



Farmers for Nature in the Amerdiep



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**A unique opportunity for
a unique stream valley area**

Initiators



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Projecten

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Residents will be free to enjoy this varying landscape, farmers will offer their products and activities in the form of farmyard sales of ice cream, accommodation and holiday residences, camping accommodations, excursions and farmers golf.

How can this be achieved?

There is a high probability of success. This project involves a group of farmers who want to take control and as a group, come to represent a symbol for an area in which there is a proper balance between ambition and a sense of reality. The products which will be realised will have to satisfy high quality standards. The investments in new activities will have to be responsible from a farm-economic point of view.

What role can you play?

A great deal of work has already been done. There is a group of farmers with a clear ambition which is also prepared to make a considerable investment in order to achieve this goal. For them, it is of vital importance that it becomes clear in the short term how prepared all of the parties concerned are to contribute both substantively as well as financially. The developments in the Amerdiep are unique in the Netherlands but also in an international context. In order to maintain this head start, the farms want to move fast. They are also assuming the following timeline: they would like to use the upcoming winter period for administrative and official discussions. In 2006, they would like to complete the pieces of the puzzle and firm up the details of the contributions of the various parties involved. This will allow them to finalise the agreements made by the winter of 2006/2007.

The group looks forward to entering into a dialogue with you and considers it a challenge to make this plan a success, together with you. We would also like to call on all of you for this: provincial and regional governments, water districts and water companies, organisations and institutions – in short, all of the involved parties in the area.



Foreword



We first met the “Amerdiep group” this past summer. We now understand what this stands for: a group of farmers who realise that they hold the key to the future of their own region, the Amerdiep, in their hands. A group of people with a sense of reality who do not want to see thick reports, sophisticated models and complicated structures. It is however a group that welcomes perspective. In them, we see the conviction that they as a group are capable of offering the Amerdiep what the community wants: agriculture that can co-exist in harmony with water, nature, landscape and recreation.

They have asked us to become the ambassadors for this project, Farmers for Nature in the Amerdiep. We answered this question with another question: “Will you all give this your all?” This brochure is the proof of their heartfelt “yes.”

A unique process has begun in the Amerdiep to which we, as ambassadors, are happy to lend our support. It is unique in the sense that we are looking for new possibilities here, opportunities which are present partially outside of the existing set of tools. New ways to create lasting investments in green and blue (land and water)

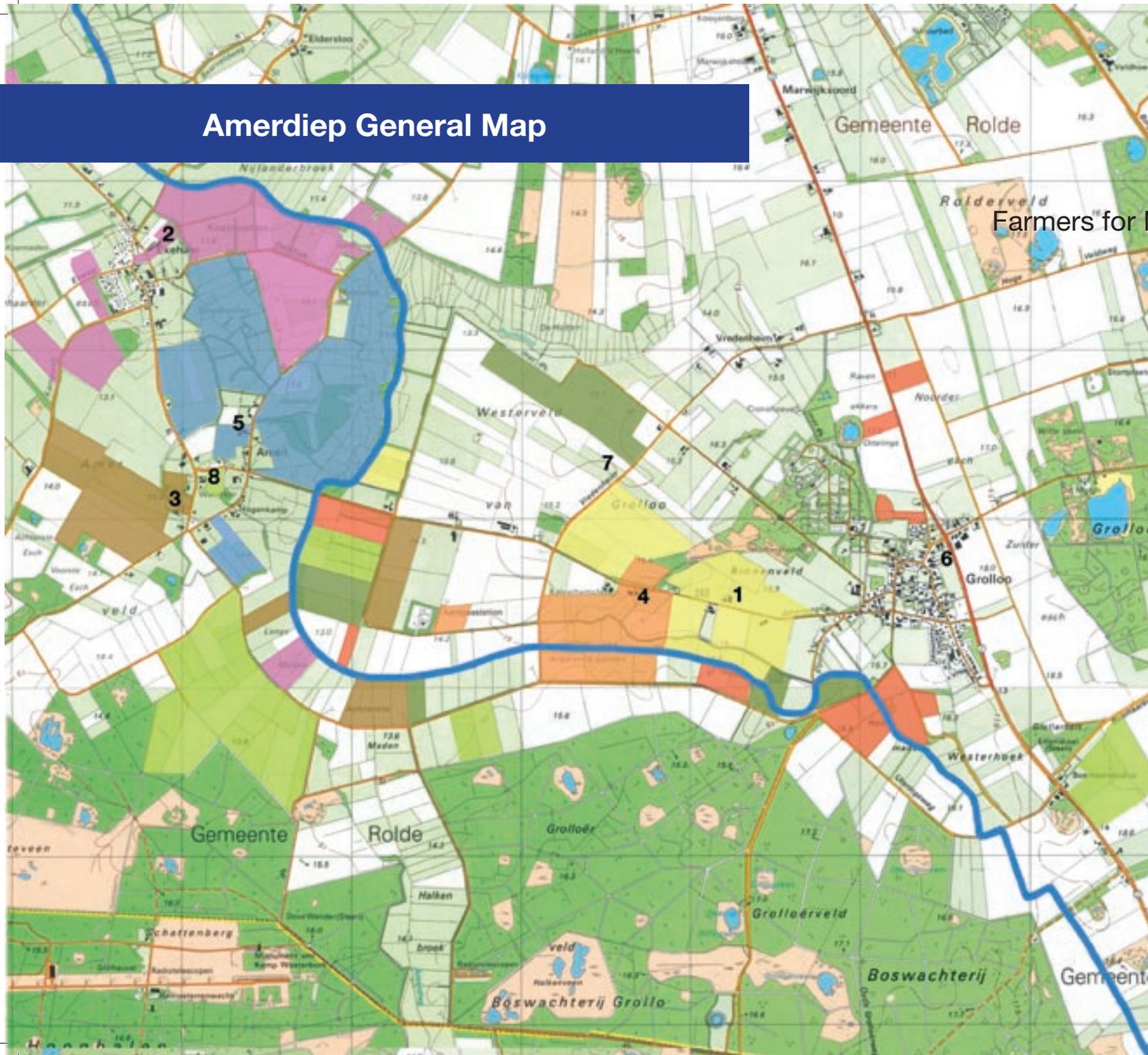
are necessary in order to allow the beautiful image we are striving for to become reality. It is above all unique because the farmers here take the lead and challenge government and other partners in the area to collaborate and push the limits.

And this is how you should view this brochure, as a challenge to collaborate, both fundamentally as well as in terms of business. The story told in this brochure is anything but nailed shut, and this is absolutely our intention in telling it. It therefore does not contain elaborate specifications or pre-determined budgets. No, this is an invitation addressed to you. This document provides a clear picture of the group’s ambitions and an indication of the range of the boundary conditions that correspond to these objectives. The key words here are quality and durability. The opening offer is now on the table. What is your stake in the new direction the development of the Amerdiep will follow?

Henk van 't Land

Eric van der Bilt

Amerdiep General Map



Farmers for Nature in the Amerdiep in a nutshell

- Problem**
- the status of the area has created a situation that makes it difficult for farming to be profitable, and full justice is not done to nature and the landscape.
 - the interests of agriculture and nature clash in terms of the water management in the area, particularly with regard to the water level and quality.
 - there is no structure in place for sustainable nature conservation for the long term in the area of finances and planning.
- Solution**
- Fitting nature conservation into the area alongside or interwoven with agricultural activities by a pilot group consisting of eight farmers.
- Area**
- Approximately 120 hectares of management area and approximately 100 hectares of white area along the upper course of the Drentsche Aa; part of the land is located relatively far from the farm buildings.

Legenda

- 1. Roelof Ebbinge
- 2. Bernard Westebring
- 3. Rudie Smit
- 4. Wicherink - Steenblik Partnership
- 5. Harm Hagens
- 6. Gerard Warringa
- 7. Jan Reinders
- 8. Bé Warmelts



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Four directions

One of the most important and best preserved stream systems in the Netherlands – the catchment area of the Drentsche Aa – is at an impasse. This applies in particular to the upper course, the Amerdiep. Several farmers in this area are directly dependent on the land that borders on the Amerdiep for the operation of their farms. In terms of agricultural value, this land is of an inferior quality. Some of these farmers have arranged for management packages but there is also a group for whom this is not feasible due to the nature of the operation of their businesses. Land mobility is stagnating. This limits the possibilities for agriculture, but also for various other activities.

NLTO and Alterra have decided to tackle this problem and together with a group of enthusiastic farmers, they have discovered new possibilities to improve the way in which agriculture and nature are currently being interwoven with one another. A pilot group of eight farmers comprises the self-appointed party designated to execute these plans. The eight participants are:

- Roelof Ebbinge, Grolloo
- Bernard Westebring, Ekehaar
- Rudie Smit, Amen
- Wicherink - Steenblik Partnership, Grolloo
- Harm Hagens, Amen
- Gerard Warringa, Grolloo
- Jan Reinders, Vredenheim
- Bé Warmelts, Amen

The pilot group is of the opinion that a good plan for agricultural nature management will provide a boost to land mobility and thus to the development of agriculture and nature as well as the landscape in the region.

From an analysis conducted among the eight ambitious participants, the following four directions for development have emerged:

W = World-market oriented

- increase in agricultural production
- improvement in the production conditions
- find this at the borders of or outside of the area
- respect for nature and landscape

E = Extensive farming, landscape-oriented

- aim for a sustainable family farm
- low costs – high yields per liter of milk
- integration of income from nature and landscape
- likelihood of additional income from opening of agriculture and care

N = Nature-oriented

- reduction in the primary agricultural production
- set a course for a new offering
- ‘nature agriculture’ is the carrier for what is offered to the community
- compensation for green and blue services form a structural pillar supporting income

R = (Agro)recreational

- mixture of the above
- appears to be nature-oriented but is actually aimed more at earning income from tourism

All of these development directions are represented within the group. This creates ideal opportunities for varied development of the area. In this brochure, you will find a brief summary of what these opportunities can mean for you, a short explanation of the vision of each of the eight participants in the project, and you will also read more about the follow-up steps necessary to a successful completion of the plans. Investments are essential to stimulate the land mobility of the region. With this brochure, we hope to arouse your interest in the ambitions which exist for the area. On the basis of this, we would like to exchange ideas with you on any interest you have in this regard. In other words, “What is in it for you and what kind of contribution can we expect from you on the basis of this?” We hope that this brochure is a good point of departure to help make Farmers for Nature in the Amerdiep a success.

Gert-Jan Stoeten
LTO Noord Projecten

Albert Corporaal
Alterra





Owner: Roelof Ebbinge (44)
 Type of farm: Dairy farm
 Head of cattle: 80 dairy cows and 70 head of young stock
 Quota: 600,000 liters
 Surface area: 68 ha

Owner: Bernard Westebring (37)
 Type of farm: Dairy farm
 Head of cattle: 135 dairy cows and 90 head of young stock
 Quota: 1,040,000 liters
 Surface area: 85 ha

“I want to be a farmer who’s involved in the heart of the community”

“The Farmer in Nature Amerdiep project offers new opportunities for everyone, for example in the field of parcel exchange and acquisition, nature management, company progress, etc. It is just what we need. Thanks to this project, we will also have the opportunity to take control of the future of our companies and our environment. This is a good thing since this also allows us to keep our say in the matter. And last but not least: a farmer might just be a better nature manager than anyone else. After all, as a farmer, you treat your land very differently: you are always working on it and are very close to it. This involvement does not stop at 5 pm. This allows us to be able to respond immediately to current problems or spontaneous opportunities.

Rehabilitation

My farm is truly in the upper course area. There is a strong seepage pressure here where the capillaries of the stream originate. You can also see this in the peat

bogs located here, which I would like to rehabilitate. I am able to keep a high water level during the summers as well. In terms of business, farming in an extensive manner appeals to me. The farm cycle here can essentially become closed, meaning an equal input and output of minerals. You really need to have ample land. As a farmer, you will then have fantastic opportunities to integrate nature and landscape. Although I enjoy this work, I do of course have to be paid for the hours I put into it.

I am currently already experimenting with the transition of our farm. The first crossings with the Montbéliarde breed are already present among the young stock. An integrated farm at this location offers me the best chance at a reasonable income as a family farm. Not lastly because you can also offer interesting possibilities for vacationers. Care is also a task that fits in well here. I want to be a farmer who’s involved in the heart of the community.”

“Guarantees are necessary”

“We are located in a unique area of national importance where very little effort is being exerted. Our home plot of 58 ha with its various wooded banks and thickets borders on the Drentsche Aa; on the other side is a nature reserve. It is beautiful, but at the same time represents a handicap for a farm. I am trying to reshape this threat into an opportunity. I am active in agricultural nature management and would like to participate in the project, but also rely on cooperation in other areas. This will allow me to continue to run my business properly. As participants, we are all facing in the same direction at any rate. Luckily, because alone we would not be as strong, but as a group, we’ll get there.

Guarantees

My reason for participating in this project is simple. Within my business, I am happy to oblige nature and landscape, however dairy farming is for me top priority. It is very important to me that the production conditions on the land close to home are as optimal as possible. Nature and water objectives may be developed further from home. For me, the sale of approximately 6 ha along the Amerdiep is a good option. When a guarantee exists for long-term management compensation, participation through management is also conceivable. In order to do this, we must break through the impasse in the land market in the Amerdiep region. Just like the Dutch Forestry Commission, we should also be given long-term guarantees for the establishment of nature.”



Owner: Rudie Smit (45)
 Type of farm: Dairy farm with adjoining recreational facility
 Head of cattle: 60 head large and small
 Surface area: 60 ha

Owners: Wicherink - Steenblik Partnership
 Type of farm: Dairy farm
 Head of cattle: 70 dairy cows with corresponding young stock
 Quota: 600,000 liters
 Surface area: 42.5 ha



“Together we can all keep it lively here”

“It is difficult to maintain a normal farmer’s existence in this region. For this reason, we started a mini-camping here four years ago which grows a bit more each year. We currently offer a great deal more, also for recreation on an excursion basis. Examples include farmers golf, covered wagon trips, horsetrams. Our farm fits perfectly in the ‘new’ region as intended by the project in which we are participating. We offer visitors value for their money. And the income we earn from tourism and recreation will become very important. For all of us.

Making a change

We think that we can offer a unique service to visitors to this area in acting as an information centre because we can also accompany them on visits to the area.

The horse and tractor trams are at the ready for this very purpose. At present, we are the last dairy farm left in Amen. In order to communicate the agricultural story well, we continue to milk cows, even though the herd is getting smaller. As a result, we have the room to sell our land to the Amerdiep. We would like to plant more landscaping on the home plot in combination with the laying of footpaths. In addition, we would like to create a large, natural watering hole for the cattle which will further add to the variation in the landscape.

We have made the switch here and see the opportunities instead of the threats. We have to make this area even more beautiful. Tourists, town residents but also groups of disabled persons for example also love it here. Together we can all keep it lively here.”

10 participant

“Development does not stand still”

“Our partnership covers a large section of the Amerdiep; we have farmed really well over the last few years. If we are able to continue along this way, we are game. We also see however that our piece of land offers a nice added value to the project Farmers for Nature Amerdiep. A great project with excellent prospects for the future! In order to help Farmers for Nature Amerdiep succeed, we will lend our cooperation provided we get good land back in return. This way we will be able to continue to realise our goals, and our land will be made available for other purposes. A win-win situation.

We came here from the Achterhoek (area in the eastern part of Holland) a little more than five years ago. In the city of Hengelo in the province of Gelderland, we had 22 ha of land spread out among 3 plots, 12 ha of which was around the farm. We were closed in there, surrounded by roads. In 1999 we acquired

more room here with 42 ha of good land around the property. We built a new cowshed ourselves as well as a second farm residence, which will keep us going. Let’s be honest here, you don’t jump for joy when the Amerdiep becomes featured more and more for water storage and nature. At least half of our home plot borders directly on the stream. Development does not stand still, however.

Milking

We want to milk. As a farmer, it is not wise to participate in developments that occur at the expense of your own farm. However, perhaps we can turn threats into opportunities. If this project offers us good land at another location or more development space, then we will give this some serious consideration. We will then have to find a solution for the buildings here. The location is very suitable for a managed farm...”

participant 11



Owner: Harm Hagens (37)
 Type of farm: Beef stock farm
 Head of cattle: Nurse cows, approx. 60 calving animals, 50 young animals and 120 pink meat calves
 Surface area: Approx. 110 ha

Owner: Gerard Warringa (39)
 Type of farm: Dairy farm
 Head of cattle: 45 dairy cows
 Quota: 380,000 liters
 Surface area: 40 ha

“If it doesn’t suit you, you shouldn’t do it. It suits me”

“Act together as a united front to get what we want”

“The Amerdiep is a dead area into which we are breathing new life. The Farmers for Nature project therefore kills two birds with one stone. On the one hand, we are serving nature: we are keeping a beautiful piece of landscape intact. On the other hand, it is possible to continue farming in different ways, whether you are looking to intensify your activities or farm more extensively. If possible, I would prefer the latter with a larger number of nurse cows. However, everything depends on the right financial support: if you have that, the project will succeed. Of that I am convinced.

Certainty

If I were to consider financial aspects alone, I would have to sell my Blonde d’Aquitaine cows straight away and concentrate solely on making and selling ice cream.

But then again, I could spend the whole day in the field...
 If you want to be a serious partner in nature management, then you have to approach it on a large scale. I gained experience with the management of land from the Forestry Service. This is not something for every farmer, and if it’s not for you, you shouldn’t do it. It suits me. I hope that I can occupy a place in the group as a farmer with a lot of nature land and a beautiful herd of Blondes. Some 100 ha comes quickly to mind, but this is not that easy of course. Management costs money, but we can also invest ourselves. If we want a high return on invested capital, we should perhaps turn to the stock market. I think that we would be satisfied with a lower return in exchange for getting certainty regarding the area in which we grew up!”

“As a group, we can and truly want to make something of this area. Presently the whole situation is unstructured. The way I see it now, it can still go two ways: the project could go on or it could be cancelled. What I mean is it all has to be possible financially of course. Regardless, we will have to continue as a group and act together as a united front in order to get what we want. Approach the area together and really make something of it that also serves a national interest. Examples of this include tourism, nature, welfare of the animals and education by involving visitors in agriculture.

Limits

At this moment, I am farming in the middle of the town of Grolloo. A typical Drents situation but an untenable one in the long run if I hope to continue

and even farm more extensively. In terms of labour, this requires too much and the legislation has also set limits. I would like to build a new farm outside of town, surrounded by sufficient land. At this time, there is insufficient dynamism in the land market; nothing is happening at all. We are farming backwards instead of forwards. It would be an enormous help to me if this project ensures that a realistic offer would be made for my plots of land along the Amerdiep. There is enough other land for sale.
 If I can build something new close to the stream valley, then I would obviously build something that fits within the landscape. I am also convinced that the buildings that we leave behind in Grolloo could be used for a proper, new purpose; residences for senior citizens, for example. This way you will be able to kill two birds with one stone.”



Owner: Jan Reinders (44)
 Type of farm: Dairy farm
 Head of cattle: 50 dairy cows
 Quota: 460,000 liters
 Surface area: 45 ha

Owner: Bé Warmelts (42)
 Type of farm: Arable farming and permanent forest
 Product: Seed material and forest
 Surface area: 45 and 56 ha, respectively



“We will all have to put our backs into it”

“A great deal of land has been offered in the Amerdiep for years and years: the supply has overrun the demand. This has caused us to reflect and determine whether or not we can do something else with the area, together. And this is the opportunity that Farmers for Nature in the Amerdiep offers us: on the one hand farms can focus more on nature management and farm in a more extensive manner via this project, on the other hand, intensification is possible. By helping each other and working together, we secure our future. It is an exciting project in which we are now involved, but we will all have to put our backs into it. The will is there....and where there's a will, there's a way, right?”

Weighing the pros and cons

If I look at the global market, I consider myself a small farmer. I have to seriously wonder if I should take the road of one-sided expansion here in the Drentsche-Aa region. Can you win this battle in the

Amerdiep? Does farming in a more extensive way offer opportunities for a low-input farm with a better bank balance, for example one with frugal Montbéliardes? Can I support my income with green services for a longer period? For me, it's something I have to give some thought to. Expansion of my home plot is necessary regardless what happens. Lugging feed and livestock around is hardly done anymore these days. At present I have around 25 hectares of land near the home plot and approximately 20 hectares of remote fields, directly on the Amerdiep. A management compensation for 6 years does not offer me and the others development opportunities, agreements are necessary for a period of 30 years. If I can get a decent price, I would like to sell the remote fields and this way make room for nature. There is interest within the group for this. We need this project in order to get everyone into a situation which allows them to be active doing what gives them the most pleasure. Once my company structure is where it needs to be, I might even have the option to shift in the direction of organic agriculture. But.....that is really a bridge too far for me right now.”

“If you know what you can expect, you can invest in quality”

“The land around the Drentsche Aa is characterised by limitations; think, for example, about optimal water management and capacity. This makes contemporary agriculture – in which low costs and high productivity are central themes – impossible here. Nature management could be a good alternative here. As a farmer, thanks to the Farmers for Nature Amerdiep project I have been given the opportunity to participate in this. The project has an enormous appeal for me. This would allow me the chance to farm in a new way. It's incredible to think that we will soon be able to manage this beautiful nature reserve with a herd of cows and to proudly be able to present them to tourists and visitors.

Motivated

My company is no stranger to the concept of nature management. During the spring of 2004, a plot of 56 ha of agricultural land was transformed into a nature

reserve by planting it with permanent forest. Thanks to the instrument of parcel exchange, we reached an agreement with 9 landowners through purchase or exchange. Reinforcement of the agricultural structure and the realisation of a nature project is our share, something we may all be proud of. In future, arable farming on our marginal land will become very difficult. In my opinion, our area along the Drentsche Aa lends itself better to a more extensive form of agriculture with blue and green services. The project encompasses the image that I have of agriculture in our area for the future. I am prepared to invest in a farm with nurse cows in which the agriculture is at the disposal of nature, landscape and water. However I am a businessman, and I require security for a long period of time for all of my major investments. These guarantees are not available at this time, but this project can make a contribution to this. If you know what you can expect, you can invest in quality.”

Farmers for Nature in the Amerdiep

On the previous pages, you have seen the names of the businesses involved and have read about their collective ambitions, for the present and the future. These people have contributed to giving shape to the area in which they live and work. They all have diverse ideas and plans. In order to evaluate the feasibility of these plans, Alterra and LTO Noord Projects have performed content-related and farm economic analyses for each farm. The autonomous development and the new development direction for each farm have all been lined up side by side. The collective analyses form the pieces of the puzzle for the new development of the stream valley of the Amerdiep.

Social needs

What does the community want? This varies. These wishes can range from water management in the upper course of the stream (better retention), to the assurance of clean (drinking) water, to more variety in the plants and animals in the stream valley, a varying landscape, accessible agriculture which provides interesting activities in which residents can participate, to farmers who ensure high quality in nature, water and the landscape and which must, above all, also be sustainable.

Farmers' needs

What do the farmers in the area want? This also involves many things. They want to maintain the prospects in their own region (the region in which most of them grew up), keep the cows in the pasture, keep the primary agriculture outside of the stream valley and the landscape farmers on the edges of the stream valley, keep nature-related agriculture and nature-oriented companies along the banks of the stream through grazing of nurse cows and the management of



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meadow lands, earn a good living through the reinforcement of the agricultural structure and expansion of the sources of income. In addition they cite the following: water management which provides the farms with opportunities provided they are offered a realistic compensation in return, finding business forms which may be passed on to the next generation and, with a view to the sustainability from one generation to the next, they would like to see guarantees given for compensation for green and blue services for a minimum of 30 years.

Offer

The businesses are not just making demands; they also have something to offer. They are all prepared to make substantial investments in their own farms so that they are able to achieve the functions desired by society for a period of at least thirty years. Through parcel exchange and farm relocation, each farm will find an appropriate location. Production agriculture is making room for nature agriculture in the stream valley with extensive grazing by nurse cows and permanent meadowland management is being applied to at least 25% of the riparian wetlands in order to ensure that ecologically valuable vegetation is able to develop properly. Extensive organic agriculture ensures better water quality in the Amerdiep and results in an improvement in the quality of the drinking water downstream in the Drentsche-Aa region. The Amerdiep will meander once again and its water level will rise again, more water will be retained and a more natural run-off will be allowed to take place. The farmers themselves are developing a varied landscape in which at least 10% of the surface will consist of wooded banks, canals, pools and flowery grasslands on the stream valley banks.



continued on page 19

Financial framework

Costs of the activities

In determining the finances, the following components play a role:

- Extensive management of grasslands
- The management of existing and new landscape elements
- Water management
- Incidental investments

Extensive management of grasslands

A number of participants are prepared to make room for nature development in the stream valley and on the edges. Other participants are prepared to buy the ground which is becoming available for a reasonable price, which is currently 17,000 per hectare. This creates the possibility for parcel exchange whereby the ecologically valuable areas would become available; in these areas, agricultural return is not possible although costs are incurred. In compensation for the investment made by the participants, the business risk, and the land-related and management costs, an annual compensation of 1300 per hectare is necessary. This involves a minimum of 250 hectares which the farmers of the Amerdiep area are focusing on in the project.

The management of the existing and new landscape elements

At the edges of the stream valley, the goal is to physically plan and maintain 10% of the land's landscape elements and flowery grasslands. This land will be withdrawn from agriculture; compensation is required for this. Compensation is also required for the physical planning and management. Fifty to seventy-five hectares are involved for which an association is being sought under the Nature Management of the Management Programme subsidy scheme.

Water management

As a result of the chosen catchment area approach, unique opportunities have been created to adapt water management to the existing need, for example improvements to the (drinking) water quality. The nature-oriented zone around the stream offers space for a natural management of the water level and run-off pattern. The group has entered into discussions with the Hunze and Aa's district water board and the water supply companies about potential financial savings, for example lower costs for the management of water courses and lower costs for purification (no use of artificial fertilizer and plant protection products in the vicinity of surface water). Appropriate compensation for the additional storage capacity is also being discussed

Incidental investments

In addition to the annual costs, there are also one-time investments necessary in order to realise this plan. Specifically, this involves the relocation of one of the dairy farms. In addition, it is necessary to build a new deep litter house at one location for the organic beef livestock farm. It might be possible to make the buildings which become available as a result of the farm relocation suitable for this purpose. Coverage is being sought for these investments within the ILG (Investment Budget for Rural Areas) in combination with private investments. The necessary investments in accessibility and facilities for hikers, cyclists and horseback riders are part of this plan and will be further elaborated upon in consultation.