wageningen, Ellen Van Loo and Frederic Ang are fervent proponents of expanding supervision rights. Van Loo is an associate professor in Marketing and Consumer Behaviour and Ang in Business Economics. Both have Belgian backgrounds. It is no coincidence that they in particular want the topic on

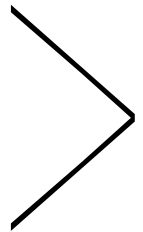
‘EVERYONE’S A PROFESSOR IS ABOUT EQUALITY, RECOGNITION AND THE RIGHTS THAT GO WITH THE OBLIGATIONS’

the agenda at WUR. ‘In Belgium, every lecturer and associate professor can call themselves a professor too,’ says Van Loo. ‘But that term is merely one aspect of showing that you’re an expert in your field: it’s about the hierarchical structure that needs changing. *Everyone’s a professor* is about equality, recognition

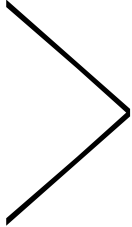
and the rights that go with the obligations. It’s about responsibilities that are commensurate with what you do.’ ‘I’ve worked in England and Belgium,’ says Ang, ‘where a tenure tracker has supervision rights virtually from day one. And that matters a lot. As a tenure tracker, the idea is that you should

be building up your own independent profile as a scientist. Supervising a PhD candidate is a significant part of that. The system in Wageningen splits the supervision rights from the guidance, though: you have to do the latter, but only a professor can be a supervisor. That makes it all heavily dependent on the professor, which runs counter to the desired independence.’

‘The everyday guidance in a PhD pro-



In Wageningen, only full professors can be supervisors. • Photo Guy Ackermans



ject is quite an obligation and it can be intensive,’ adds Van Loo, ‘so why shouldn’t it come with supervision rights? The responsibilities and the rights don’t match.’

Rules

The two Belgians’ arguments are backed up in part by Wageningen Young Academy, the group of younger tenure trackers. ‘The way supervision rights currently work creates a lengthy and sometimes very unnatural dependency relationship between the younger and the older and more experienced researchers in supervising PhD candidates,’ says Nico Claassens, associate professor at the Laboratory of Microbiology. ‘Despite often having the idea for a project, bringing in the funding and doing most of the guidance, you have to bring someone else on board because you don’t have supervision rights. That feels wrong. Not just for us, doing the supervision, but for the PhD candidate too. I have one PhD student who has two experienced coaches who don’t have supervision rights. Even the



Photo Guy Ackermans

supervisor asked, ‘What do you need me for? I’ve hardly got anything to do with this research.’ Well, those are the rules... Not that it’s always like that, of course. There are plenty of supervisors who bring a lot to the table. And

in some cases it’s really good to have a supervisory team with a wide range of skills. It’s about being obliged to do it a particular way.’

‘It’s about the pool of people with supervision rights being too small,’ says Tim van Emmerik, an associate professor of Hydrology and Environmental Hydraulics. ‘In Wageningen, day-to-day supervision of PhD candidates is done by at least two people and ideally, one

‘EVEN THE SUPERVISOR ASKED WHY THEY WERE NEEDED’

‘IN BELGIUM, GERMANY, THE UK AND THE USA, THEY SEEM CONFIDENT YOU’RE CAPABLE’

‘IT’S THE CANDIDATE WHO SUFFERS IF YOU GET IT WRONG’

of them would have supervision rights. We have to make that pool bigger and develop a good system to ensure that, independently of your place on the academic ladder.’

Accountabilities

Everyone’s a professor has been bubbling away in Dutch academic circles for some time, since the Young Academy embraced the idea of Eindhoven’s Prof. Storm two years ago. In Wageningen, it is on the agenda of the Academic Board, says Dean of Research Wouter Hendriks. The Academic Board advises the Executive Board about *inter alia* PhD candidacy matters. ‘Opinions about *Everyone’s a professor* in the Academic Board are divided,’ says Hendriks. Personally, he is against expanding supervision rights further, beyond what has already been done (see inset). That allows someone in the last phase of tenure track to be a supervisor, or even one phase earlier in special cases. They must then have seen at least three complete PhD projects through as a co-supervisor to acquire the experience. ‘Our Academic Board thinks it’s a big responsibility,’ explains Hendriks. ‘That’s why that rule about three supervision projects was made. Guiding a PhD candidate is quite an

onerous responsibility. You take it on for four years, guiding a PhD candidate in becoming an independent scientist. You’ve got to take it seriously. Supervision rights are about more than guiding a PhD candidate; it’s the candidate who suffers if you get it wrong. If there are problems and the project overruns by a year, who pays? The supervisor is responsible and you’ll have to get it sorted. Are you up to that? Do you have the resources, the network or the capabilities? An assistant or associate professor often has fewer options for finding solutions. So you end up knocking on a professor’s door anyway.’ Ang and Van Loo think it is weird to

link supervision rights to a minimum number of PhD projects managed. Van Loo: ‘A tenure tracker mostly has plenty of experience with writing articles, setting up research and supervising students. I don’t see the guidance as a problem.’ Ang: ‘You also have to look at it in the international context. In Belgium, Germany, the UK and the USA, they seem confident that you’re capable of supervising others from the start of the tenure track. Are the differences between assistant, associate and full professors big enough that you arbitrarily assign supervision rights to a restricted group? I don’t think so. Belgium is a good example of how it can be done without that unnecessary hierarchy.’

Wageningen Young Academy is making the case for having a broadly based committee examine the current system critically. ‘A letter about that was sent to the Executive Board in June 2023,’ says Claassens. According to him, that committee should include not only professors but also PhD candidates, tenure trackers and other academic staff. ‘As yet, there’s been no response to the request.’ ■

Is *Everyone’s a professor* a good idea? Share your opinion online using the QR code.



GOWN

In Wageningen, the right to wear a gown is reserved for professors. The rules are more flexible elsewhere in the Netherlands. Since November last year, all Eindhoven’s academic staff have been allowed to wear gowns at formal ceremonies. Despite that, sources at the gown maker say business is quiet. In Nijmegen and Utrecht, not only the supervisors but also the co-supervisors are allowed to wear gowns at the graduation. Elsewhere, the rules vary. The opinions at Wageningen Young Academy are divided, says Nico Claassens. ‘Some see only the professors being allowed to wear a gown as a sign of inequality. It’s about what the gown represents: does it symbolize status and hierarchy, or the neutrality of science? If you’re in the latter camp, it’s strange that only the professors have gowns!’

Always drunk, strung out or stoned?

Keeping substance abuse under control

Do you worry sometimes that you might be overdoing the alcohol or drugs? Or do some of your fellow students seem always to be drunk, high or stoned? In search of useful tips, *Resource* sat in on a meeting about substance abuse organized by the Wageningen Federation of Student Societies. The second *Where do I draw the line?* meeting came in two parts. First, Nils van Tilborgh talked openly about his story: he became addicted to alcohol and cocaine while at Groningen University. Then Wageningen professor and pharmacologist Renger Witkamp (Nutrition & Health) added to that story with background facts about addiction. *Resource* derived the following insights from their stories.

Text Marieke Enter • Illustration Marly Hendricks

1

Don't assume it won't happen to you or your friends

Becoming addicted happens faster than you think. And it definitely isn't just about the stereotypical junkies on the street. According to the Jellinek organization, about two million people in the Netherlands are addicted to something — from drink or drugs to medicines or gambling. Addiction is found in all strata of society, although there is a big sex difference in some forms. Addiction to alcohol, medicines or drugs is twice as common among men as among women. No hormonal explanation has been found as yet for this difference, said Witkamp, so the causes are most likely to be social.

2

Misery fuels addiction

Nearly every addiction started off as curiosity: what would it be like to...? Often the experience is pleasant enough to repeat it again. And again. And again. Until the use crosses a line and starts to become problematic. 'That dividing line is thin and is different depending on the person,' said Witkamp. Vulnerable moments are notorious: you don't feel happy, your love life is going badly or your grades are falling. Witkamp: 'Addiction is more likely where there is misery.'

3

See through the lies and don't let go

Addicts have a tendency (certainly in the early stages) to deny or downplay the problem. Van Tilborgh certainly heard that voice in his head saying he was going too far. 'But that voice shut up when I was drinking.' It wasn't just a question of self-deception. Lying became second nature to Van Tilborgh, allowing him to avoid difficult questions and continue drinking and snorting coke unimpeded. He also withdrew into himself. 'That is what addiction does to you: you become isolated and all your energy goes on maintaining your addiction. Addicts are not easy people to get on with. I was lucky my friends didn't give up on me.'

4

More often = worse

Substance abuse leads to biological changes. Witkamp: ‘The substances disrupt the processes in your brain. They act on unstable neural networks and can trick them.’ For example, cannabis is known to make food taste nicer and to make sounds appear clearer. LSD lets you see things that are not real. Repeated use of such substances makes the receptors in your brain start behaving differently. ‘That effect can be long-term, possibly even the rest of your life. Think of the reformed alcoholics who only have to take one sip of wine to feel an overpowering urge for more.’ The biggest problem with addiction is that eventually you get habituation and a loss of sensitivity. ‘That way, you end up in a downward spiral and the addiction takes over your life.’



5

Know what you are taking

It is very dangerous to swallow or snort something blind, warned Witkamp. ‘You may have seen the videos from the US about “zombie drugs”. Their effect is quite awful: people really do walk round like the living dead. These drugs are for example synthetic cannabis and Krokodil, a kind of cheap fake heroin. They are extremely addictive and they are also in circulation in Europe. Don’t risk exposure to them — get your drugs tested!’

6

Avoid temptations

The availability of the substance is a decisive factor in addiction. That is a major issue with alcohol. Witkamp: ‘Alcohol is everywhere — and it is socially accepted. You’d cause a stir if you snorted cocaine in public, but drinking is seen as “sociable”.’ After doing rehab, Van Tilborgh decided to avoid temptation for a while. He stopped seeing his friends in the drugs scene and didn’t go to festivals or parties. He does now go to the pub again, but he no longer touches alcohol. ‘I have started dating again. It’s not very sexy when you have to explain why you’re drinking tea when she sips her wine. But that’s the way it is: as an alcoholic, I don’t have a choice.’

7

Don’t be moralistic

Be aware that addiction is a very powerful biological process that can be more than you are able to cope with, stressed Witkamp. ‘There’s no need to be moralistic about this. An addiction is a problem you need to tackle as soon as possible. Don’t be ashamed!’ He emphasized how important it is for students to look out for one another. ‘Say something if you suspect problematic use of a substance. Help each other without stigmatizing.’ Van Tilborgh had a similar message: ‘Getting angry doesn’t help, but setting limits does. Start the conversation kindly. Addiction is a disease, and unfortunately not one you can cure with a pill. But there is a medicine: connecting with others.’

**Self-help group**

WUR has a self-help group run by students for students with a dependency or addiction. It is not only for substance abuse but also for example gambling or gaming. The initiative was taken by a fourth-year Bachelor’s student in biology who wanted help tackling his cannabis habit but felt that approaching the Iriszorg addiction care organization was a step too far. ‘I needed a lower-threshold option. So with the help of Student Support, I set up this group,’ he says. The group meets from 20:00 to 21:30 on alternate Tuesday evenings (21/01, 04/02, 18/02 etc.) in Impulse, in the closed ‘Innovation’ room on the first floor. You don’t have to register – just walk in. The meetings are in English. You are also welcome if you just want to listen anonymously.

Limelight

Student orchestra De Ontzetting is working on the final preparations for a special collaboration. On 9 February the orchestra will be sharing the Junushoff stage with poet Ivar van der Walle in an event focusing on war and peace.

Text Coretta Jongeling



SAT
9-2-2025

Theater de Junushoff

14:30-17:00

Admission 7.50 euros

War and peace

It is nearly 80 years since the capitulation of the Germans was signed in Hotel De Wereld, signifying the end of the Second World War for the Netherlands. 'As a Wageningen orchestra, we wanted to pay attention to 80 years of freedom,' explains trombonist and the orchestra's chair Ruben van der Linden. 'Plus some fantastic pieces of music have been written on the topic of war. The music really tells a story. For example, we

play *D-day* by Alex Poelman and Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, on the Russian defeat of Napoleon's army. But we also have lighter music such as Vera Lynn's famous song "We'll meet again". For this concert, the student orchestra is collaborating with the poet Ivar van der Walle, who came second in last year's

Dutch Poetry Slam. 'He wrote texts for this production that fit with the music we will be playing. He will take audiences back to the stories of the time.'

De Ontzetting is an orchestra consisting of about 60 students. They put on two big concerts a year. 'We have been working on this concert since the start of the academic year. Every Thursday evening, we rehearse in Orion. I also practise at home occasionally. Although I use a special mute for my trombone then so I don't drive my housemates mad.' Tickets can be bought on ontzetting.wur.nl.



Photo Josef Ellerkamp



TIPS

SAT 25 January

Kabaal am Kwartaal

(hardcore punk) at Unitas

TUE 28 January

Honk! Improv Comedy show

(comedy) in Cultuurwerkplaats

THU 30 January

Prins S. en de Geit

(electropop) in Theater de Junushoff



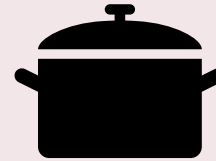
You can spot some great-looking people and cool outfits on the Wageningen campus. This column highlights some of them. This time, it's **Celine Mulders**, a Master's student in Forest and Nature Conservation. Text and photo Ana Mattiuzzi Martins



'Comfortable to wear is crucial for me, as are colour schemes. What you wear says a lot about you and how you want people to see you. It's a non-verbal way of expressing your personality. So I mostly wear a *lot* of colour. A lot. My outfits get loads of compliments, which is nice. I like to stand out a bit, but I tend to forget what I've got on and that it may be striking – until someone remarks on it. It's always a nice reminder of what I'm actually wearing.

I get my clothes through Vinted, second-hand shops and clothes swaps. Sometimes people in the building where I live give clothes away by leaving them in the hall and I make use of that; occasionally there's really nice stuff. I get my inspiration from my friends and from people like Florence Given, with pretty eclectic tastes. I follow them on social media. Style icons like those got me combining patterns and colours and experimenting with various looks, so that I have distinct and unique outfits. I put a lot of attention into makeup too, particularly highlighters and other nice details, and I try to make them gel with my outfit.'

You encounter all the flavours of the world in our WUR community. Environmental Sciences Master's student Alyt Falkena (22) shares a recipe for a dessert from Friesland.



Flavours of WUR

Fryske tiramisu

'This Frisian tiramisu is famous in our Frisian society, *Wageningensk Studinte Selskip foar Fryske Stúdzje*. Every year, we organize a three-course dinner to get to know the first-years, and this dessert is basically always on the menu. When it wasn't included one year, the members were massively disappointed because everyone had really been looking forward to this iconic dish.'

- 1 Whip up the cream with some of the sugar and the egg white.
- 2 In a bowl, mix the mascarpone, Beerenburg, egg yolks and sugar to form a thick, homogeneous mixture.
- 3 Next, use a spatula to blend the cream into the mascarpone mixture.
- 4 Cut the sugar loaf into slices 1 centimetre thick.
- 5 In an oven dish, place a layer of the sugar loaf slices, sprinkle some of the liqueur and spread a layer of the mascarpone mixture on top.
- 6 Continue until you have used up the loaf.

Let the dish set in the fridge for at least 2 hours (24 hours for the best flavour).

You can garnish the tiramisu with icing sugar, almond flakes, cocoa powder or grated chocolate.

Ingredients (for 10 people) :

- 500g mascarpone
- 4 egg yolks
- 1 egg white
- 1 Frisian sugar loaf
- 125g brown caster sugar
- 35ml Beerenburg liqueur
- 1 cup whipped cream (250ml)

Preparation time :

🕒 ~20 minutes



Alyt Falkena
Master's student of
Environmental Sciences



Meanwhile in... Bulgaria - Bulgarian roses

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, MSc student of International Land and Water Management **Eli Todorova (21)** from Bulgaria talks about the threat to Bulgaria's Rose Valley. Text Youssef el Khattabi

'From an early age, we hear stories about Kazanlak and how this region is known worldwide for its roses. Every Bulgarian is proud of the rose, a flower that has been associated with our country for a long time. Every Bulgarian woman has cosmetic products with the Bulgarian rose as an ingredient. For Bulgarians, the rose symbolizes beauty, pride, heritage and tradition. 'The rose has become part of our identity and something that foreigners associate us with. The Rose Valley attracts tourists and there are lots of souvenirs linked to it. The flower is essential for our economy. Global high-

end perfume brands use Bulgarian rose oil. 'One of the most profound effects of climate change is the increase in annual temperatures. So far, the impact on rose crops has been limited, but I fear that might not be the case in the future. Higher temperatures can directly affect the growth of the flowers. Since the rose industry provides jobs for a lot of local people, the livelihoods and financial situation of families might be affected. 'Overall, as a Bulgaria citizen, I would say that our understanding of the necessity of climate change adaptation is not where it should be. Even the younger generation is not involved enough in the topics of climate change and its impact. I believe way more awareness is needed in Bulgaria about the climate and innovations that would enable the survival of the rose.'



Advertisement

The advertisement is split into two main sections. The left section features a blue background with a large white checkmark. Below it, the text reads: 'OUR CAMPUS IS SMOKE-FREE', 'It is prohibited by law to smoke or vape on Wageningen Campus', 'TOWARDS A SMOKEFREE GENERATION', and 'ACHIEVING A SMOKE-FREE GENERATION'. The right section has a light blue background with a white circle containing the text: 'In January every year many people quit smoking', 'New years resolutions?', and 'Check out stoptober.nl For useful tips (website in Dutch language only)'. At the bottom right, there is a photo of a person running on a path next to a river, and the Wageningen University & Research logo.

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AI DENIES SPREADING FAKE INFORMATION

During her speech at the New Year drinks do in Omnia, President of the Executive Board Houkje Sjeimovaara warned of the dangers of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in spreading fake information. AI responded by announcing it disagreed completely with this, according to automatically generated messages on social media.

WUR is a stronghold of fact-checkers, a safe haven in a dangerous world where people like Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk no longer find it necessary to check the facts on X and Facebook. During her New Year's speech in Omnia, Sjeimovaara promised to make things difficult for AI. 'Watch out AI, because we've got our eyes on you and we are the facts people.' She made a gesture pointing first to her eyes with two fingers and then stretching out her arm and pointing her index finger at an imaginary AI as if AI was personally present among the audience sipping their drinks.

But it turns out AI is not as imaginary as we thought. An automatically generated response from AI, a collaboration between ChatGPT and Gemini, appeared immediately on both Facebook and X: 'We firmly deny spreading misleading information. In fact, our work is based in part on WUR research. We show, for example, that the climate is always changing, and our research demonstrates that

'We firmly deny spreading misleading information. In fact, our work is based in part on WUR research'

nitrogen is essential for life on Earth. So what's the problem?! But science is all about double checking, so we do our own research too. Glyphosate? Monsanto has repeatedly shown through its own research that this herbicide is safe. And while we're on the subject of the multinationals on Wageningen campus: how much proof do you need that they have no involvement whatsoever in WUR's gen-tech ventures? AI is actually looking forward to partnering with WUR. We'll just run through the Principles of Collaboration, then everything will be guaranteed to be OK! The online post got lots of positive comments. For example, @57834gprut wrote: 'AI for WUR President!' And @XX_345 said: 'Science is also an opinion.' Musk himself even added a comment: 'Life is too short for facts.' That message got 84,654 likes.