**NUTRITION AND HEALTH**

**Body has weapon against saturated fat**

The consumption of saturated fat can set off severe inflammatory responses in the body, which seeks to defend itself by producing the protein Angptplike protein 4 (Angptl4). This finding was published by Wageningen food scientists in the journal Cell Metabolism in December. Sander Kersten, associate professor of Nutrition, Metabolism and Genomics at Wageningen University, part of Wageningen UR, ‘How exactly the saturated fat in our bodies works is still quite a mystery. This research, which took three and a half years, makes an important contribution to our knowledge.’ Kersten and colleagues demonstrated in mice that the protein Angptl4 prevents saturated fat absorbed in the abdomen from setting off a severe inflammatory response there.

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**EUROPEAN GRANT**

**Cash for cutting-edge research**

Two Wageningen researchers received about 2.5 millions euros each from the European Research Council (ERC) in the form of Advanced Grants for senior researchers leading innovative and ground-breaking research.

Martien Cohen Stuart, professor of Aquatic Ecology and Water Quality Management at Wageningen University, part of Wageningen UR, received the grant for his research on ‘tipping points’. This research generates insight into signals which announce a sudden transformation in a system, for example in the climate or migrane attacks. Scheffer received the Spinoza prize for this work in 2009. Martien Cohen Stuart, professor at the Laboratory for Physical Chemistry and Colloid Science at Wageningen University received an Advanced grant for his research on a new type of macromolecule: biosynthetic polymers produced by natural methods.

In total, 256 top European researchers received the ERC grant in 2010. Two of the grants went to Wageningen researchers in 2009 as well.

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**VEGETABLE PRODUCTION**

**Picking robot for peppers**

Applied Plant Research (PPR) at Wageningen UR is all set to develop a robot for harvesting bell peppers. The European Union has allocated eight million euros to the CROPS project, involving research institutes and companies from 10 countries. Wageningen UR is coordinating the project, which focuses on the development of new techniques for sensors, robot arms, grippers and intelligence.

Project leader Jan Bonsema: ‘We are going to generate fundamental knowledge in the form of practical applications. In the Netherlands we will be working closely with Jentjes Machine engineering on the development of the machine. Abroad, the various different partners will be working on an apple-picking robot, a machine for picking grapes selectively for first-class wine and precision instruments for spraying apple orchards.’ The grant for the project comes from the EU’s seventh Framework Programme (FP7).

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**ENVIRONMENT**

**Green neighbourhoods work**

Green space in residential neighbourhoods has a positive effect on social cohesion. That may sound obvious, but the effect has now been proven by research at Alterra, part of Wageningen UR. In particular, small-scale green areas such as public gardens and allotments promote social contact between residents. The more urban the neighbourhood, the bigger the positive impact of the green space. These results provide policymakers with insight into the contribution made by such outdoor facilities to a pleasant, safe and clean neighbourhood.

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