

Designs for System Innovation

Stepping stones towards sustainable livestock husbandry

More and more livestock farmers and other interested parties have been cooperating towards sustainable livestock husbandry. Since 2001, the “Designs for System Innovation” programme of the Animal Sciences Group of Wageningen UR has been working together with livestock farmers, the business world and policymakers to design concepts for sustainable livestock husbandry. Their aim is to serve as stepping stones: once implemented, they will significantly contribute to sustainable husbandry.

Livestock husbandry is an intricate system where animal, soil, crop, capital, energy and nutrients are interconnected in many ways. Pulling one string might have consequences elsewhere - in unexpected places. Combining the demands of the animal and the farmer with the demands of consumers and the environment can only be successful if we have the courage to drop our standard ways of thinking and acting.

Experiments in practice

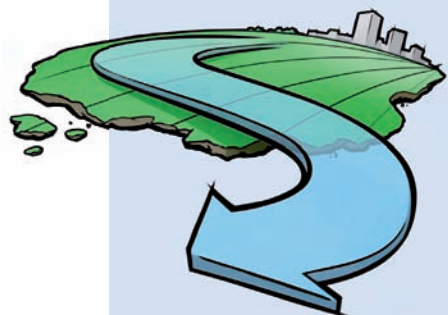
The Designs for System Innovation programme demonstrates that the interests of the animal, the environment, the consumer and entrepreneur can be congruent in the end, if we have the courage to make a sustainability leap. Experiments in practice are important to demonstrate if and how economic requirements can go hand in hand with the environment and animal welfare. They also reveal practical issues that need to be solved. The first design concepts of the Comfort Class (for fattening pigs) and Houden van Hennen (for laying hens) projects have been implemented, giving an impetus to the animal production sector.

Invitation

The concepts of sustainable livestock husbandry are not blueprints but stepping stones. Parties can adapt the concepts to their own situation and so make the leap towards sustainability. The concepts are long-term visions offering effective tools for immediate action. In this way we can realise the ambition of the Dutch Minister of Agriculture: a 100% sustainable livestock husbandry by 2023.

More information

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Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit

Comfort Class

To produce as much pork as possible at the lowest possible costs – that is what Dutch pig farmers are good at. Unfortunately, this has also caused problems, such as in the field of animal welfare. The Comfort Class approach has been designed by Wageningen UR and the Dierenbescherming (Society for the Protection of Animals) and takes the demands of the animals as a starting point. Since 2006, the Dutch agricultural organisation (LTO) and the Dierenbescherming have been running an experimental pig farm in Raalte (the Netherlands) where monitoring and further development takes place. Comfort Class principles have also been adopted by several pig farmers.

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Keeping & Loving Hens (Houden van Hennen)

The Houden van Hennen project breaks with popular beliefs, such as the idea that more space per chicken will cost a lot of money by definition. In 2004 the project produced two new concepts that combine the needs of animal, farmer and citizen/consumer. The concepts have been accepted, adapted and further improved with practical knowledge and the experience of farmers and system builders. The Plantation concept has been realised by Chris and Marianne Borren in Voorthuizen (the Netherlands) on their Lankerenhof farm. The Rondeel BV consortium is working on the further development of the Rondeel concept.

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Cow Power (Kracht van Koeien)

Animal welfare, animal health, the environment and economics in dairy husbandry are much more compatible than we often think. Allowing cows much more space and freedom to move can be combined with a 50 to 75% emission reduction of ammonia, nitrate and greenhouse gases without raising the production costs. This does require a different way of thinking and acting: give the cow room to move, consider minerals as resources instead of waste, share capital, labour and functions, and consider the soil as a productive ecosystem. The four concepts, which the Kracht van Koeien project presented in March 2009, demonstrate how this can be realised.

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Pork Opportunities (Varkansen)

Comfort Class has shown the pig farming industry that good animal welfare can certainly be guaranteed in an industry that is driven by economic motives. The Varkansen project has an even broader scope; sustainable pig farming must also be good for the citizen and the environment. By the end of 2009 Varkansen will present design concepts to stimulate sustainable development in pig farming.

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