

Case care farm 'Aan de groene weg'

The farm

Farm 'Aan de groene weg' is situated in Berkenwoude (Zuid-Holland) and is part of a GmbH in Auleben (Thüringen), a cooperation of a German and a Dutchman. Both farms are private family businesses. During the week Nicolien Both lives on the farm in the Netherlands, together with the three children, while her husband Wim stays on the farm in Germany. In the weekends the family is together; one weekend in the Netherlands, the other in Germany. Nicolien and Wim chose to have two farms, because of the restricted options to expand the farm in the Netherlands. They kept the farm in the Netherlands in order to meet their children's wishes to finish their schools in the Netherlands.



There are 88 milking cows, 28 young cattle and 19 calves on the farm. The average milk production per cow is 7.500 kilos per year. Over the last years this number has fallen because of previous plans to take the cattle to Germany. Since those plans are no longer in place, milking cows with lower milk production will be replaced by other cows. In addition, 308 sheep are kept on 65 hectares of grass land. Moreover, there are 4 hectares of arable land, an orchard and hedges are being maintained and biotopes are being created. Next to that, the banks of ditches are

being maintained as well. The activities for nature and landscape management don't provide enough financial support in order to expand them on the farm. The participants do help with taking up the banks of ditches with a ditch hook and they trim trees.

On the German farm there are 350 milking cows and there is the same amount of young cattle. It is not useful to move the cattle from the Netherlands, because on the German farm the production of milk is 8.500 kilos per cow per year. In total, this farm uses 350 hectares of grass land for the milking cows. Primal cows are held as well.



Care activities

Start of the care

A few years ago, Nicolien came across the care sector, due to personal circumstances. She spent a lot of time at the farm, in order to relax and enjoy her rest, because she needed to sort some things out. In those days this was very useful for her. She wanted to share this with people who also need rest and relaxation. Moreover, Nicolien and Wim also wanted to make better use of the existing facilities at the farm. When starting the care branch at the farm, the most important problems were the lack of professional support, and the lack of support of the care sector and policy makers.

At the farm the participants cooperate in the daily care for the cattle, they help in maintaining the garden and the landscape and they help with product processing. If a participant doesn't feel like working, that is also okay.

Number and diversity of clients

On working days, a maximum of eight people can come to the farm. Because there are no participants on Wednesdays and Fridays, not all places are filled up. The group consists mainly of men; only two women come on Monday and Tuesday and on Thursday there is just one woman.

The care farm is a subcontractor of a care institution in the area in which the farm is situated. Seven of the participants on the farm come from this institution. In addition, one participant with a PGB (Personal Budget) comes to the farm.

The number of participants has risen sharply since 2001. In 2001 there were only two participants who came through the care institution. In 2006 the number of participants on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday fluctuated between seven and eight a day. There are various

target groups for daily activities, and one weekend a month a child is staying over. People with mental disabilities, psychiatric problems, physical limitations or histories of addiction come to the farm, as well as young people with learning disabilities and autistic people. People can also come to the farm to recover from injuries

Experiences of clients

Two unique characteristics of a care farm are the quietness and the fact that one can do daily farm activities. The participants are being treated with respect and appreciation, and they get their own place in society. Since the participants work with the family, they learn how to work with other people. There is no canteen on the farm, so the participants sit with the family around the kitchen table during eating times.

The participants experience the care on the farm as very pleasant. However, this is not always clear to people from outside, not even for Nicolien. For instance, there is one participant from psychiatry who is always complaining about the farm. It smells like manure and the animals are annoying. But when this particular participant had left, because he was being transferred to another institution, Nicolien received a letter from him in which he stated that he had liked the work on the farm. The work had given him insights in the reality of life.

The farm likes to participate in spreading knowledge and information about care farms. One example is the publication of the book 'een ploeg van goud' (Ganzenwinkel, van, 2005) ('A golden plough'). In this book participants of various care farms in the Netherlands are talking about their experiences. As part of the target group of people with a history of addiction, Tijs talks about his experiences on care farm 'Aan de groene weg'. He experiences the things he does on a day as very pleasant and he is able to keep a better rhythm in his life. In the future he would like to find a steady job at the care farm.

Finances

Most participants on farm 'Aan de groene weg' come from a care institution in the area. The compensation for the participants who come from this institution has risen from € 15, - per daily period in 2001 to € 23,50 per day. The compensation for the participant who has his own PGB is € 40, - per day. The care farm has to pay for the family labour and the food and drink of the participants from this budget.

The care farm bought clothes and (Wellington) boots for the participants. The investment per participant is approximately € 150, -. In addition, the farm had to make adjustments to tools for about € 200, - per care place. For the rest, the farm uses mainly existing facilities. Therefore it has not been necessary to make further investments, for example by adjusting buildings.

The distribution of the family income hasn't changed much since 2001. Income from agriculture has lowered somewhat from 93% in 2001 to 87% in 2006, but it remains the main source of income for the family. Income from care has risen from 1% in 2001 to 10% in 2006. Income from activities outside the farm has fallen from 5% in 2001 to 1% in 2006. Income from nature management has risen from 1% in 2001 to 2% in 2006. However, there is a balance between costs and benefits. It is to be expected that the economical situation remains as it is in 2006, which has mainly to do with the developments on the German farm. Because of the great share of agriculture it is expected that the farm would still exist in five years' time, even if it wouldn't have a care branch.

Labour: division of tasks

Due to the partly separated life that Nicolien and Wim live, it is mostly Nicolien who manages the farm in The Netherlands. This is no problem for her, because her mother used to be a farmer as well. An employee helps her with the agricultural activities. This employee comes from the MAS (Secondary Agricultural School) and works 40 hours a week. He is hired to do Wim's activities. Nicolien herself supervises the participants at the farm. She works 40 hours a week on the agricultural activities, four hours a week in care and during eighteen hours she combines care and agriculture. Nicolien meets with the employee daily, in order to discuss the activities.

Networks

Care farm 'Aan de groene weg' is connected to Den Hâneker, an agricultural nature society which has a department for care farms as well. Den Hâneker intermediates between participants and care farms in the area Alblasserwaard-Vijfherenlanden in the province of

Zuid-Holland. In addition Den Hâneker organises study groups for care farmers; this way the care farmers can learn from each other's experiences and problems. Another advantage is that the care farmers can discuss which participant fits best at which farm.

Nicolien is actively involved in the activities of Den Hâneker. She also makes her farm available to farmers and citizens to see. In addition, she informs consumers or clients of other care farms about the care farm. These networking activities in agriculture and care should be supported more in the future, in order to stimulate agriculture and care.

Bottle necks

Farm 'Aan de groene weg' is situated in the Krimpenerwaard. This area is located between the cities Rotterdam and Gouda. However, public transport in this area is not organised well. A bus passes the farm only five times a day. This is not enough to make the participants come to the farm, so another solution with regards to the transport of participants has to be found. The participants of the care institution come to the farm by minibus. It is clear that transport is one of the hindrances to get more participants to the farm. This is not only the case for farm 'Aan de groene weg', but also for other care farms in this area. It is even so bad that there are enough participants that like to go to the farm - and enough places on care farms in the area - but it is not possible for the participants to reach the farms.

Another problem is the unwillingness of care institutions to place participants at care farms. Nicolien tries to improve this by talking to care institutions and by being involved in the regional society Den Hâneker.

Future

In the future, Nicolien would like to keep the Dutch farm as a care farm. This is possible by managing the farm by herself, or by changing the farm into a foundation in which others manage it. If one of the children would want to take over the Dutch farm, than this should be a possibility. However, Nicolien and Wim prefer to take over the German farm in order to continue there. For the next ten years the GmbH will remain in its current form, but after this time there is a chance that they can take over the whole farm.

It is possible to expand care on farm 'Aan de groene weg' to five days a week. On the German farm there is no care at all. Nicolien is looking for the possibilities to make this happen. Since her presence in Germany is limited, she is not able to give it her full attention. The German culture is different than in the Netherlands. In Germany the people are more geared towards production and performance. That is in contradiction to the rest that is being offered on farm 'Aan de groene weg'. However, it should not be forgotten that the participants are actively involved in the agricultural production.