

# FEANGREIDE MEET-UP

Veenweide Atelier, Arcadia

*Wednesday 24 January 2024 - De Laape, Warten*

The Laape is located along the main waterway of the Wartenster Wiid, just outside Leeuwarden. This was once a dairy farm, later a sheep and poultry farm. The buildings are now used as an event and meeting venue. A number of historical elements, such as the original barn windows and green concrete floors, have been preserved.

The Frisian Veenweidegebied (peat meadow area) is in transition. And that's exactly what today is about: during the first Feangreide Meet-up 2024 of the Arcadia triennial the completion of year 1 of Veenweide Atelier is being presented; A lab for eco-social design, where designers, nature and other stakeholders collectively create innovative solutions for the most important transition issues.

## **“Something for the next step”**

“After Leeuwarden-Fryslân 2018, we still had lots of unfulfilled ambitions,” business manager Immie Jonkman explains in her opening words. “We want to continue to make the world more beautiful, and we want to do that together with you. We use art and culture to look at the world from a different perspective.”



Warm welcome by Immie Jonkman, director-manager at Arcadia

The collective character of the project – a collaborative of various designers, residents, entrepreneurs, farmers, nature and other stakeholders – ensures that ideas and plans can count on a lot of support. “In addition, it fits perfectly within the Frisian concept of mienskip, community. Collaboration and continuous consultation are in our DNA,” artistic director of the Veenweide Atelier and designer Henriette Waal emphasises.



Aldert de Boer, a sixth-generation farmer in Aldeboarn De Deelen, and moderator Kees Foekema

The meet-up starts with a tour of the room by moderator Kees Foekema (program maker at De Balie in Amsterdam). A father and son, who run a farm together, hope they are not the only ones who are concerned about the future of their business. “We hope to find something here, an idea, that helps us make the next step.” An alderman from Opsterland wants to gain inspiration about how governments can help farmers. According to him, it is now time to deliver. Politicians has to stop dragging their feet and put their money where their mouth is. The representative of Wetterskip Fryslân, sitting next to him, hopes to hear new some new ideas. “Too often we are being lectured from up high by the politicians in The Hague. What we need are plans that make the people here happy.” Landscape historian Jeroen Wiersma hopes that the rich history of the area will also have a place in the future: “We don't have to turn back time, but we could learn quite a few lessons from the past.”

## Designers Lenora Ditzler and Janna Bystrykh want to cultivate a deep understanding of nature.

The first pitch is by Lenora Ditzler (agricultural systems scientist at Wageningen University) and Janna Bystrykh (architect, researcher and head of the Architecture Master at the Academy of Architecture in Amsterdam), who work together on this project. Last year, they talked to three farmers who farm on 'old grass'. More grass species can be found on these grasslands, attracting more animals and birds. This has given them a deeper understanding of what we call nature.

"Where I used to see the same green fields whizzing by in the train window, I was now able to look at it with more attention and notice the differences between the various types of grass," says Lenora. Lenora and Janna's project aims to teach others to read the landscape and to develop a new collective story about grasslands. How we deal with something largely depends on what value we put on it.

Janna and Lenora's pitch is followed by a panel discussion, with Janna, Lenora and ecologist Eddy Wymenga. According to Eddy, we should value the knowledge of our farmers as a form of indigenous wisdom. They know the landscape, not only based on theory, but also through their many years of being physically connected with it.

Janna and Lenora's pitch is followed by a panel discussion, with Janna, Lenora and ecologist Eddy Wymenga. According to Eddy, we should value the knowledge of our farmers as a form of indigenous wisdom. They know the landscape, not only based on theory, but also through their many years of being physically connected with it.

"This indigenous wisdom about the landscape can be combined with new forms of agriculture, such as paludiculture." Janna nods.

During their field visits, they noticed how the farmers would take a walk across their land every morning to look at the condition of the fields and soil. You really have to get up close to be able to see what the land needs that day, and what it can give you back in return. Because of their close observation of the land, the farmers also know that it takes time to change that land. This will not happen overnight simply because a policy target has to be achieved. According to the three panellists, it would be best if the landscape not only became more diverse, like it was in the past, but if it would also be cultivated in more diverse ways, depending on what gives the best result for a specific location or specific time of year.



Panel discussion with Janna Bystrykh, Lenora Ditzler, Eddy Wymenga and moderator Kees Foekema

### An economic boost

This elicits a reaction from a farmer in the audience. He farms on perennial ryegrass, which means his grassland is not diverse. However, this type of grass does produce the highest milk yield. "If I want my cows to produce the same amount of milk on old grass, I would have to supplement their feed with turnips. I would then have to either buy those or grow them myself." Eddy and Lenora understand his concerns. "Earning a living is also important," Eddy agrees. The representative of the Wetterskip also agrees: "We need an economic boost." And according to the designers, that is exactly the question that needs to be answered: How do we change what we as a society value (in monetary terms), to

also cause a change in our social conditions, so that farmers can continue farming? If it could be done differently, he would be the first to sign up to it, the farmer confirms.

After a short break, designer Tjeerd Veenhoven starts his pitch. He has brought along a number of objects that are the result of his design process, including a block of compressed cattail fibres, bonded together with mushroom mycelium. Together with farmers and construction company Dijkstra Draisma, he is working on designs for (temporary) bio-based building materials using the residual flows from agriculture or wet crops. Farmers can either grow these fibres or use their own machines to press or dry the building panels. Farmer Aen Age Jongbloed, who contributed to Tjeerd's process, is also in the audience and joins us later for the panel discussion.



Tjeerd Veenhoven shows his latest material experiment, cattail bonded using oyster mushroom

## Peat as a superhero

First, Eva Pfannes makes her pitch on behalf of OOZE Architects, who have been busy imagining a new, sustainable revenue model for the Veenweidegebied. She starts her story by calling the peat 'a superhero'.

Although peat meadows cover only 3% of our Earth's surface, they store twice as much CO<sub>2</sub> as woodland, which covers 33% of the Earth's surface. But how can we make better use of this (super)power? Eva sees three ways that can also serve as a future revenue model: preventing carbon from evaporating from the peat, actively storing the carbon by, for example, wet cultivation (paludiculture), and reassessing the value and beauty of the peat meadows, for example through tourism. According to her, farmers are indispensable in this process: they are the only ones who have both the knowledge of the land and the decisiveness and energy to change that same land with their own hands. During the project period, OOZE explored the most promising prospects for activity in the Veenweidegebied. "As Tjeerd said, wet cultivation of cattails, for example, looks very promising. But we also look at what tourism and recreation have to offer. And especially at how all these future initiatives can work together and join up to form new chains."

## The risk must be borne by the community as a whole

The panel discussion with Eva and farmer Aen Age also includes Tjeerd and innovator Coen Verboom, from construction company Dijkstra Draisma. Aen Age also sees the need to turn this crisis area into a promising area again, but also recognises that this will mean a heavy burden for the farmers. "A new revenue model can also result in risk and loss. It's not some simple experiment."

The panellists agree that the entire community should bear this risk. Coen says that he has already had an exploratory meeting with Rabobank (the bank used by a large number of farmers) to see if they want to invest

in bio-based building materials. Their response was somewhat hesitant. “We shouldn’t just sit back and wait until that one party signs up,” he feels. “We have to keep pushing on all fronts, to ensure the transition keeps its momentum.” An audience member asks why he is not talking to the European investment bank. This inspires Coen. “I didn’t know that was possible!”

### **In conclusion: Move away from monoculture, and be more daring**

What issues and projects can the Veenweide Atelier focus on in the near future and what can the designers’ collaborations lead to? According to Eva, we need positive examples to get people to start imagining a positive future. “When the media come to an innovative project, the first question they ask is: How can this be scaled up?” Designers can also help people develop a realistic picture of the future. Embracing wet cultivation does not mean that all arable land in the entire province will immediately be filled up with cattails, but we should explore what it means, and what such a landscape will look like.

For example, reed is now being imported from China, at a cost of 12 million euros per year, while it also grows well here. “We have to move away from monoculture, and be more daring,” says Aen Age. Tjeerd is pragmatic. “As far as I’m concerned, the time for talking is behind us. We have the technologies, and it is important to start producing.”

According to Henriette, there is a good foundation. There is an invitation on the table for collaboration with the Province, the Water

photography: Robert Veenstra  
Author report: Anna Lillioja

Board, farmers and industry. It is important to work on the basis of long-term cooperation with residents, to arrive at new ideas, to break new ground. The next step is to design pilot projects at a number of locations in the area, and hopefully also to create a physical place for the studio itself, so that designers can stay and work in the heart of the area.



Panel discussion with Eva Pfannes, Coen Verboom, Aen Age Jongbloed, Tjeerd Veenhoven and moderator Kees Foekema



# FEANGREIDE MEET-UP

Veenweide Atelier, Arcadia