

# The meaning of closing a dairy farm in the Netherlands

An exploration of considerations, dilemmas and the need for guidance in this process

Report:	MSc Thesis
Author:	Maureen Booijink
Student number:	930311099120
Programme:	Master Applied Communication Science
Course:	CPT-81333
Chair group:	Strategic Communication
Supervisor:	Dr. Margit van Wessel
Co-supervisor:	Dr. Evelien de Olde
Date:	18 May 2018
University:	 WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH



# The meaning of closing a dairy farm in the Netherlands

An exploration of considerations, dilemmas and the need for guidance in this process

Report:	MSc Thesis
Author:	Maureen Booijink
Student number:	930311099120
Programme:	Master Applied Communication Science
Course:	CPT-81333
Chair group:	Strategic Communication
Supervisor:	Dr. Margit van Wessel
Co-supervisor:	Dr. Evelien de Olde
Date:	18 May 2018
University:	Wageningen University & Research



**WAGENINGEN**  
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

## Preface

After completing my Bachelor in Agribusiness at the CAH in Dronten, I felt I was not quite ready for the labor market. I was 21 years, felt myself very young and I missed some specialization in my Bachelor. The decision was made quickly, I wanted to do a Master, but which one? I knew that I would like to work in the agricultural sector and that I have a big interest in human interaction, so I chose the Master Applied Communication Science at Wageningen University and Research. In order to keep the connection with agricultural sector, I did my optional life science courses at the Animal Production Systems group (Master Animal Science) and I tried to keep all my assignments related to agriculture.

Slowly, my interest in the Dutch dairy sector grew and I wanted to learn more about it. However, I wasn't really interested in the technical side of it, but more in the human aspect behind the farm. During my internship at Schuttelaar & Partners, I found an interesting report about the socio-economic consequences of closing a sow farm. This report inspired me to think about a topic for my thesis, which I still had to do in order to complete the Master. Namely, I wanted to conduct a similar research, but then related to the dairy sector.

I had some difficulty in making my topic specific so I planned a conversation with Paulien Hogenkamp (agricultural coach) and Henk Kortering (agricultural psychologist), to seek their advice. They helped me a lot in creating a first vision about the topic of my thesis and I would like to thank them for that. Thanks to the professional guidance of my two supervisors Margit van Wessel and Evelien the Olde, who helped me to structure and to give focus to my research. Without them, I was stuck in a web of all the collected information. Furthermore, I would like to thank my aunt Nicola for checking my English. Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, brother, boyfriend and friends, who supported me a lot during the thesis process.

Maureen Booiijink

Olst, May 2018

## Samenvatting

Hoewel de grootte van de melkveebedrijven in Nederland toeneemt, neemt het aantal melkveehouders af. Dit kan grotendeels verklaard worden doordat veel boeren geen opvolgers meer hebben. Daarbij komt, dat de werkomgeving van de boer drastisch veranderd is. Er zijn meer en meer maatschappelijke discussies over dierproductiesystemen, de melkprijs is volatiel terwijl de productiekosten stijgen en boeren moeten zich continue aanpassen aan veranderende wet- en regelgeving. Het aanpassingsvermogen op externe gebeurtenissen is een essentieel onderdeel om te overleven als boer. De vermindering in het aantal melkveehouders laat zien dat dit aanpassingsvermogen niet zonder limiet is. Echter, het stoppen van een boerderij, is geen makkelijk besluit. Familierelaties, verlies van een levenswijze en (het ervaren van weinig) toekomstperspectief spelen een rol. 15% van de boeren weet niet hoe te stoppen en bevindt zich in een non-acceptatiefase. Deze groep start te laat met praten over problemen, waardoor er weinig mogelijkheden meer zijn om het bedrijf te redden of om tot een goed stoppersplan te komen. Hoewel onderzoek laat zien dat het stoppersproces complex en multidimensionaal is, zijn deze dimensies niet eerder systematisch bestudeerd. Daarnaast is de behoefte aan ondersteuning in dit stoppersproces niet eerder onderzocht vanuit het perspectief van de boer en zijn erfbetreders. Dit onderzoek identificeert deze dimensies door het bestuderen van de redenen waarom boeren stoppen, door te kijken welke afwegingen ze hierbij maken en welke dilemma's ze tegen komen in het stoppersproces. Ten slotte is de behoefte aan begeleiding in het stoppersproces onderzocht vanuit het perspectief van de boer en zijn erfbetreders. Het doel van het onderzoek is kennis verzamelen over de betekenis (afwegingen en dilemma's vormen samen de betekenis van stoppen) van stoppen in de context van veranderingen in de melkveesector en hoe melkveehouders in Nederland ondersteund kunnen worden in dit stoppersproces.

Het uitgangspunt van dit onderzoek is dat betekenis sociaal geconstrueerd is. Het betekent dat mensen betekenis geven door interactie met hun omgeving. Daarnaast is aangenomen dat mensen zelf hun waarheid creëren, dus verschillende boeren kunnen hun stoppersproces op een andere manier ervaren. In dit onderzoek, een reden is de verklaring voor een bepaalde handeling. Dus waarom gaan melkveehouders stoppen met boeren? Een afweging is iets waarover gedacht moet worden als je een beslissing moet maken. Een dilemma geeft een situatie weer, waarbij iemand moet kiezen tussen twee of meer uitkomsten van een probleem. De concepten hangen met elkaar samen.

Semi gestructureerde interviews zijn gebruikt om data te verzamelen. Acht stoppers, acht melkveehouders en vier erfbetreders zijn geïnterviewd. De geïnterviewden waren onbekenden voor de onderzoeker en benaderd door de Facebook groep 'Koeien' en via, via. Er zijn transcripten van de interviews gemaakt en de informatie is geanalyseerd door middel van de 'Gefundeerde Theorie'.

De meest genoemde redenen waarom melkveehouders stoppen zijn: fysieke problemen, de invloed van wet- en regelgeving, financiële redenen of het gebrek aan een opvolger. Vaak is het een combinatie van deze redenen. Het stoppersproces is complex en multidimensionaal. Zo maakt de melkveehouder afwegingen op persoonlijk, sociaal en economisch vlak. Hierbij kunnen verschillende dilemma's ontstaan. Vanwege de complexiteit van het stoppersproces, is er behoefte aan begeleiding in dit proces, volgens de geïnterviewden. Vooral oudere boeren, boeren met weinig scholing en hoog gefinancierde boeren zouden dit het meest nodig hebben. Begeleiding moet gratis of goedkoop zijn, bekend zijn en vrijblijvend zijn. De begeleider moet open, geïnteresseerd, empathisch en objectief zijn. Hij mag geen eigen belang hebben, moet basis kennis hebben van de agrarische sector en snappen hoe de menselijke psyche werkt. Verschillende mensen kunnen deze begeleiding bieden, afhankelijk van de situatie en van de fase van het stoppersproces waarin de melkveehouder zich bevindt. De geïnterviewden hebben inzicht gegeven in verschillende interventies die zouden kunnen werken, en ook bijbehorende uitdagingen hebben ze genoemd. Namelijk, boeren staan vaak niet open voor begeleiding, begeleiding is te laat aangeboden / gezocht, begeleiding is onbekend en niet gefinancierd.

### Summary

Although the size of dairy farms in the Netherlands has been increasing in recent years, the number of dairy farms in the Netherlands has decreased. This event could be explained largely, that many dairy farmers in the Netherlands have no successor. Thereby comes that the farmers' working environment has changed drastically. There is an increase in social discussions about livestock production, the milk prices are volatile while the production costs are increasing and farmers must continuously adapt to changes in legislation. The ability to adapt to external pressures forms an essential part of farming and its continuity, which is limited, as the decline in the number of dairy farms in the Netherlands indicates. However, closing a farm is not an easy decision. Family relations, the loss of a way of life, and (the lack of) future perspective play a role. 15% of farmers in the Netherlands, that are on the crossroad to stop farming, don't know how to stop farming, and finding themselves in a 'non-accepting' phase. This is a problem, because these farmers start with conversations about their problems too late, leading to fewer possibilities to save the farm or to develop a proper closing plan. However, research tells that the closing process is complex and multidimensional, these dimensions have not been studied in a systematic way. Next to this, the need for guidance in this closing process is not explored from a farmers' and property visitors' perspective. This research identifies these dimensions by studying the reasons for closing a farm, the considerations farmers make in the closing process and the dilemmas these farmers face. Finally, the need for guidance in the closing process is explored from the farmers' and property visitors' perspective. The aim of this research is to gain knowledge about the meaning (together, the considerations and dilemmas form the meaning of the closing process) of closing a farm in the context of changes in the dairy sector and to gain knowledge about how dairy farmers in the Netherlands can be supported in this closing process.

The starting point of this research, is that 'meaning' is socially constructed. That means people give 'meaning' through interaction with their environment. Next to this, it's assumed that people create their own truth, so different farmers could experience their closing process in a various ways. In this research, a 'reason' is explains: *"Why someone does something."* That is, why does a farmer stop farming? A 'consideration' is: *"Something that must be thought about when you are planning or deciding something"*. A 'dilemma' represents: *"A situation whereby a person has to make a choice between two or more outcomes of a problem."* These concepts are all interrelated.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Eight former dairy farmers, eight dairy farmers and four property visitors were interviewed. The interviewees were unknown to the researcher and were approached through the Facebook group 'Koeien' and via, via. The interviews were transcribed and analysed by means of the 'Grounded Theory'.

Commonly mentioned reasons for dairy farmers in the Netherlands, to stop farming are: physical issues, the influence of laws and regulations, financial reasons, or the lack of a successor. Often, it's a combination of reasons. The closing process is complex and multidimensional. In different areas (personal, social and economic), farmers make many considerations, and often various dilemmas emerge. Because the closing process, is a complex one, there is a need for guidance in this process, according to the interviewees. Older farmers, poorly educated farmers and farmers with high debts, need guidance the most. Guidance needs to be low costs or free, and without obligation. People need to know that guidance exists. The guide must be open, interested, without personal or conflicting interest, empathic, objective with basic agricultural knowledge and understanding of human psyche. Different people can be this guide, depending on the situation and phase of the closing process in which the farmer is. Different interventions which could help the farmer in the closing process, are explained, and challenges are mentioned. Namely, most farmers are not open to receiving guidance. Secondly, guidance is offered / searched too late. Thirdly, guidance is unknown. Finally, guidance not funded.

## Table of contents

Preface .....	2
Samenvatting .....	3
Summary .....	4
1. Introduction .....	7
2. Theoretical framework .....	12
2.1. Meaning .....	12
2.2. Reasons .....	13
2.3. Considerations .....	13
2.4. Dilemmas .....	14
2.5. Relations between the 4 concepts .....	14
3. Material & methods .....	15
3.1. Qualitative interpretative research .....	15
3.2. Data collection .....	15
3.3. Interviewees .....	16
3.4. Data analysis .....	17
4. Results .....	18
4.1. Reasons to stop farming .....	18
4.1.1. Physical issues .....	18
4.1.2. The influence of laws and regulations .....	19
4.1.3. Financial reasons .....	19
4.1.4. No successor .....	20
4.1.5. Combination of these 4 reasons .....	20
4.2. Considerations and dilemmas .....	21
4.2.1. Personal considerations and dilemmas .....	21
4.2.2. Social considerations and dilemmas .....	27
4.2.3. Future social consideration and dilemma .....	31
4.2.4. Economic considerations and dilemmas .....	34
4.3. Guidance in the closing process .....	38
4.3.1. The importance of communication .....	38
4.3.2. Need for guidance .....	39
4.3.3. Guidance and guide .....	40
4.3.4. Interventions .....	43

4.3.5. Challenges related to guidance .....	46
5. Discussion and conclusion .....	48
5.1. Major findings of the study .....	48
5.2. Comparison of the results with similar researches .....	48
5.3. Reflection on the findings and limitations of the study design .....	49
5.4. Societal relevance of the findings .....	50
5.5. Recommendations for further research .....	50
6. Practical recommendations.....	51
6.1. Farmers must know that the use of guidance is no shame.....	51
6.2. People must know that guidance is available and accessible.....	51
6.3. Different guides in different phases are needed .....	51
6.4. Interventions must be low-threshold .....	52
6.5. Guidance must be funded .....	52
Bibliography .....	53
Appendix 1. Interview guide .....	57
Appendix 2. Personal reflection on the research .....	60

## 1. Introduction

### Farmers stop farming

Although the size of dairy farms in the Netherlands has been increasing in recent years, the actual number of dairy farms in the Netherlands has decreased (Agrimatie, 2017a). In 2000, a dairy farmer in the Netherlands, had 51 cows on average. In 2016, this amount is increased to 97 dairy cows per farm on average (Agrimatie, 2017a). The 100 largest dairy farms in the Netherlands, have almost 500 dairy cows, on average (CBS, 2017). In 2000, the Netherlands had 29,466 dairy farms. In 2016, this was reduced to 17,910 dairy farms (Agrimatie, 2017a). That is a decrease of 39% in the number of dairy farms over 16 years. On average is that a decrease of 2,4% per year. For 2017, the number of dairy farms is expected to decline even more due to the so-called 'Stoppersregeling'. This regulation was developed to limit phosphate production (Klootwijk, Van Middelaar, Berentsen, & De boer, 2016) and is offered as a subsidy to farmers for closing their dairy farms. According to De Snoo (2018) approximately 600 dairy farmers made use of the 'Stoppersregeling' which corresponds with the decline of 3.4% for 2017 (De Snoo, 2018). Figure 1 visualizes the numbers mentioned above.

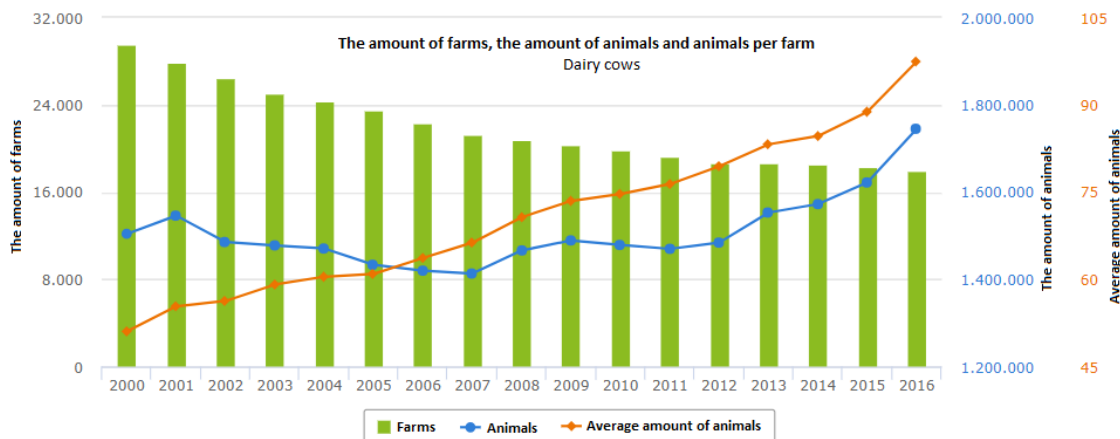


Figure 1: The amount of farms, the amount of animals and animals per farm (Agrimatie, 2017c).

### Why farmers stop farming

It can be concluded that many farmers stopped farming. An important factor for the decline in the number of dairy farms in the Netherlands, is lack of succession. A large number of dairy farmers in the Netherlands stopped farming because they had no successor. In 2016, only 60% of the farmers aged 55 years and older had a successor (CBS, 2017). Notably, small dairy farms with less than 50 dairy cows, had almost no successors (28%) (CBS, 2017). On bigger dairy farms (with 100 dairy cows or more), 85% of older farmers had a successor (CBS, 2017).

According to Geerling-Eiff and Van der Meulen (2008), disappointing financial results or a change in the ecological environment (e.g. reconstruction in an area) could also be a reason to close a farm. Moreover, personal reasons could make a farmer stop farming, these reasons could be positive, but negative as well. That means, does the farmer stop farming on voluntary basis (e.g. because of other ambitions) or is he forced (e.g. because of a divorce) to stop farming (Geerling-Eiff & Van der Meulen, 2008)? Lastly, crisis in the farm (for example a fire), could endanger the continuity of the farm (especially when the farm is insured insufficiently) (Geerling-Eiff & Van der Meulen, 2008). It could occur that a farmer has more than



one reason to stop farming. Slightly different, but closely related is the multicausality theory of Pauwels (2015). This theory tells that more causes lead to a certain effect (Pauwels, 2015). In this research, it is not about causes, but about reasons.

Next to this, the working environment of farmers has changed drastically over the years. A farmer needs to have many skills in order to keep a viable and profitable farm. However, which changes have made it so challenging for dairy farmers in the Netherlands, to continue in the current working environment? Firstly, there is an increase in social discussion about livestock production (e.g. about animal welfare). These discussions have consequences for Dutch dairy farmers, for example when retailers and consumers make choices based on production methods (Berkhout et al., 2018). Secondly, farmers are at the mercy of the volatility of milk prices, as production costs continue to rise (Agrimatie, 2017b). Lastly, dairy farmers in the Netherlands must continuously adapt to changes in legislation (Klootwijk et al., 2016). For example, as a result of the Phosphate Reduction plan from 2017, many farmers had to reduce their number of dairy cows, meaning less milk and less income. Especially, farmers who built new barns by means of a loan in or after 2015, have a challenging time continuing to farm profitably (Groot Wassink, 2017). As a result of the Phosphate Reduction plan, these farmers may not keep extra cows unless they purchase extra Phosphate rights (Groot Wassink, 2017). However, this is an additional investment, which costs money again. (Groot Wassink, 2017).

Until recently, only good craftsmanship to manage and control the farm, was needed for a farmer to be successful in his profession (Bergevoet, 2005). However, because of the social, economic and governmental developments (Bergevoet, 2005), the possession of production skills alone, is no longer sufficient (David, 2001). To keep a farm viable for the future, the farmer running a family farm must have the skills of a craftsman, a manager and an entrepreneur (Olsson, 1988), as showed in figure 2.

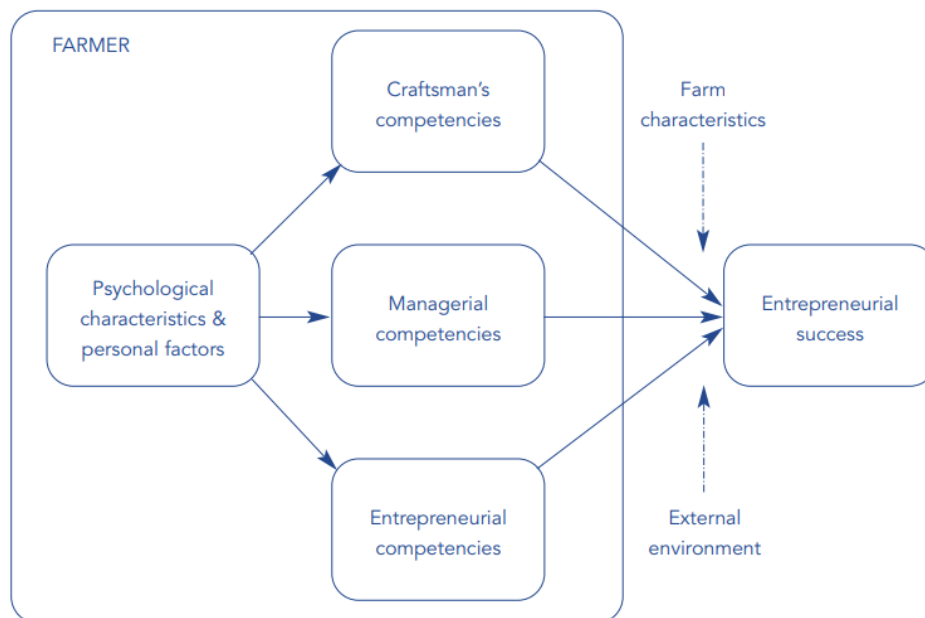


Figure 2: Skills a farmer need to possess nowadays (Bergevoet, 2005)

The ability to adapt to external pressures forms an essential part of farming and its continuity (Darnhofer, Bellon, Dedieu, & Milestad, 2010), which is limited, as the decline in the number of dairy farms in the Netherlands indicates. However, closing a farm is not an easy decision and the process easily takes three

to five years, possibly longer (Gies, Nieuwenhuizen, Naeff, Vleemigh, & Paulissen, 2016). Giving up farming as a livelihood usually means a marked changes in one's way of life and the cultural scripts organising it (Vanclay, Silvasti, & Howden, 2007).

### **Why closing a farm is difficult**

Family farming could be one explanation for this difficulty to stop farming. The family farm is usually passed on from generation to generation (Silvasti, Vesala, & Laitalainen, 2014). Many farmers are conscious at a very young age, that it's tradition to take over the farm (Schnabel, 2001). As a successor of a farm, the farmer takes responsibility for taking good care of the farm and finally transferring it to the next generation (Silvasti et al., 2014). These farmers could feel that they don't have the right to break "the great chain of being" of the farm, because it's for generations in the family (Schnabel, 2001). Closing a farm may therefore be considered as a failure in living up to the expectations of the family (Silvasti et al., 2014). In other research, about the socio-economic consequences of closing a sow farm in the Netherlands, confirmed that these farmers feel guilty to the elderly generation for not continuing their lifework (Zeugenhoudert, 2016). This research gave two other reasons why closing a farm is not an easy decision to make. It tells that sow farmers lose a lot more than their farm (Zeugenhoudert, 2016). For example, their network, their pension, their pride and sometimes even their house (Zeugenhoudert, 2016). Lastly, the expectation of a productive and profitable future without their farms, makes it difficult for farmers to stop farming (Zeugenhoudert, 2016).

### **Many farmers search for help too late**

LEI stated that around 85% of the farmers in the Netherlands, who make the choice to stop farming prematurely, is able to consciously take control over the closing process (Geerling-Eiff & Van der Meulen, 2008). That means, to determine which facilities there are and how to collect the required information to proceed with a closure. (Geerling-Eiff & Van der Meulen, 2008). However, 15% of the farmers in the Netherlands, that are on the crossroad to stop farming, have trouble with this conscience, finding themselves in a 'non-accepting' phase (Geerling-Eiff & Van der Meulen, 2008). Reasons for this include: private problems, the expectation pattern of the environment and self-reflection (Geerling-Eiff & Van der Meulen, 2008). This is a problem, because these farmers start with conversations about their problems too late, leading to fewer possibilities to save the farm or to develop a proper closing plan (Geerling-Eiff & Van der Meulen, 2008). Troubles are often hidden for the farmers' environment and farmers don't ask for help or advice in their social network (family, friends, neighbours) out of shame (Smidt, Nieuwenhuizen, & Gies, 2014). Persons who discover problems in an early stage, are property visitors like advisors or suppliers (Smidt et al., 2014). An existing organisation which offers support to farmers is ZOB (Zorg voor Boer en Tuinder). ZOB supports farmers on voluntary basis, to 250 to 300 farmers annually (Smidt et al., 2014). These volunteers listen to farmers if they face certain problems, give them advice and refer them to specialists (Smidt et al., 2014). A common inhibitory factor in the acceptance process to stop farming is the social environment. Often, the primary blame is placed on the shoulders of the farmer, however this tendency does decrease (Geerling-Eiff & Van der Meulen, 2008).

### **Initial starting point**

This brings us to the initial starting point for conducting this research. Namely in first instance, it was expected that closing a farm would be a taboo for dairy farmers in the Netherlands. So, the first setup for this research, was to test if this expectation was true. A taboo is a prohibition imposed by social custom or as a protective measure (Colding & Folke, 2001). According to Stifel (2011), persons comply with a taboo for two reasons (Stifel, Fafchamps, & Minten, 2007). Firstly, it's a means through which persons show respect for their elders (Brown, 1999). It's possible to draw conclusions regarding the social relations that persons value very high through taboo adhering. Secondly, a taboo is mostly adhered out of fear. Persons think that not adhering a certain taboo could lead to negative consequences (Stifel et al., 2007). The

interviews showed that closing a farm as a taboo is reduced compared with the past. Some interviewees even stated that this taboo has in fact completely disappeared (page 31 and 32). However, these interviewees showed that the closing process is a complex one, which makes it often hard for farmers to go through this process on their own. This led to a shift in focus during the execution of the research. Namely, an in depth exploration of the complexity of the closing process and the need for guidance in it.

### **The added value of this research**

The researches above show why closing a farm is not an easy decision. These studies suggested that the closing process has a multidimensional nature, though, these dimensions have not been studied in a systematic way. This research identifies these dimensions by studying the reasons for closing a farm, the considerations farmers make in the closing process and the dilemmas these farmers face, by means of qualitative research.

Furthermore, research also shows that there is a group of farmers who find themselves in a 'non-accepting' phase when they are on a crossroad to stop farming. However, these farmers start with conversations about their problems too late, leading to fewer possibilities to save the farm or to develop a proper closing plan. Although these farmers will most likely benefit from support in the closing process, research has not explored the need for guidance in the closing process among farmers, from a farmers' and property visitors' perspective. Therefore, this research explores how farmers in the Netherlands can be supported in this closing process.

### **Delineation of the research and role of the 'Stoppersregeling' in this research**

To stay with the interests of the author and to delineate the research, it's chosen to explore the closing process of dairy farmers, rather than the closing process of all types of farmers. Especially, the stories of former dairy farmers in the Netherlands who participated to the 'Stoppersregeling' are explored because these farmers recently stopped farming. This regulation is part of the Phosphate Reduction plan 2017 and was developed to limit the phosphate production (Klootwijk et al., 2016). Due to the abolishment of the Dutch milk quota in 2015, the phosphate production (i.e., excretion via manure) has increased because of the expanding dairy farms (Klootwijk et al., 2016). The excessive phosphate being spread caused a washout of surplus phosphates from the soil. (Schoumans, Willems, & Van Duinhoven, 2008). Resulting in strong growth of phytoplankton (algae), for example. This led to, water plants disappearing due to lack of sunlight and fish dying due to oxygen shortage (Schoumans et al., 2008). The 'Stoppersregeling' as a subsidy for closing a dairy farm had to reduce the amount of dairy farms in the Netherlands, leading a reduction in phosphate production.

### **Aim of the research**

Shortly, the aim of this research is to gain knowledge about the meaning (together, the considerations and dilemmas form the meaning of the closing process) of closing a farm in the context of changes in the dairy sector and to gain knowledge about how dairy farmers in the Netherlands can be supported in this closing process. To conduct this research in a structural manner, several research questions are developed:

#### **Main research question:**

What is the meaning of closing a dairy farm in the Dutch dairy sector?

#### **Partial research questions:**

1. What could be reasons to stop farming?
2. Which personal, social and economic considerations play a role if a dairy farmer wants to close his farm?
3. Which dilemmas emerge out of these considerations?

4. What are the needs and the challenges related to guidance in the closing process?

## 2. Theoretical framework

The research questions contain several concepts like meaning, reasons, considerations and dilemmas. However, what is exactly meant by these concepts, and how are they related to each other? In the subparagraphs below, these concepts and the relationships between these concepts are explained.

### 2.1. Meaning

The term meaning making as it is used in this research is the translation of the term 'sensemaking'. Weick (2005) defines it as: "a way station on the road to a consensually constructed, coordinated system of action" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Oss (2009) explains that 'sensemaking' is not only a cognitive process, but there is a connection between the actions and the cognition of people (Van Oss & Van 't Hek, 2011). People give meaning to events by means of interaction with their environment (Maitlis, 2005). Weick (1995) describes that people can know and adapt their meanings by acting (Weick, 1995). He stated: "how can I know what I think until I see what I say?" By means of acting, we can understand the things we didn't understand and save these new understandings in our memory. For this, interaction with the outside world is needed. Weick (1995) also stated that reality isn't separated from the views and behavior of people, the reality is social constructed (Weick, 1995).

In the meaning giving process, Staveren (2007) differs between on the one hand the world, like the exist out of fixed tacit structures and on the other hand the names, concept and labels which we create to organize, structure and understand the world (Staveren, 2007). Senge (1992) takes in the meaning giving process the individual cognitive movement as a starting point (Senge, 1992). This movement supposes that the individual memory is central and every person act on it in his or her own way. He indicates that people have all kinds of views, assumptions and stories in mind, which form reference frames (Senge, 1992). These reference frames are used by people to look to the world (Staveren, 2007). The result of this way of looking is that every person has a different reality (Homan, 2006). Within the individual cognitive movement, the context where the individual is part of, plays a limited role. In case of the closing process of a dairy farm, every situation could be different, so it's unlikely that context isn't that important. The social-constructional movement fits better, because the social interaction process in a local context of relationships is central. Reality emerges out of relational processes between human beings. By means of a negotiation process in a local context, reality is created. The individual doesn't create reality solely by himself anymore (Homan, 2006). Human relationships are complex, many things happen at the same time (O'connor, 1997). It is not possible to predict what is going to happen because the response of one person influences the response of another person and the other way around. O'connor (1997) stated that the content of the communication and the context of the situation are decisive for the meaning giving process (O'connor, 1997). Furthermore, Burnes (2009) stated that people are more likely to be emotional, rather than economic rational creatures (Burnes, 2009).

The information above shows that meaning giving is partly dependent of the interaction with the outside world, the content of communication and the context of the situation. In this research, especially the interaction between dairy farmers and their environment is considered. Standards, traditions, relationships between farmer and neighborhood, relations between farmer and family, role of the property visitors, social identities and status are included, for example. The information above also shows that the construction of reality differs from person to person. In relation to this research, be aware that every involved person can experience the closing process in a different manner. From these thoughts, it is interesting to explore the meaning giving process of closing a dairy farm in the Netherlands.

## 2.2. Reasons

In this research, reasons are motivating reasons. It's a reason for which someone does something. A reason that, according to the person, counts in favor in a certain way (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2016). When a person acts motivated by a reason, he acts 'in light of that reason' and the reason will be a premise in the practical reasoning, if any, that leads to the action (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2016). Motivating reasons can also explain the actions of a person, therefore these reasons are also called: 'explanatory' reasons (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2016).

In short, motivating reasons are the reasons for which persons act. These are cognitive reasons (Davis, 2005).

According to Davis (2005) motivating reasons can be described as: *A's reason for X is P* (Davis, 2005).

In this research, A refers to the farmer and X refers to closing a farm. Generally, P refers to a description of an objective fact or a perceived objective fact, but not about the persons own mental state (Davis, 2005). In the light of this topic, it means that the farmers' reason to stop farming was the lack of money, for example.

In this research, the event(s) that lead up to a dairy farmer deciding to close his farm, or is thinking about closing his farm, or has closed his farm already, are explored. Different reasons for closing a farm could bring many different stories and perspectives. It is the starting point of closing process, and therefore important to include in this research.

## 2.3. Considerations

According to the Dictionary of Oxford University, a consideration is: *"The act of thinking carefully about something"* and *"Something that must be thought about when you are planning or deciding something"* (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, N.D.). The dictionary gives several examples of considerations to get a better understanding of the term.

*[uncountable, countable] (formal) "The act of thinking carefully about something" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, N.D.).*

For example:

1. Careful consideration should be given to issues of health and safety.
2. The proposals are currently under considerations (= being discussed).
3. After a few moment's consideration, he began to speak
4. A consideration of the legal issues involved

*[countable] "Something that must be thought about when you are planning or deciding something" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, N.D.)*

For example:

1. Economic/commercial/environmental/practical considerations
2. Time is another important consideration

In case of this research, considerations are thoughts of Dairy farmers as and when they plan(ned) to stop farming. As suggested above, these considerations could be economic, environmental or practical. In this research, personal, social and economic considerations of the Dairy farmers are explored, with the focus of understanding the process of closing a farm in mind.

## 2.4. Dilemmas

A dilemma represents a situation whereby a person or a group has to make a choice between two or more outcomes of a problem (Sinnott-Armstrong, 1987). That means, every chosen option can have negative consequences. Related to this research, a dilemma can be of a personal, social or economic influence. For example, a social dilemma is a conflict between what an individual person wants and what he feels he should do to stay accepted by his neighborhood and or family.

## 2.5. Relations between the 4 concepts

Meaning is the overarching concept which consist out of both the considerations and dilemmas. It give's insight in the multidimensional nature of the closing process. The reasons are the starting points for the dairy farmer's mental process to close a dairy farm. From these points, the dairy farmer can start to make several considerations if he (chooses to) close(s) his farm. He asks himself the 'what if..?' question. Out of these considerations, various dilemmas will emerge that create barriers for making the actual decision to stop farming.

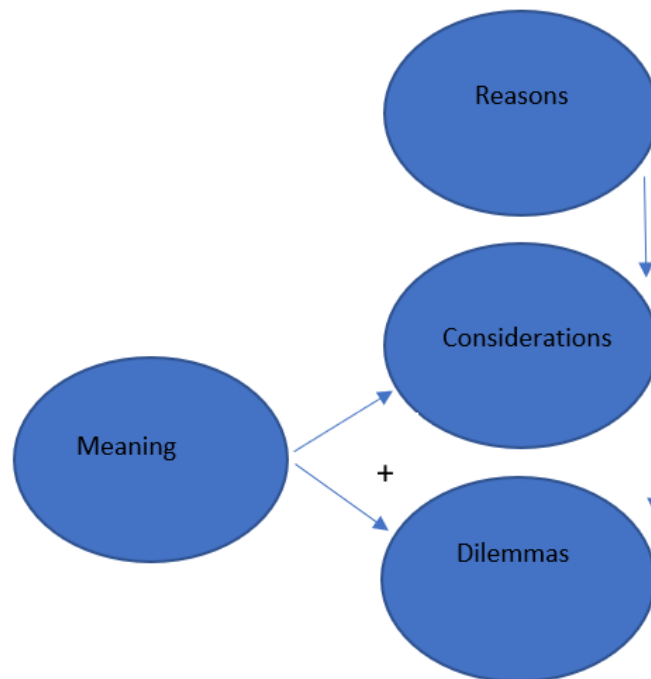


Figure 3: Structure of concepts (Own creation)

### 3. Material & methods

This chapter shows how the research is conducted. The first paragraph explains qualitative interpretative research followed by how the data is collected. Thirdly, some information about the interviewees is given. The chapter closes with an explanation of the data analysis.

#### 3.1. Qualitative interpretative research

In order to answer research questions, a qualitative interpretative approach for the research was chosen. As Green and Thorogood (2004) argue, qualitative research tries to find 'answers to questions about the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of a phenomenon, rather than questions about 'how many' or 'how much' as it is in quantitative research (Green & Thorogood, 2018). Although quantitative research can be also about the 'why', there is a difference. Qualitative research is more focused on understanding why a certain phenomenon happens, while quantitative research is emphasized to declare why a certain event occurs (Van IJendoorn, 1998). Qualitative researchers study the influence of processes in social life. How does a pattern unfold? What meaning is given to a certain event (Everaert & Van Peet, 2006)?

Next to this, an interpretative approach was chosen. Interpretive studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). According to Walsham (1993) interpretive methods of research start from the position that our knowledge of reality, including the domain of human action, is a social construction by human actors and that this applies equally to researchers (Walsham, 1993). Thus there is no objective reality which can be discovered by researchers and replicated by others, in contrast to the assumptions of positivist science (Walsham, 1993).

The interpretative ontology is about internal realism and subjective idealism (Walsham, 1993). Internal realism means that the reality-for-us is an intersubjective construction of shared human cognitive apparatus. The subjective idealism means that each person constructs his or her own reality. This is important because the thoughts about the closing process are reality for the interviewees (Green & Thorogood, 2018; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). The interpretative approach positions the meaning-making practices of human actors at the centre of scientific explanation. According to Bevir & Kedar (2008) interpretative approaches see human actions as meaningful and historically contingent (Bevir & Kedar, 2008). In this perspective, social sciences and the study subjects are located in a linguistic, historical and values standpoints (The University of Utah, N.D.).

#### 3.2. Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. A semi-structured interview is a formal interview whereby the interviewer develops and uses an 'interview guide'. This guide is a list of questions and topics that need to be covered during the conversation, but the interviewer can follow topical trajectories in the conversation that may stray from the guide (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008). The interview guide can be found in annex 1.

According to Russel (1988), a semi-structured interview provides a clear set of instructions, and it can provide reliable, comparable data without being stuck to a fixed structure (Russel, 1988). Next to this, a semi-structured interview allows for two-way communication between the interviewee and the researcher (Case, 1990). The two-way communication is easier (compared with for example surveys) for exploring the personal story of the interviewee because the interviewer can adapt his or her questions or dig deeper in a certain sub topic (Van Wessel, 2018).



It is typical, that the interviewer has a paper-based interview guide. Since, these interviews often have open-ended questions, discussions may well diverge from the original interview guide. For this reason, it was decided that the interviews should be recorded in audio format, and later transcribed for analysis. The interview was planned to take around 45 to 60 minutes. This timespan was chosen because, as an interviewer, you need to give a short introduction about the subject and goal of the research. Then the interviewer poses the questions, and finally you might have a closure with some informal or extra information. It's important that the questions the interviewer has, can be posed but the interview should not be too long. The interviewer and the interviewee must be focused throughout the process (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008). However, in practice the duration of the interviews varied per interviewee. Sometimes an interview was complete within 35 minutes, whereas on other occasions it took up to 2.5 hours to complete. The duration depended very much upon the story, evidence and experience the interviewee wanted to share. The interviewee was informed about the potential duration of the interview before the interview began.

### 3.3. Interviewees

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight current dairy farmers and with eight former dairy farmers who participated in the 'Stoppersregeling'. This quantity of interviews was chosen because of limited time. The timespan for this research was six to eight months, and an interview of one hour takes about eight hours' of time to process and transcribe accurately.

The reason for interviewing these two groups is because it was expected that the former dairy farmers would have a different story than the current dairy farmers, as they had already made the decision to close their farm. It was also expected that the different geographical regions would bring different stories, therefore two former dairy farmers and two current dairy farmers from each region were interviewed. That is, four persons from the south, four from the north, four from the west, and four from east of the Netherlands were interviewed. Based on the authors experience, it was expected that the persons from the south and the west would be more open about the closing process than the persons from the north and the east. The interviews were conducted with dairy farmers who are unknown to the interviewer. As well as this, it was made deliberate to approach farmers who do not reside in the same region than the interviewer, in order create more distance between the interviewer and the interviewee. It was expected that the farmers would be more open to an unknown person who does not have common contacts in the dairy sector (Van Wessel, 2018).

Furthermore, property visitors were interviewed to gain and understand their perspective on the closing process of a dairy farm, and the need for guidance through the process. A veterinarian, a care organisation (ZOB (Zorg Om Boer en Tuinder) is an organization which offers conversations and advise to farmers and gardeners on voluntary basis), an agricultural advisor (a specific type-of accountant) and an animal feed advisor were also interviewed. It was anticipated that these persons could contribute to answering the research questions because they have close contact with many other dairy farmers.

The interviewees were approached through the Facebook group 'Koeien' and via, via. For example, the agricultural advisor is a colleague of a former classmate. It was attempted to approach these interviewees by means of Platform Stil Leed in het Buitengebied and LTO (Land- en Tuinbouw Organisatie), however these organisations were not permitted to provide contact details.

### 3.4. Data analysis

The data collected provides information in answer to the research questions. The first step in analysing the data was to accurately transcribe the interviews. The recorded interviews and the interview transcriptions got a clearly identifiable name for quick insight in the data and to distinguish the data (Tubbing, 2016). These transcripts were read carefully to get a better understanding of the content. The next step was coding the transcripts by means of the 'Grounded Theory' (Charmaz, 2006).

The coding process exists of 3 steps:

1. Open coding (Assigning labels)
2. Axial coding (Comparing fragments with the same codes)
3. Selective coding (Elaborating concepts to a theory)

In the first step (open coding), labels were assigned to text fragments to address the topic. That means, every consideration, dilemma and useful fragment about guidance is labelled. These components were identified by keeping the explanation of the concepts (elaborated in the theoretical framework) in mind while the interviews were read again carefully. The fragments with the label considerations and dilemmas are categorized in personal, social and economic dilemmas and considerations. The personal level includes fragments which focused on the farmer himself, the social level highlighted the fragments concerning the farmers' relationships with family and neighbourhood and the economic level is related to fragments about the financial situation of the farmer. These considerations and dilemmas are identified because they give insight in the complexity of the closing process. Furthermore, the fragments with the label guidance are categorized in the importance of communication, the need for guidance, (characteristics of) guidance and guide, interventions and challenges related to guidance. Sometimes, a fragment had one, or more than one label. In this way, analysing per theme or keyword was possible. After the coding of one or two transcripts, a short evaluation was conducted. If necessary, the label structure was adapted (Tubbing, 2016).

In the second step (axial coding), the fragments within a categories were compared. Differences and similarities were explored. Sometimes, the coding in the first step was adapted again, for example some codes were separated and new codes emerged. Based on axial coding, different groups were identified (Tubbing, 2016), for example dairy farmers who did or who did not participate to the 'Stoppersregeling'.

Finally the third step (selective coding) was about elaborating the founded concepts to a theory. By means of the constant comparison, the relationships between the codes were analysed (Tubbing, 2016). The coding was done by means of (Microsoft) WORD, because the codes patterns could be listed and therefore compared very easily.

After the coding process, each category (for example the importance of communication), is read many times. The sentences that contributed to the answers of the research questions are used. These sentences are processed in story form. The logical structure of the different results sections is taken into account. Other data, that didn't contribute to the answers of the research questions are deleted (e.g. sentences about the power of the farmers). The results were written down and interpreted, and were also compared with the collected literature. The information emerging from the interviews is sometimes sensitive and therefore is processed anonymously.

## 4. Results

Based on the analysis of the interviews, several results were found. These results give insight into the reasons for closing a farm; the personal, social, economic considerations and dilemmas of the closing process, and these results give insight into the need for guidance through this complex process. The findings of the research are presented below.

### 4.1. Reasons to stop farming

According to the interviewees, several reasons exist for closing a dairy farm. These reasons differ per interviewee, although four of them are commonly mentioned, namely, physical issues (for example, cancer or an accident) could be the reason to stop farming. Furthermore, the influence of laws and regulations (e.g. strict regulation) or financial problems (e.g. payment arrears) could be a reason to stop farming. Lastly, the lack of a successor could lead to closure of the farm. However, the interviewees stated that, often it's a combination of these four reasons. The interviewees mentioned some other reasons, although, these were mentioned only once. Therefore, the other reasons aren't discussed further in this research. A brief overview of the commonly mentioned reasons is given in table 1.

Commonly mentioned reasons to stop farming:
1. Physical issues
2. The influence of laws and regulations
3. Financial reasons
4. No successor
5. Combination of these 4 reasons
6. Other <sup>1</sup>

Table 1: Commonly mentioned reasons to stop farming (Own Creation)

#### 4.1.1. Physical issues

Physical limitation is one of the commonly mentioned reasons to stop farming. Below, two fragments are stated about physical issues as a reason for closing a dairy farm, one is stated by a former dairy farmer who had suffered from cancer.

*"A brain tumor. I was operated on, that was reasonably successful. However, I still feel the consequences every day because of my daily medication. That was the reason to reduce the farm slowly in 2013. My memory is no longer what it always was. It doesn't get any easier. More and more laws are coming, you have to know more and more."*

Former farmer 4

The following statement is given by farmer 8, he mentioned why his former employer closed his farm.

*"He had a hit rock his head. He had a broken vertebra in his neck. He will never really be 100% recovered. Normal tractor work is almost impossible due to the vibrations."*

Farmer 8

---

<sup>1</sup> Other reasons to stop farming are:

1. Mental issues
2. Other ambitions
3. Don't feel like being a farmer anymore

These reasons are mentioned just once, therefore these aren't discussed further in this research.

### 4.1.2. The influence of laws and regulations

The influence of laws and regulations can also be a ground for discontinuing the dairy farm. The freedom in management of a dairy farm, feels limited because of strict legislations, in the opinion of several interviewees. Some farmers no longer feel the joy of being a dairy farmer because of constant regulation. In the first fragment below, the former dairy farmer made the switch from dairy cows to an organic goat farm, because he was exhausted with all the governmental restrictions and regulations around dairy farming in the Netherlands.

*"Then came the Phosphate Reduction plan. I have bought milk quota all my life. I didn't feel like.., we had plenty of land. I didn't feel like buying all Phosphate rights. I made many efforts to expand. I also didn't participate to the phosphate problem, and then you are chased down in such a brutal way. So, I said, on a certain moment, the milk price was at stake. Then, I didn't want to deliver for the bulk anymore. That's why I took this step. We became organic. Then came the 'Stoppersregeling', then we went further with goats."*

Former farmer 5

The second fragment refers to an acquaintance of farmer 6, who thought about closing the farm because of the strict legislation.

*"We recently spoke one (referring to another dairy farmer), and he said: All those laws and regulations, you cannot farm anymore in this way."*

Farmer 6

### 4.1.3. Financial reasons

The most commonly mentioned reason to close a dairy farm is for financial reasons. It's striking that almost every former dairy farmer mentioned it. Most of them participated to the 'Stoppersregeling' out of financial necessity. One former dairy farmer had payment arrears, as showed in the fragment below.

*"The fact was, 2015/2016 was a disaster year. So, I had big payment arrears with the feed supplier and with another contractor. So for this reason, I decided to participate to the 'Stoppersregeling'."*

Former farmer 2

The majority felt (almost) forced to accept the 'Stoppersregeling' because the farm wasn't viable anymore, according to one former dairy farmer.

*"If I look to the majority of the farmers. Then it's the financial picture I think. Most of these farmers have high debts. Big barns are built. Some of these barns aren't fully occupied. Most of them are very intensive, so dependent of manure disposal, many feed purchase. That's expensive here. That's going to play tricks firstly, I think. Most farmers feel like farming, and want to farm, however, it has to be possible as well."*

Former farmer 4

*"It was a bit of a forced choice. We haven't stopped because of wealth."*

Former farmer 8

### 4.1.4. No successor

What is also mentioned often, is that a dairy farm closed down, because the farmer had no successor.

*“They were both around the age of 60, no successor. So they both have stopped.”*

*Former farmer 4*

Every current or former dairy farmer interviewed, succeeded the farm from their parents and even in some cases, from their grandparents. If a dairy farmer has no son or daughter who wants to be a successor for the farm, in most cases the farm closes, according to the interviewees.

*“I had no successor, no children.”*

*Former farmer 2*

Transferring a farm to someone else, requires a lot of capital and is almost always only possible to transfer at a lower value than the actual value, according to one interviewee. This farmer did not feel like granting the farm to a person who was not a relative.

*“I thought about it and I didn’t found it a wishful situation. Another possibility is to sell everything. But to grant it to another person? I don’t know. You are passing the capital on then. And the other person becomes wealthy, more or less. You can create a successor clause. That he must continue the farm for a minimum of 10 years. I would prefer to give the farm another ‘shape’. To sell it in a limited way, and to create a ‘shape’ that my child likes, so he would succeed the farm.”*

*Farmer 3*

### 4.1.5. Combination of these 4 reasons

The property visitors, (the veterinarian, agricultural advisor and the animal feed advisor) stated that the reasons for closing a dairy farm differ. Often, it’s a combination of the reasons.

*“You can’t mention one reason. But often there is no successor. And on a certain time, you have the situation of: I may stop farming. Then you have the question, are you continue farming until you fall down with rheumatism at the age of 82? Or do you stop farming at 58 and try to survive the last years financially with a quieter life? That is also an option. I notice farmers with physical problems in combination with no successor, then they start to think. In a time, when there are also changes in regulation, these farmers consult with their accountants to make a financial plan. They want to know: Can I stop farming, what are the financial consequences of that decision?”*

*Veterinarian*

*“That could differ. One (farmer) perhaps for economic reasons, and the other (farmer) may have reached a certain age. The one (farmer) said: “I have no successor, why should I continue farming?” So that person could think: “My company has X value, maybe I should sell it. In that case, I could live from it for the last years of my life.” In some cases, there are single farmers. And sometimes, it is a very kind and social family without a successor.”*

*Animal Feed Advisor*

*“Financial, no successor, incapacitated (physical issues).”*

*Agricultural Advisor*

### 4.2. Considerations and dilemmas

Before a dairy farmer decides to close his farm, he<sup>2</sup> makes several personal, social and economic considerations. Often, out of these considerations, various dilemmas emerge. To gain better insight in the meaning of the closing process, these considerations and dilemmas are explored.

#### 4.2.1. Personal considerations and dilemmas

##### Consideration

Do I feel, I have an interesting and useful future ahead of me if I close my dairy farm?

##### Dilemmas

Due to the reasons mentioned before, some dairy farmers (decide to) stop farming. Before these farmers make the actual and final decision, they will consider their future prospects without their farm, according to the interviewees. For many interviewed (former) farmers, this isn't a problem. Some of the former dairy farmers are hired as a freelancer and continue to farm, but as an employee (ZZP'er) on another farm. Some of the interviewees started, or would like to start, another enterprise (like renting out a vacation house), or switched from dairy cows to goats or arable crops. However, there is another group farmers, who feel they would have lower prospects if they (were to) stop farming, according to the interviewees. Out of this consideration several dilemmas could emerge for them.

1. Firstly, a farmer within, or is close to, retirement age may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, knowing that he must continue doing heavy work at an older age.
  - b. Closing his farm, and maybe not knowing how to spend his time without a farm.

The animal feed advisor stated that he knows of farmers within retirement age who simply would not know how to spend their time without a farm to work on. If these farmers stop farming and no longer have to work, it will be difficult for them to make their time fulfilling, especially if they must leave their farm, house and land. The other option is continuing farming, knowing that the physical work could become too heavy once they get older.

*"Another example, a man is 73. He said: What do I have to do with my time if I stop farming?"*

*Animal feed advisor*

2. Secondly, a farmer who is not close to retirement age may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, although he may wish to close it for any other reason (e.g. financial).
  - b. Closing his farm. However, he might not want to work for a boss.

According to the interviewees, there is a group farmers who does not want to work for an employer.

*"I didn't know what else I could do, I had already realized that I couldn't work for a boss."*

*Former farmer 2*

However, if these farmers were to close their dairy farms, they still need to work because they would not have reached a suitable retirement age yet. These farmers could choose between continuing their farm, although it may not be very viable for the future, or they could consider closing their farm and starting another enterprise, or simply going to work for an employer. This dilemma could form a barrier in the decision to actually close the farm. Both options could be seen as unattractive to an independent farmer.

---

<sup>2</sup> In this research, 'he' could also be a 'she'. The farmer could be a male or a female, although in this research is spoken about a 'he' to make the sentences better readable.

3. Thirdly, a farmer of 50 years and older may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, although he may wish to close it for any other reason (e.g. financial).
  - b. Closing his farm, keeping in mind that it may be difficult to find a job because of his age.

Some of the interviewees felt their age would be a barrier in the decision to close their dairy farm. The members of this group are at least 50 years old and have not yet reached a suitable retirement age. Even though some of these farmers would like to work for an employer, they are concerned that they are too old to be accepted for a new work position.

*“And furthermore, I have tried to get a job for a few days per week. However, that isn’t so easily done at my age, I am 62, you can forget it.”*

*Former farmer 7*

4. Furthermore, a farmer with little formal education may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, although he may wish to close it for any other reason (e.g. financial).
  - b. Closing his farm, although he may not know which other work he could do, given his level of education.

Some interviewees stated that they would not know which work they could do, if they were not able to be a farmer anymore.

*“No, my school career wasn’t that spectacular. I couldn’t use it.”*

*Farmer 7*

For example, one interviewed farmer had only agricultural education on middle level, and started working on his parents’ farm by the age of 19. He only focused on his farm and didn’t experience other situations like going abroad, working on other farms or being an employee in another field. Now, he is 35 years old and never thought about closing the farm, even when the milk prices were very low and unprofitable. He continues with farming because he does not know which other work he could do.

5. Lastly, a farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, although he may wish to close it for any other reason (e.g. financial).
  - b. Closing his farm, even though he does not dare to leave his familiar situation.

Lastly, many farmers still need to work after they have closed their dairy farm. They simply do not know what they can do, or would like to do. They may acknowledge that they do want to stop farming, but once they have made this decision, they are forced to leave their familiar situation. Although they are not satisfied with their current farming circumstances, they are still in a familiar situation, and feel comfortable there. They are fearful that stepping out of their comfort zone may make matters worse. They have fear of the unknown.

*“I am sure that there are persons who don’t dare to stop farming. Because they are afraid of what people may say. Furthermore they won’t know what else to do.”*

*Former farmer 1*

### Consideration

Is it emotionally acceptable for me if I stop dairy farming?

### Dilemmas

If a dairy farmer wants to stop farming, he makes another consideration on personal level, according to the interviewees. Namely, is it emotionally acceptable for him if he stops farming? Being a farmer is a way of life, a farmer is autonomic and his own boss. Generally speaking, he is proud of what he does and who he is. Pride, definitely makes it harder to let go and certainly poses a personal barrier in the decision to stop farming. Furthermore, a farmer does not want to let down anybody. That is, the feeling of failing himself and his social environment for not continuing the farm, could also suggest why farmers are so reluctant to stop farming. Lastly, not all, but many farmers are emotionally attached to their farm and location (as they are often in held in the family for many generations), which could also be a barrier in the decision to close the farm. If a farmer still wants to close his dairy farm, two dilemmas could emerge.

1. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, although he may wish to close it for any other reason (e.g. financial).
  - b. Closing his farm, although he will lose more than solely his job.

If a farmer continues his farm, despite his desire to close it, he keeps his job and retains all the related things. If a farmer stops farming, often he will lose more than solely his job. For example, his familiar daily rhythm. A farmer is physically bound to his barn(s) by necessity, for example the milking shifts (if he has a milking robot), as well as feedings, which are scheduled at fixed times. A few of the interviewees experience this loss of daily rhythm as a kind of freedom, however, the majority of interviewees describe this as an empty feeling; they have no goal or direction in life anymore.

*“You have lost your daily rhythm”.*

*Former farmer 1*

Secondly, a farmer may feel he could lose a part of his identity if he stops farming. It's a safe feeling, being part of a certain community. If a farmer stops farming, he will no longer be a part of this community. This loss of identity goes together with the loss of status. Some farmers feel they are more respected among colleague farmers if they drive the biggest tractor or own the highest number of cows. However, often a large portion of these assets are owned by the bank. If this arrangement collapses, he may be forced to stop farming, and will lose all the social status he felt he had.

*“That's what I mean with self-esteem. It's safe to be part of a group. And if you aren't a farmer anymore, you aren't part of it anymore. Especially if you are a big farmer, then you have the feeling: “They look up to me”. But they don't know how much is owned by the bank!”*

*Former farmer 3*

Furthermore, if a farmer closes his farm, he will lose a large part of his social network. Property visitors, like the veterinarian, the cattle trader, the animal feed advisor, will no longer need to visit the farmer.

*“And that's the problem I think, if farmers stop. The cattle trader won't visit you anymore. Nobody comes anymore, they don't need you! They can't earn money anymore at your place, so they move on. You do not count anymore.”*

*Former farmer 6*



## The meaning of closing a dairy farm in the Netherlands

The connection with other farmers within agricultural Study Groups becomes less close, because the topics discussed are less relevant for those who have already stopped farming.

*"I always was a member of the local livestock Study Group, but I don't feel at home there anymore. The connection is diminishing because you do not have so much in common to discuss with them anymore."*

*Former farmer 7*

The former dairy farmer no longer needs to go to the milk factory meetings, because he no longer produces milk. Sometimes the former farmer also loses his living environment as he sells his farm, he probably has to sell his buildings too. As a result, he must move which can be a really big and reluctant step to take, especially if the family farm has been in the same location for many generations. The step becomes even bigger if the farmer must give up his rural lifestyle and move to a house in the city or a village.

*"To fall into an emptiness, because you miss lots of contacts and you have to give up your freedom live into the city."*

*Farmer 8*

2. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, although he may wish to close it for any other reason (e.g. financial).
  - b. Closing his farm. Even though, he has the feeling that he does not have the right to break the family tradition.

Often the dairy farm is passed through the family for three, four or sometimes even five generations, according to the interviewees. So, some interviewed farmers feel too embarrassed and encumbered to stop farming, although they rationally know that they must choose for their own future. They feel guilty when they close the farm, because it was started by their grandparents and many other family members have helped build it together.

*"Because you built on it together for years, from the past until now. Grandpa and Grandma bought it."*

*Farmer 1*

Many farmers feel that they are only a link in the process, that they are just a temporary manager instead of owner of the farm, knowing that they would eventually have to pass it on to the next generation just like their (grand)parents did for them. Furthermore, these farmers feel they should not sell the farm or property, because they succeeded it from their family relatively inexpensively. They feel, selling would be unfair to their siblings, or other family members, because they would personally benefit from the family capital.

*"From my perspective, I am only a link in the process of the farm. So, I don't have the feeling that I own it. Not really. More in the sense that I am a temporary manager of the farm. And if I would sell it, I get the money from it, but I don't want it. I want to stay as part of a link in the whole family farm, that's enough for me. That's why I would mind very much, if I had to sell it. Because of that feeling, the farm isn't my property, while I would benefit from the money."*

*Farmer 4*

### Consideration

What do I value more? The pros and cons of being a farmer vs. the pros and cons of not being a farmer?

### Dilemmas

As a dairy farmer, one must deal with several disadvantages like being physically bound to the farm. A dairy farmer has fixed feeding shifts so he knows when he must be in the barn. However, some situations like sickness for example cannot be planned. Therefore, a farmer, is actually even more tied to his work, than an employee in a retail store for example. Secondly, going on holiday is not very easy for a farmer to schedule in, compared with the employed person. The farmer needs to find a skilled person and responsible person who can conduct the daily tasks and manage the farm during the farmers' holiday. Furthermore, some interviewees feel stressed about managing their farm. They are working constantly to keep the farm viable and profitable. As well as this, farming is physically hard work. Besides all the administrative tasks, the farmer must do, or manage many other tasks, like cleaning, milking, feeding, checking on the health of his herd, movement of materials, fencing etcetera. Another disadvantage is the enormous financial obligation of farming in general. Often, farmers incur large debts, because the investments are expensive, and taking over a farm requires a lot of capital. Furthermore, a farmer today must deal with more and more legislation. These governmental restrictions lead to the feeling of limited freedom in management style and choices of farmers, and negatively impacts the pleasure of farming, according to the interviewees.

However, being a dairy farmer also brings many advantages. Firstly, management is by many farmers experienced as an advantage. Making strategic decisions to continue the farm, is seen as a beautiful and attractive aspect of being a farmer. Related to this, farmers experience the freedom of being their own boss and appreciate being able to carry out tasks in their own way. They don't have accountability to an employer. Furthermore, often, a farmer is working out-doors where they have more variation in work activities. Another important advantage of being a farmer is the contact and care of animals, which is of very personal importance.

Interestingly, and important to realize, is that some interviewees see certain advantages as disadvantages in reverse of each other. For example, management. Many interviewed farmers appreciate this as a certain type of freedom, because they can make their own decisions, and are accountable for them. While on the other hand, some of them experience the management aspect as disadvantageous, because they find it very stressful to manage a business and make a living.

If a farmer decides to close his dairy farm, he also will experience certain pros and cons. An advantage as an employee is the security of a monthly salary. Secondly, as an employee, you do not have the same level of responsibility because the employer has final responsibility and accountability for managing the company in a strategic and profitable way. Going on holiday, for example, is much easier without the responsibility of a farm, on Friday an employee has a whole weekend available to enjoy! The disadvantage stated by the interviewees was actually being responsible to an employer, which is not an attractive option.

Summarized, both as a dairy farmer and a non-dairy farmer, one will experience advantages and disadvantages<sup>3</sup>. This could lead to two dilemmas.

---

<sup>3</sup> These advantages and disadvantages are mentioned in the interviews.

## The meaning of closing a dairy farm in the Netherlands

1. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, so as to avoid the disadvantages of being an employee.
  - b. Closing his farm, so he can benefit from the advantages of being an employee.

<b><i>Advantages of salaried employment</i></b>	<b><i>Disadvantages of salaried employment</i></b>
<i>Monthly salary</i>	<i>Accountability to your employer</i>
<i>You don't have final responsibility</i>	
<i>Going on holiday is easier</i>	
<i>Freedom (Not 24/7 job)</i>	

*Table 2: Pros and cons of being an employee (Own creation)*

2. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm. However, he must deal with the disadvantages of being a farmer.
  - b. Closing his farm. However, he will lose all the advantages of being a farmer.

<b><i>Advantages of being a dairy farmer</i></b>	<b><i>Disadvantages of being a dairy farmer</i></b>
<i>Entrepreneurship</i>	<i>Bounded to the farm (e.g. milking shifts or births)</i>
<i>Being your own boss</i>	<i>Going on holiday isn't easily done</i>
<i>Freedom in comings and goings</i>	<i>Stress of management and responsibility</i>
<i>Out-door work</i>	<i>Physical hard work</i>
<i>Contact and care for animals</i>	<i>Big financial obligations</i>
<i>Variation in work activities</i>	<i>Dealing with lots of governmental restrictions</i>

*Table 3: Pros and cons of being a dairy farmer (Own creation)*

### 4.2.2. Social considerations and dilemmas

#### Consideration

Will my family accept it, if I close my dairy farm?

#### Dilemmas

All the interviewed farmers and former farmers succeeded the farm from their family, the farms are/were family enterprises, built by multiple generations. Therefore, it isn't very strange that the interviewees stated that family relations play a large role in the closing process. Some interviewees stated that their family (would) understand the decision to stop farming. One reason for this is because the succession of the farm has been well arranged financially in the past. Secondly, the siblings and other family members can see that continuing the farm is hardly achievable in a profitable way, (e.g. financially, the amount of work, legislation and regulations, or a combination of reasons). Finally, siblings or other family members may have no emotional connection with the farm what so ever. However, most interviewees stated that farmers would take their families thoughts and feelings very heavily into consideration, if and when they ever have to make this decision to stop farming. They could face several dilemmas emerged out of this consideration.

1. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, although he may wish to close it for any other reason (e.g. financial).
  - b. Closing his farm, with the possibility, however, that this might cause damage to the relationships within family.

The first dilemma farmers may have is directly related to the quality of family relationships. They may struggle with wanting to close their dairy farm for several reasons on the one hand, versus their fear of negative consequences concerning family relations if they do decide to stop farming. Some former farmers who were interviewed even stated that their decision lead to severing contact with some siblings. They stated that their siblings felt that the farmer had already received everything (almost) for free from their preceding generations of farmers. When they closed the farm, their siblings felt that the farmer himself would benefit from their accumulated family capital. This is an extreme example of negative family consequences. It is not always this extreme, but the choice to stop farming could definitely lead to family tensions, according to the interviewees.

*"My brothers have difficulty with my decision. They think it's unacceptable. Still. Apparently. Because the contact is gone."*

*Former farmer 1*

Closing a farm is difficult and emotional for family members, because the farm is, or has been, a big part of their life. Most interviewees stated that family understanding comes later and is dependent on the reason why a farmer stops farming.

*"If you give insight on your financial situation, to your family. Not all farmers do that. Farmers succeeded the farm with a lower value. However, I think, if you give your family insight to your financial situation, they will understand why you stop farming. However, if you don't, then they think you are going to sell the farm and benefit from the family capital."*

*Former farmer 5*

*"It's also a bit like: What's is the reason, why he stops farming? E.g. Do I stop because I don't feel like being a farmer anymore or do I stop because I have physical issues? In case of the last reason, they will understand it sooner."*

*Farmer 8*

2. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, although he may wish to close it for any other reason (e.g. financial).
  - b. Closing his farm, and manage the consequences of having disappointed his family members.

Secondly, a dairy farmer could struggle with wanting to close his farm for certain reasons, versus wanting to honor the family tradition which means continuing the farm. This dilemma is slightly different than the previous one, because in this situation the farmer isn't afraid of harming the family relations, rather that he simply doesn't want to disappoint his family members.

*"When I started more than 20 years ago. I learned that a farm doesn't stop very easily. Because often, it's a generation problem. Great grandfather started the farm, Grandpa succeeded it. Your farther became a farmer and now you. And if you don't, you break the family tradition."*

*Veterinarian*

3. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, although he may wish to close it for any other reason (e.g. financial).
  - b. Closing his farm. However, he doesn't want to cause unchosen change in the lives of his family members.

Lastly, sometimes three generations live on one farm property. If the farmer decides to stop farming and sells the farm, he will have to move. Consequentially, the remaining family generations are also forced to move to another home.

*"His parents also lived on our farm. Those days, it was a reason to not stop farming. Because what should they do? They were in their early 70's then."*

*Former farmer 1*

*"The children were very sad when we moved. We had a big part in the household, the trampoline stood inside. And they found it strange that Grandpa and Grandma would live somewhere else."*

*Former farmer 1*

So, this decision to stop farming not only affects the farmer himself, the consequences affect many more people. The farmer must choose between adhering his wish to close the farm, and bear the guilt for causing unchosen change in several lives, versus continuing to farm and accept the consequences of living a life he doesn't want anymore, or does not believe is viable in the long term.

### Consideration

How will my neighborhood react if I close my dairy farm?

### Dilemmas

Farmers often live in a small community, so if there is an event (for example a farmer who stops), information is quickly shared throughout the community, according to one interviewed farmer. A small story becomes bigger as it's told from person to person. He said that he once told the inseminator: "I am going to emigrate haha". This was a joke, because it was such a bad weather. Two days later he was called by a colleague farmer who asked: "I've heard your emigration is settled, what are you going to do with your Dutch farm?". Another farmer confirmed this, he said that people like to talk, but that this is everywhere. The Care organization agreed with this. "It's a type of entertainment said another farmer". The animal feed advisor stated that he has heard negative stories told by the neighborhood if a farmer closed his farm. However, he has also heard many understanding reactions. He stated that understanding of the neighborhood also depends on the openness and communication of the former farmer.

*"I think that it differs. I know negative stories, but also stories with understanding. It's also a bit like: are you open about it? How honestly do you communicate? I think that the opinion of others about your choices depends greatly on your own communication. If you say: we were on economic level a lost case, sounds very different then: We have a certain vision about the future. To meet that vision, we have to perform certain actions. And the consequences of those actions are too big in our opinion. You are saying exactly the same thing, however it sounds very different. I think in every choice, the manner of communication is very important."*

*Animal Feed Advisor*

Out of the interviews, it can be concluded that the reaction of the neighborhood is one of the social considerations, most farmers make if they would like to close their farm. Out of this consideration, again two dilemmas emerge.

1. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, although he may wish to close it for any other reason (e.g. financial).
  - b. Closing his farm, and accepting that the neighborhood will gossip about it.

In some cases, fear for gossiping by the neighborhood is a barrier in the decision to stop farming. Despite some farmers would like to stop farming, they choose to continue because they are afraid what their community would say. They feel some sense of shame, because the neighborhood might say that former farmers are losers, that they have failed. One former farmer thinks that people will talk about him, but not with him. He explicitly told his story to his neighborhood in order to avoid gossiping. Some interviewees heard gossiping, although, not directly.

*"I think people will talk about us. We haven't heard gossiping directly. However, maybe I don't want to see it. We told our story very quickly by our self. To prevent wild stories. We had reactions like: Aww, what a brave decision. If they think we are losers, then they won't say it so quickly. But we won't know that."*

*Former farmer 1*

More interviewees confirmed that they think, the neighborhood will gossip or talk about them, but they haven't heard it themselves. It's important to realize that people have different perspectives about reactions of the neighborhood. Some perceive it as gossiping, others see it as information sharing. It's striking that most interviewees mention the opinion of the neighborhood as a barrier in the decision to stop farming, while most of them also think that closing a farm is seen as a management decision rather

than a failure. One farmer added that he obtained understanding, after he explained the background story about why he made the decision to stop farming.

*“For example on my birthday, when other farmers visit me. They do talk about it, and if I explain the background story, then they have understanding, why I made that decision. The reaction of the neighborhood plays a subordinate role, because here are many ‘import-farmers’.”*

*Former farmer 6*

Another farmer stated that the opinion of the neighborhood depends on the situation and the reason why a farmer closes his farm. The neighborhood views ‘closing a farm’ as failing if farmers didn’t take good care of the farm, but it is seen as a management decision when the farmer has no successor, for example. Some interviewees mention a difference with the past. Being seen as a ‘loser’ if a farmer stops is more something from the past. Especially farmers know that running a farm isn’t easy anymore because of the changing working environment, according one interviewee.

*“I do think so, people look at it in an adult manner. It used to be like: “Oh what a loser”, I think. Especially other farmers know that keeping a farm viable isn’t easy anymore. The working environment is changed greatly and people know more, are world wise. So they have more understanding.”*

*Former farmer 4*

Next to this, a former farmer stated that the opinion of the neighborhood plays a subordinate role, if a farmer is an ‘import-farmer’. That means, he has not been in the same location for generations, but has moved, for example from Twente to Drenthe because of better expansion possibilities. In that case, often, the farmer is not that closely connected with his neighborhood, which explains why the opinion of the neighborhood is less important.

2. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, although he may wish to close it for any other reason (e.g. financial).
  - b. Closing his farm, knowing that other farmers will purchase his land to expand their own farm.

The ‘land hunger’ is high in the Netherlands, according to one farmer. This means the demand for land is high, but the availability is limited because the Netherlands is such a small country.

*“The ‘land hunger’ is massive in the Netherlands. The agricultural area decreases already for several years. If a farmer stops, this will lead to opportunities for other farmers.”*

*Farmer 7*

If more farms will disappear, this will lead to chances for other farms to expand their farm size. Farmers could face the following dilemma: collecting money when selling the buildings and deal with all the colleague farmers who come for the farmers’ properties like vultures versus continuing the farm, no vultures, but not adhering to the farmers’ wish to stop farming.

*“We sold about half of the land. And farmers came, they wanted to rent land and deliver manure. I always saw it a bit like vultures, they don’t want to talk with you to find a solution. No, how do I get your product (as cheap as possible) under my plastic?”*

*Care organisation*

#### 4.2.3. Future social consideration and dilemma

##### **Consideration**

Should I favor one of my children to ensure a family member as successor of my dairy farm?

##### **Dilemma**

If the increase of farm size continues, the capital need will be so high, that family succession of the farm, will almost be impossible, according to one interviewee. A farmer might consider in the future if he should favor one of the children to ensure, a family successor, or if the farmer should make another decision. This consideration could lead to a dilemma.

1. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm. However, favoring one child more than his others, to guarantee succession within the family.
  - b. Closing his farm. None of his children are favored. However, there is no succession.

On the one hand, the farmer would prefer continuation of the farm by one of his children. However, to ensure this, the successor will be favored very much in comparison with the other siblings. On the other hand, the farmer could divide the land into shares, so every child, and/or other people, could buy a share or shares to continue the farm. However, if the farmer chooses this option, continuation of the farm as a family company becomes much more complicated, especially when the shareholders have children who want to succeed the farm themselves. If both sides of the dilemma are unattractive for the farmer, he could also choose to stop farming altogether. None of his children would be favored, however continuation of the family tradition will be broken.

*“The capital need has become very big, so a family successor is almost impossible. It’s possible in a shape of family shares. And in a family with many children, the successor is favored greatly compared with the rest of the children. The differences only get bigger in the future.”*

*Farmer 7*



### Closing the farm as a taboo

The findings related to the difference with the past are interesting and important. Although this difference isn't any consideration or dilemma, these findings are worth explaining, because they are closely intertwined with the social considerations and dilemmas mentioned before. The information will help to understand the complexity of the closing process in more depth. Closing a farm is used to be viewed as a taboo. Some interviewees still think that closing a farm is a taboo, that farmers don't want to close their operations out of fear hurting the family or out of shame (feeling of failing): "What will people say about it?"

*"I am sure that there are people who don't dare to stop farming. Because of not wanting to harm the other generation or out of shame. Or because of other reasons. Those people exist, absolutely. What should people say about it? However, the taboo of closing a farm is decreased in my opinion. 10 years ago, closing a farm was a taboo for sure."*

*Former farmer 1*

However most of the interviewees feel that this taboo is highly reduced compared to 10 years ago. Some interviewees think that this taboo is disappeared altogether. Historically, it used to be 'not a done thing', if the farmer did not feel like farming anymore. Some interviewees added that many children of farmers felt pressure to succeed the farm just to continue the family tradition, interestingly they stated that this was more common in the past than it is nowadays.

*"Actually, I had been labeled as a farm successor since I was a young boy. Because I was the only son. I have a younger and older sister, so I was the successor. I was pushed in that direction."*

*Farmer 3*

It's remarkable that only one of the twenty interviewees stated to the contrary, that it was easier to stop farming in the past, because the farm size was a lot smaller. He said that farmers have nowadays a closer bond with their farm, because they have expanded the size of their farm over time.

*"Then you just had 50 cows and if you stopped farming, then you just stopped. Those days, you hadn't such a strong connection with your farm as nowadays, in my opinion. We started here 20 years ago, with 56 cows, now we have 145 cows."*

*Farmer 5*

The people who said that the taboo is reduced or disappeared, support their statement with several reasons. First, they think that closing the farm is a management decision, because they understand that it is more difficult to run a farm nowadays.

*"Most people I talk with, say: Closing a farm is a management decision. Because everybody knows, it's hard to keep a farm viable."*

*Former farmer 4*

## The meaning of closing a dairy farm in the Netherlands

One farmer stated that farmers are almost forced to stop farming because of so many governmental restrictions, so people do understand when and why a farmer makes this decision. Secondly, the current generation (farmers children), is more focused on achieving a degree than learning a trade. These young people explore other professions where they are able to work less hard and earn more. Sadly, the combination of poor advocacy, overwhelming financial obligations and continued evolution of governmental legislation, becoming a farmer is not really a very attractive option for this generation, according to one farmer.

*“But I do know, the desire to continue farming is minimalized by a lot of people, that is true. Moreover, more young people who first want to succeed the farm change their minds. Many of them wish to study further, they see: Oh, if I work for a feed company, I can earn an X amount of money. They also think: If I become a farmer, I have to work hard for little money. Plus, these people sometimes get a better job offer.”*

*Farmer 2*

Thirdly, closing a farm happens a lot more often these days, so nobody is really surprised anymore when a farmer decides to stop farming.

It's striking that some farmers feel there isn't a taboo on closing a farm anymore, while at the same time, they feel that continuing their own farm is an absolutely must. Sometimes, even if they don't have a family successor, they will find an external successor at all costs. Furthermore, they (would) arrange with one of their children to succeed the farm, but in a different format, like starting a kindergarten, for example, and employing a manager for the cows. Some (former) farmers stated that if they sell the farm, they could have a million euros on their bank account. However, these people also stated that this option would bring very little satisfaction. They rather would have little money on their bank account and see continuation of the farm to the next generation.

*“From my point of view, it's less important than it used to be. Now it's more like: I am going to do what I want. At our home it is also said: You are not obliged to succeed the farm. Everybody had a good education, so they have more possibilities. Yet, I would like it very much if my children would succeed the farm. For example, because my father could come back to work on the farm for a long time. However, if someone has another format for continuing the farm, this would also be a possibility.”*

*Farmer 1*

Openness about the closing process differs according to the interviewees. One farmer stated that the older generation is not very open about their decision making. He also stated that most of the former farmers are honest about their story, however details about the financial background remain hidden. More interviewees confirmed that former farmers are silent about the financial aspect of the closing process.

*“We don't speak about the selling price of the farm. That's nobody's business.”*

*Former farmer 1*

#### 4.2.4. Economic considerations and dilemmas

##### Consideration

What is financially more tolerable, closing or continuing my dairy farm?

##### Dilemmas

When a farmer closes his farm, it will have a significant impact on his financial situation. A farm contains a large amount of capital, which is often family owned, and will also carry (some) debts. The financial consequences are going to be very different in every situation. Every farmer will most likely consider the financial consequences of closing their dairy farm, before taking any definite action, according to the interviewees. Dependent on the situation of the farmer, a dilemma could emerge.

1. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm, although he can barely make a living.
  - b. Closing his farm, knowing however, that he may not be able to repay his mortgage, or other debts.

Dairy farmers who have invested a lot in new barns to keep more cows are almost forced to continue their farm. If they close, they will be unable to repay their mortgage and have to participate in a supplementary benefit program.

*“However, some farmers can’t quit. These farmers don’t have the capital to repay their mortgage. So, you are stuck in this situation. You could continue or could go into a supplementary benefit program.”*

*Former farmer 1*

However, if they continue their farm, but cannot utilize full capacity of their new barn (as a result of the Phosphate Reduction plan), their cost price is going to become far too high to support their quantity of production.

*“I have contact with CRV and it’s said: I see so much misery at the big farms. Big barns, high mortgages. And if the milk price decreases, their cost price is far too high. However, these farmers did it to themselves. They built big barns, they are typical farmers. They want to be part of ‘the group’. It’s about their self-esteem. So, if the neighbor builds, I build too. If the neighbor buys land, so do I. And in the end, all the farms are almost owned by the bank. So, it seems more beautiful, than it really is. I think that plenty of them want to stop farming, but they simply cannot, because of their financial obligations.”*

*Former farmer 3*

### Consideration

Do I want to, or am I able to perform certain actions to keep my dairy farm viable for the future?

### Dilemmas

Some interviewed farmers took over a farm that was far behind in terms of modern developments. These farmers felt they must pursue other activities, for example, increase the farm size or make specific investments if they want their farm survive. Unfortunately, these actions are often accompanied by an increase in workload or an increase in financial burden. The farmers will consider if they want to or are able to perform these actions. Is it's worth it?

1. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Making certain investments to continue his farm, keeping in mind that he will have additional financial burdens that will need to be paid off.
  - b. Closing the farm, even though he may not even want to, but weighing up the investments and financial consequences, it will be unprofitable.

A dairy farmer who needs to make significant investments to keep his farm viable for the future, or needs to move to an area where he can increase the size of his farm, will be faced with the financial consequences of his actions.

*"He really wanted it, but he saw that it wasn't profitable. Or he had to invest, if he wanted to continue. He didn't dare to do it."*

*Care organization*

On the one hand, if he continues the farm in his old way, he may not survive in the future, however his financial obligations won't increase. On the other hand, if he makes large investments, his farm would become more viable for the future. However, in that case, higher financial obligations emerge, which the farmer may not want to, isn't able to, or doesn't dare to carry.

*"Especially with the degree of investment, because of the Phosphate regulation, even if we wanted to continue, we would have had to invest in four tons of phosphate. We didn't feel like doing this. And we couldn't afford it."*

*Former farmer 1*

2. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm in his traditional way, knowing that he should seek out another source of income to keep his farm viable, which he may not want to do, or may not have time for.
  - b. Closing his farm, even though he may not want to close it.

The other dilemma is about finding another source of income, to keep the dairy farm viable for the future. Some farmers find it hard to survive and aren't able to or do not want to make additional investments. They will need to search for other income revenues if they want to keep their farm running. These farmers could struggle with not wanting to close the farm versus not wanting to start other activities. For example, earning extra money with an external job, or by focusing more on other agricultural branches like arable farming. The farmers are not sure if these extra efforts are worth the continuation of the farm.

*"And in the meanwhile, we had more and more conversations with the accountant, with the bank. We had tough years. I worked more and more in an external job."*

*Former farmer 8*

### Consideration

Do I earn enough money as a dairy farmer in relation with the amount of work I have to do?

### Dilemma

As mentioned in the pros and cons of dairy farming, it is a 24/7 job according to one interviewee. The work of a farmer is constant, and in general he earns little money according to one farmer.

*“Always continued with milking, never really earned money, but survived....”*

*Former farmer 2*

However, most interviewed farmers feel a passion and see many advantages of being a farmer. It’s a way of life, with freedom in comings and goings.

*“On the one hand, being a farmer is a way of life. On the other hand, being a farmer is nothing more than a profession. A beautiful profession, that deserves much time and attention. But in the end, it stays a profession. If you don’t earn money, it’s a hobby which costs money.”*

*Animal Feed Advisor*

The closing process of a farm could start with the following consideration: Do I earn enough money as a dairy farmer compared with the workload it requires? If the answer is no, a dilemma could emerge.

1. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm. However, he is unsatisfied about the amount of money he makes.
  - b. Closing his farm. However, he will lose his farm and forego all the advantages he enjoys with that occupation.

The farmer is unsatisfied about the amount of money he earns in relation to his workload, however he has passion for his farm and likes the work. If he would hire himself as a freelancer or switch to another profession he would earn more money and have a lighter workload, however then he will still lose his farm.

*“Those sons and daughters don’t want to work in the shit for a minimum wage. If you hire yourself as a freelancer nowadays, you have a better situation than the farmer who walks all day, every day between the cows.”*

*Former farmer 5*

### Consideration

If I don't have a relative as a successor, do I grant an external successor to continue my farm?

### Dilemma

As mentioned before, all the interviewed (former) farmers succeeded the farm from their family. However, a farmer may not have a son or daughter, or even another family member, a cousin for example, who would like to succeed the farm. Some farmers consider granting their farm to an external successor in order to see its continuation. Although, for most farmers this decision is not easily made because a lot of family capital will be transferred to someone outside the family. This could lead to the following dilemma.

1. A farmer may have to choose between:
  - a. Continuing his farm. However, he will be granting family capital to someone who is a non-relative.
  - b. Closing his farm. Giving up the family tradition of generational succession.

The farmer may have to choose between closing the farm due to lack of a family successor. He breaks the family tradition but keeps the capital in the family. He could also choose to continuation the farm with an external successor, which honors the family tradition, to some extent, but in turn grants capital to a non-relative.

*"I thought about it and I didn't found it a wishful situation. Another possibility is to sell everything. But to grant it to another person? I don't know. You are passing the capital on then. And the other person becomes wealthy, more or less. You can create a successor clause. That he must continue the farm for a minimum of 10 years. I would prefer to give the farm another 'shape'. To sell it in a limited way, and to create a 'shape' that my child likes, so he would succeed the farm."*

*Farmer 3*

*"Or you need to collaborate with an external person. You need to grant the farm to him with heart and soul, so he can continue it".*

*Farmer 7*

### 4.3. Guidance in the closing process

Dairy farmers in the Netherlands, make many considerations and different dilemmas could emerge in the closing process. It could be difficult for farmers to go through this process by themselves, therefore help may be needed. This chapter explains the need for guidance in the closing process, which interventions already exist, which other interventions could be successful and which challenges are related to it.

#### 4.3.1. The importance of communication

As shown in the information above, dairy farmers make several considerations before they actually make the decision to stop farming. Out of these considerations, various dilemmas could emerge, which make the closing process a complex one. Many interviewees stated that communication about the process is important. Namely, perspectives of others could help the farmer in making choices and talking about the closing process could help the farmer to deal with the loss of his farm.

*“To talk about it, it’s a manner of processing. To stay silent, you will get stuck in it. You will stay stuck in the same circle. And if you hear thoughts of other people, you will leave that circle maybe. It has a healing effect. It isn’t wrong or right, it’s just different. You need different perspectives. There is no fixed closing process.”*

*Care Organization*

By means of open communication, the farmer could receive help and understanding from others. That is, if a farmer is silent about his struggles, others won’t know he needs help.

*“No, that wasn’t hard for me. My girlfriend thinks that I am too open sometimes. However, my opinion is: By being open, I received help always. If I stayed silence, I wouldn’t survive. That’s the lesson, you can take with you. By being open, I met people who wanted to help me.”*

*Former farmer 2*

Most former farmers who were interviewed for this research involved family members and their accountant in the decision to stop farming. About the involvement of other property visitors, like the veterinarian or the animal feed advisor is thought of differently by the interviewees. Some of them discuss everything with everyone, while others only inform the property visitors about their decision once it is made. Some of the interviewees stated that the content of conversations depends on the connection they have with the property visitors. One of the farmers has a close relationship with his veterinarian, so this person is really a confidential advisor for him.

The same applies for the conversations after a farmer is stopped. Certain former farmers can talk very easily with anyone about the loss of their farm. However, most of them talk with family members, like their wife and father. One farmer shares his thoughts with friends. Several friends of this farmer have an agricultural background, so he thinks that these friends would understand him best. This farmer stated if a farmer can’t talk about his situation in his own network, he needs to search for an external person he can talk to.

*“I have friends who don’t know anything of farms, those will never totally understand what goes on, and how I feel. While someone, who owns a farm would understand it better. If you don’t know those kinds of people, then you need to find them somewhere else.”*

*Farmer 1*

### 4.3.2. Need for guidance

The opinions are divided about the need for guidance in the closing process of dairy farmers. Most of the interviewees said that they do think, there is a need for guidance among dairy farmers. One of the former farmers stated that the added value of external guidance is the 'helicopter view'. He said that a farmer could swim in his own bubble, and an external person could offer him a broader perspective. Another former farmer added that an external person could give the farmer a greater sense of future perspective when he tells this farmer which options he has as he stops farming.

*"I think there will always be people who doubt: How do I go further? Those persons will think in the 'cow world'. Maybe it could be enlightening, to broaden their focus. That they hear, there are plenty of possibilities. I think there will always be a group who have a need for this."*

*Former farmer 4*

One of the interviewees stated that guidance in the closing process could help the suffering among farmers. Another farmer adds that he thinks that there are farmers who want to stop, but don't know how. Guidance could help according to him. It's striking that these interviewees think there is a need for guidance in the closing process among dairy farmers, while only a one of them admitted he was in need of support himself. He said that he had a need for guidance after he closed his farm, because he didn't know how to go on with his life. One former farmer said that he doesn't think that there is a need for guidance. He thinks that former dairy farmers have lots of knowledge and skills, that they will find their way. He sees guidance in the closing process as a burden for the farmer.

*"I think that the stopped farmer has already plenty of knowledge, he will find a solution himself. I don't think you have to burden him with guidance."*

*Former farmer 5*

Another former farmer stated that the need of help depends on the situation. If a dairy farmer is forced to stop farming, he could have a bigger need for guidance, than a farmer who stops farming out of his own choice. He said the need for help is also dependent of the age and wishes of the farmer.

The interviewees mentioned three categories of dairy farmers who might have a need for help in the closing process. Firstly, those who have high debts. These farmers have often built a new barn which they cannot fill to capacity because of the Phosphate Reduction plan. These farmers are forced to stop and sell by the bank because they can no longer fulfill their financial obligations. According to the interviewees, these farmers have a tough time mentally and could use some support.

*"There are people who are forced to stop farming, because their financial situation is very bad. I think those will face mental misery. Farmers who just built a barn and can't use it completely because of the Phosphate Reduction plan. Those must sell their farm. I think that's very hard."*

*Farmer 8*

Secondly, former farmers who have not had much formal education and succeeded their parents farm directly from school could have a limited perspective, according to some interviewees. These farmers might also benefit from guidance. Lastly, former farmers who are older, (e.g. 50 plus) could struggle with finding new work. These farmers aren't used to working for someone else and have always been focused on their farm, so they don't know which other possibilities may be available for them. Thereby comes, they are often afraid that they too old to be hired for a job. Guidance could give this group helpful insight in their possibilities after they have closed their farm.



### 4.3.3. Guidance and guide

The interviewees were asked which characteristics guidance and guide<sup>4</sup> should have. For example, it was asked in what phase of the closing process support would be most helpful, and who could best provide it. Furthermore, the interviewees gave their opinion about how guidance could be funded.

Firstly, guidance during the closing process must be free (or at very low costs) for the farmer, according to most interviewees. They stated that farmers don't like spending money, so they won't use the guidance if they have to pay (much) for it. Especially, farmers who have heavy debts with the bank, do not see expensive guidance as their first priority, however these farmers might need the support the most.

*"Look, a farmer hates spending money, so don't send him a bill. Especially the farmers who have high debts, while those could need it the most."*

*Farmer 7*

Most of the interviewees stated that guidance should be offered as a subsidized service from the government, because the changes in governmental legislation are the cause of why so many farmers are having a difficult time.

*"It should be a service arranged by the government."*

*Farmer 1*

Furthermore, farmers need to know that guidance in the closing process is available. For example by advertising the service in magazines.

*"It must be cost free anyway. And farmers must know that guidance exist, for example by advertising in magazines. That there always is a possibility to call without any obligation. A kind of children helpline, however in this case, for farmers."*

*Farmer 1*

Moreover, farmers need to know that the service is not obligatory. That means, if a farmer calls the service, he could choose a further trajectory, or he can just have one helpful conversation with a guide. It's optional, so the farmer can discontinue the guidance at any time. Next to this, three former farmers said that they would like guidance should consist of two parts: "How did we get here?" and "Where do we go from here?" Lastly, several interviewees said that guidance should not only consist of social support, but also economical advice should be offered.

*"You need someone who not only offers social and emotional support, but also economic advise"*

*Farmer 2*

---

<sup>4</sup> The word guide is chosen because different persons could give guidance to the farmer, during various phases of the closing process. For example, not only an agricultural coach can support the farmer, also family or property visitors can offer guidance in the closing process.

## The meaning of closing a dairy farm in the Netherlands

The guide must be a person who is sincerely interested in the farmer, only then he will create trust. The guide should really take the time to explore and understand the farmer's story. Furthermore, the guide must be open, empathic and objective. He may not have any personal interest.

*"You need someone without personal interest"*

*Farmer 1*

The opinions are divided, about if an agricultural background of the guide is an advantage or disadvantage when offering guidance. Some stated that a guide with practical experience in agriculture has a head start in being accepted for help, because he and the farmer speak the same language which could lead to better understanding.

*"In that case, you have a giant head start. If you speak the same language. If the farmer knows, you understand it, you have a giant head start. Collaboration is easier in this manner. The guide has a vital role, because he works with people who have problems (in general)."*

*Agricultural Advisor*

In contrast, some interviewees argue that an agricultural background of the guide is a disadvantage. In this case, the guide would have limited perspective and couldn't offer the farmer a broad range of possibilities, because he could steer the farmer in his familiar agricultural work.

*"I don't think so, if someone does not know what he wants to do, than he must look as broad as possible. He must not only think in the 'cow world'. You need someone who can tell about all jobs, who can inform him. I think, it's narrow minded to say: He milked for the past 20 years, so he must get a job in the dairy sector. I think the majority will work in the dairy sector, but at least, they must get the chance to think about a job outside the dairy business."*

*Former farmer 4*

Other interviewees stated that the guide should have basic agricultural knowledge, so he could understand how farmers think, and offer him both agricultural options and non-agricultural options for future work. One farmer added that the guide should have knowledge about the human psyche.

*"Someone must understand the agricultural sector and how a farm works. However, I think, one must also have knowledge of the human psyche to offer proper guidance."*

*Farmer 1*

Next question was: "Who can be this guide?" One farmer mentioned that close family (like a child, brother or parent), has the greatest chance of success because they aren't afraid to mention certain issues that could harm the farmer's feelings. He stated that a property visitor will be more careful with addressing sensitive issues, because it can harm the relationship between the property visitor and the farmer, which is not a good idea because the farmer is his customer.

## The meaning of closing a dairy farm in the Netherlands

*“Yes, they all come for your wallet. Close family has the highest chance of success. Wife, children, brother, parents. Those persons aren’t afraid to address sensitive issues that can be hurtful for the farmer. A property visitor is afraid to mention these issues. Because the farmer is his customer.”*

*Farmer 7*

Another farmer confirmed that a property visitor isn’t a suited guide, because he is focused only on one part of the farm. For example, the veterinarian is only focused on the animals according from his medical and health perspective. A farmer deals with all aspects of the farm, like administration, animal feed and animal health, so a property visitor is not able to put himself completely in the shoes of the farmer.

*“In general, a farmer knows more about all parts of the farm, than a veterinarian for example. A veterinarian is only interested in animals”*

*Former farmer 3*

Furthermore, property visitors are expensive and do not have no time to chat for hours at the farmers’ kitchen table, in the opinion of some interviewees.

*“The prices of veterinarians were heavily increased last year. I don’t dare to offer a cup of coffee to the veterinarian because he will write the hours. In the past, there was more time to have a chat in the farmers’ kitchen. Other topics (referring to personal topics) are discussed at the kitchen table.”*

*Farmer 1*

However, in contrast, other interviewees said that property visitors (like the veterinarian or the animal feed advisor), are very suited to help the farmer. This is because these people visit the farmer frequently, which can often make it possible to identify problems at an early stage.

*“However, animal feed advisors etc. The farmer talks to these people first of all. I think it has added value to involve these people in the closing process.”*

*Former farmer 1*

Moreover, these property visitors are well educated people, with a broad view and a lot of experience with farmers. A third party which is mentioned as a guide in the closing process is a representative of the milk factory. A company like Friesland Campina determines the milk price and makes many demands on the farmer. The farmer who mentioned this stated that this organization is a cooperation, just like Agrifirm added another farmer. That means, these are created to serve the interests of the farmers. In that respect, LTO could also be suited as guide.

*“They expect a lot from us. I think it’s a task for them. It’s a cooperation, so it’s created to serve our interests.”*

*Farmer 4*

Lastly, doctors, psychologists and social work could offer help to farmers according to some interviewees.

### 4.3.4. Interventions

The interviewees mentioned several existing interventions that could help the farmer in his decision to stop farming or which could support to the farmer during the closing process. Moreover, the interviewees offered insight into other interventions that could be successful, according to them. Opinions were divided about the effectiveness of some interventions. However, most of the interviewees had a common opinion about the interventions.

#### Existing interventions

According to some interviewees, the LTO already employs social workers, who have contact with farmers if they face problems. However, not all farmers are members of the LTO. In that case, ZOB is approached to support the farmer. The LTO has also organized themed evenings about the closing process. The Rabobank also spoke about this topic. However, some of the interviewees stated that these types of events won't be visited, because farmers could be afraid of creating gossip. Another interviewee said that these events are visited by many farmers.

*"These already exist, farmers do visit those themed evenings. Also, the Rabobank has those days. That event had many visitors."*

*Former farmer 8*

One interviewee stated that there is already more attention being paid towards the closing process. He stated that more and more stories of former farmers are published in magazines, like in the Nieuwe Oogst.

*"These stories become more and more public."*

*Former farmer 8*

The representative of the care organization said that LTO used to have a social and economic service (SEV: Sociaal Economische Voorlichting), subsidized by the government. However, he stated that the service was taken over by Flynth and the social part has now disappeared.

*"For example, LTO. It had SEV in the past. Social Economic Extension (Sociaal Economische Voorlichting). It was subsidized by the government. However, now, the service is offered by Flynth. Its only Economic Extension. The social part isn't covered anymore."*

*Care Organization*

Another existing intervention is a Facebook group for former farmers. These former farmers share thoughts, however, the effectiveness of this Facebook group is limited according to one interviewee. Namely the background stories are unknown, and the other farmers are strangers.

*"There was a Facebook group with members who participated to the 'Stoppersregeling'. We could share thoughts with other former farmers by means of that"*

*Former farmer 8*

Lastly, according to one interviewed farmer, the NVWA (Nederlandse Voedsel- en Warenautoriteit) can be approached if animals are treated badly, but a central contact point if farmers need advice is unknown according to one farmer.

*"You do have the NVWA, if animals are treated badly. I don't think, there is a central contact point"*

*Farmer 1*

### Ideas for other interventions

On the question, which other interventions could support the closing process, different ideas were given. One former farmer mentioned that the veterinarian is obligated to conduct a farm health check and if needed, a farm treatment plan. This interviewee stated that this plan could be expanded with a (mental) health check and treatment plan for the farmer. He noted, however, that these veterinarians are not educated or trained for this part, however they could be very suitable because they frequently visit the farm. However, he also stated that it depends of the veterinarians' character, if he or she is suited for this.

*"The veterinarian is obligated to perform a farm health check / a farm treatment plan. For example, with the 'Koekompas', the strengths and weaknesses of the company are explored. On the one hand, the veterinarian is not educated for social work. We were always lucky, to have very social, communicative veterinarians. So, in the context of the farm treatment plan, the health of the farmer could also be explored. He is a very suited candidate because he visits the farm regularly. On the other hand, it depends per veterinarian. One is very suited to do it, the other isn't."*

Former farmer 1

The interviewed veterinarian added that he had no social focus in his education, it was only focused on the health of animals. However, he thinks it's important to better integrate the social part in a veterinarians' education. He said you must care for the owner of the animals firstly. Namely, if the farmer feels bad, this might work through into the care for his animals.

*"The only thing we are trained in, is to cure a sick animal. I think it would be good, to care for the person who keeps the animals."*

Veterinarian

Secondly, some interviewees stated former farmers could share their experiences with other farmers who have closed, or are considering closing their farming. One of the interviewees said that this intervention could be effective, because people won't feel alone anymore. Another former farmer added that this intervention will work, because better advice can be given if people talk from their own experience.

*"I do have the feeling, if somebody wants to tell his story about closing his farm, I could support him. Because of my own experience."*

Former farmer 7

The third intervention mentioned, was an organized evening (for example by LTO), about the closing process. Some argue that this would work, because it could help clarifying their minds and offer a broader focus. That is, these farmers need to see that there are plenty of possibilities after they stop farming. However, some interviewees stated that no farmer would come to such an evening, because they are afraid that people will gossip about them, before they had even made the decision to close their farm. This fear could be a barrier to visit an intervention like this, however much these farmers might have a need for it. These interviewees prefer an evening with a subtheme about closing a farm.

*"Many farmers are member of the LTO, if somebody gives the main lecture on closing a farm, imagine if you are seen at such an evening. In that case: Oehhhh... You would have to organize a general evening and have closing a farm as a subtheme. If you make closing a farm as the main theme... online would be better perhaps."*

Former farmer 1

## The meaning of closing a dairy farm in the Netherlands

The main theme, for example could be about new tractors, that would remove the barrier, then the farmer can discretely listen to information about 'closing the farm'. Another farmer said he likes this event, because he could listen and pick out the information he needed. He prefers this intervention in an informal setting and with the possibility for networking. He also mentioned a possibility for making an appointment with the lecturer in a one-to-one setting in case of further questions.

*"Imagine: I thought, I want to get rid of my dairy cows and I don't know how to go further. I would prefer to listen somewhere. One-to-one, I don't like that. From a broad story, I can pick out the useful things. It's informal, with a possibility for networking. For example: "you mentioned something useful", I would like to know more about it. Maybe, after this, a one-to-one meeting will work."*

*Former farmer 4*

Furthermore, an internet platform could be a means for farmers to share thoughts. However, this intervention may not be suitable for older people, and it's a bit impersonal. However, this could be seen as an advantage or disadvantage. If a farmer would stay anonymous it's an advantage. However, if someone really wants to feel connected with like-minded persons, a meeting in real life is better suited.

*"It's impersonal, however, you can collect knowledge from it. You can deepen your knowledge and see which possibilities there are. How you can fix difficulties, for example."*

*Farmer 3*

Next to this, the closing process could be easier if young farmers first work as an employee for someone else. If a young farmer sees more than only his own farm, he will get a better view of the options outside his farm.

*"That's why I always regret it, that boys that have just finished school, enter the farm of their parents directly. First, do something else! Broaden your perspective, learn to think out of the box!"*

*Former farmer 7*

The sixth intervention mentioned is the performance appraisal. Many employees have a conversation with their manager about 1. Their performances and 2. Their wellbeing ("how are you?"). Farmers don't have that, and if they do not talk in their own network, they must solve everything on their own. If farmers could talk to someone, like a coach, problems might be prevented or solved at an earlier stage. He could be paid out of the positive effect he has on the farm, according to the interviewee.

*"In this area, there are many flower bulb farms. Those are very big with a lot of work. Those companies have a coach, who steers all the activities. I think that this also would have added value for dairy farms, especially the big ones. In a big company, the coach can work fulltime, on a small farm, he could come once every 14 days for example."*

*Farmer 7*

Lastly, one interviewee said there should be a helpline for farmers to call. Another said, an agricultural psychologist would be helpful. The representative of the care organization said that property visitors like the veterinarian and animal feed advisor should visit the former farmer for a final conversation.

*"At least, one final conversation should be good for both parties, I think."*

*Care Organization*

### 4.3.5. Challenges related to guidance

The interviewees confirmed, there is a need for guidance in the closing process. However, in practice, none of the interviewed former dairy farmers were supported in this process. Only one of them stated that he was in need of guidance for himself. According to the interviewees, guidance is accompanied with several challenges. The following paragraph gives insight in these challenges.

#### 1. How can farmers be more open for guidance?

One challenge is that many farmers are not open to receive help, according to the interviewees. Many of the interviewees stated that farmers often do not acknowledge that they have a need for guidance. This could be because they don't recognize the signals or they simply don't want to admit their need for help.

*"My neighbor, his mother died. The veterinarian came to me and said: I am worried. However, how do you reach this man? If I say to him: We are worried about you, he will get angry. He would say: Mind your own business."*

*Former farmer 3*

A farmer isn't the type of person, who will go quickly or easily to a doctor. According to the Animal feed advisor, these kinds of people only go to a doctor when they face more serious physical problems, but not with mental health issues.

*"Illness as defined by those types of people, are physical issues only. However, not mentally"*

*Animal feed advisor*

So, it's hard to reach these farmers, because they are reluctant to receive any type of guidance. Thereby comes, that some care organizations have a dusty image. These farmers view them as a last resort, which creates a barrier in providing the support they need, sooner.

*"Organizations like ZOB have this name: If you don't know what to do anymore, you can call ZOB. Then, you can stop farming."*

*Care organization*

#### 2. How can guidance be offered at an earlier stage?

When a farmer is willing to accept help, the next challenge emerges. Namely, a farmer often needs to take the first step if he wants guidance not only before he closes his farm, but also after the farm is closed.

*"But in the end, farmers must take the first step by themselves"*

*Former farmer 1*

Often this happens too late, so how can we encourage farmers to search for help earlier? How can the farmers social environment help direct him to the appropriate help, at an earlier stage? The last question could be a problem. That means, if a guide were to contact a farmer, because he is informed by the farmers brother, for example, the farmer will feel that somebody close to him has betrayed him. As a result, he may no longer be open to help.

*"If you approach a care organization. And that person visits the farmer, the farmer will ask by whom the care organization was informed? Somebody in the environment of the farmer must have said: that farmer needs help. While maybe, the farmer isn't open for it yet. He might feel it as an attack."*

*Farmer 1*

Property visitors can often detect or foresee problems in an early stage, because they visit the farmer frequently. However, as one of the interviewees stated, these people do not know themselves which organizations they can contact.

*“People need to know there is an organization that can support farmers through their closing process. If my contact person falls away, then I have to find a new one.”*

*Agricultural advisor*

### **3. How can we make sure people know that guidance is available?**

Resources related to guidance are often unknown. Farmers, property visitors and others don't know who they can approach if they want help, for themselves or for others.

*“I don't know who can help us”*

*Farmer 2*

They aren't aware of a central contact point or an agricultural coach / psychologist who they can approach.

*“I don't think, there is a central contact point”.*

*Farmer 1*

The interviewed representative of the care organization said that this organization is promoted by flyers and meetings, although this doesn't work sufficiently according to him.

*“At the moment, this is our problem also. We are a bit unknown for many companies, for many persons.”*

*Care Organization*

### **4. Who is going to pay for guidance?**

Finally, a service like this costs money. According to most interviewees, farmers will not be willing, or sometimes able to pay for it, however much they might need it.

*“The financial aspect is a problem”*

*Farmer 1*

That means, someone else must pay for it. As said before, there were some care organizations, subsidized by the government in the past. Unfortunately, these services have been cut away.

*“For example, LTO. It had SEV in the past. Social Economic Extension (Sociaal Economische Voorlichting). It was subsidized by the government. However, now, the service is offered by Flynth. Its only Economic Extension. The social part isn't covered anymore.”*

*Care Organization*

Now, volunteers offer help to farmers. These volunteers are mostly pensioners with agricultural affinity. These people help farmers for a very small amount of money. They get a some education, however, they could offer more professional support if the volunteers were better trained. That would need to be funded somehow.



## 5. Discussion and conclusion

In the previous chapter, considerations, dilemmas and the need for guidance in the closing process are explored. In this chapter, the meaning of these results is explained. Firstly, by presenting the major findings of the study. Secondly, a comparison of the results with similar researches is made. Thirdly, a reflection on the findings and limitations of the study design are given. Furthermore, the societal relevance of the findings is explained, followed by recommendations for further research. A personal reflection on the execution of the research, can be found in Appendix 2.

### 5.1. Major findings of the study

The results of this research suggest that a farmer can have several reasons to stop farming. It's a complex mental process with many considerations and dilemmas on personal, social and economic level. On a personal level, a farmer could consider if he perceives enough future perspective without his farm. Furthermore he could consider if it's emotionally acceptable for him to stop farming. Lastly, he could consider what he values more: the pros and cons of being a farmer versus the pros and cons of being an employee. On a social level, he could consider if his family will accept it, if he stops farming. Next to this, he could consider the reaction of the neighborhood if he stops farming. On an economic level, a farmer could consider the financial attractiveness of closing versus continuing to farm. Moreover, he could consider if he wants to, or is able to perform certain actions to keep his farm viable for the future. Thirdly, he could consider if he makes enough money as a dairy farmer in relation with the workload he has to maintain. Finally, he needs to consider if he would grant his farm to an external successor, in the case he has no relative as a successor. Out of these considerations, various dilemmas could emerge, depending on the farmers' situation. These dilemmas can be found in the results section.

It's important to talk about the closing process because perspectives from others, could help the farmer make appropriate decisions in dealing with the closure and loss of his farm. If the farmer can't discuss this process within his own social network, he needs to search for an external resource where he can get the right support. Although there is a need for guidance in this closing process (characteristics of guidance and the guide and interventions which could be successful are enlightened), often farmers are not receptive to guidance, or seek it out too late. Most people are not aware that a service like this is available, they don't know who they can approach. Lastly, guidance cost's money and farmers cannot or will not pay (much) for it. The service no longer subsidized, so the funding of guidance is a problem currently. These challenges must be overcome to offer a comprehensive support system to dairy farmers who are faced with closing a dairy farm. The findings are important to help prevent, uncover problems and/or relieve hidden suffering among dairy farmers in the Netherlands.

### 5.2. Comparison of the results with similar researches

Literature stated that a large group of dairy farmers in the Netherlands, stop farming because they don't have a successor. In 2016, 60% of farmers aged 55 and older had a successor (CBS, 2017). Small dairy farms with less than 50 cows, had only a 28% level of succession (CBS, 2017). On larger dairy farms, with 100 cows or more, 85% of the older farmers has a successor (CBS, 2017). This research, however, showed no clear relation between the number of cows and the percentage rate of successors. It didn't display any information about the age of the farmer in relation to the percentage rate of successors either.

Gies et al. (2016) already knew that, closing a farm isn't an easy decision (Gies et al., 2016). Giving up farming as a livelihood usually means a marked changes in one's way of life and the cultural scripts organising it (Vanclay et al., 2007). The complexity of this process is confirmed by the findings. Demonstrating that farmers have many considerations to take into account, and will encounter various dilemmas on several levels which could emerge. The multidimensionality of the process has not been

explored in the way this new research has been unfolded. The systemic exploration of personal, social and economic dimensions in the farm closing process is new.

According to the literature, family farming could be one explanation for this difficulty in closing a farm. The family farm is usually passed on from generation to the next (Silvasti et al., 2014). These farmers may feel that they don't have the right to break "the great chain of being" of the farm, because it has been in the family for generations (Schnabel, 2001). The findings agree with this statement, because according to the interviewees, farmers will consider: 'Will my family accept it, if I close my farm?'. This research shows that some farmers continue to farm out of fear that closing the farm will harm relationships within family. Furthermore, these farmers continue farming because they simply don't want to disappoint their relatives. Namely because passing the farm on to a next generation is a family tradition.

A research about the socio-economic consequences of closing a sow farm tells that, a sow farmer who stops farming loses more, than just his livelihood (e.g. house, pension, pride and network) (Zeugenhoudert, 2016). This study shows that the same applies for dairy farmers who stop farming. This research also shows, that the feeling of low future prospects without their farm makes it difficult for farmers to stop farming (Zeugenhoudert, 2016). This information is in line with the dilemmas emerging out of the consideration: 'Do I have good future prospects if I close my farm?' Namely, the interviewees stated that some farmers would like to stop farming, although their personal background, age, education, etcetera, might form a barrier to actually stopping farming. For example, a farmer is afraid that he is too old to find a job, or not qualified enough after he closes his farm.

Lastly, 15% of the farmers in the Netherlands, who are on a crossroad of stopping farming, find themselves in a 'non-accepting' phase (Geerling-Eiff & Van der Meulen, 2008). Although this research does problematize this, (namely, these farmers start conversations about their problems too late, resulting in fewer possibilities to save the farm, or to develop an adequate closing plan), it gives no insight in the need for guidance in the closing process from a farmers' and property visitors' perspective.

### 5.3. Reflection on the findings and limitations of the study design

The stories of the interviewees differed per person, although there were many common aspects about the closing process. Especially relationships with family members playing a significant role. Because every interviewee had his own personal story, it is difficult to generalize the results for the whole Dutch dairy sector. Not every farmer will have the same considerations during his closing process. Moreover, not every farmer will face the same dilemmas. Situations are different, dependent on context. This could be a limitation of the research.

Although most interviewees saw the importance for guidance through this process, only one former farmer admitted his need for help. The others judged the need for guidance would be for 'someone else'. Despite, these interviewees being engaged in the agricultural sector, and therefore may have insight into the need for help, they still project this need for guidance, as a service that 'other' farmers are in need of. This message could be different if an interviewee speaks only for himself.

Furthermore, the number of interviewees could be a limitation of the research. In total, twenty people were interviewed. Sixteen farmers (current and former), and four property visitors. For qualitative research within a time table of six to eight months, this amount should be sufficient to gain enough information. However, the information is a display of twenty personal stories, which may show more variation if twenty additional people were interviewed. For example, a survey could reach more people, however an in-depth conversation isn't possible with this.

The quality of the interviewees' stories varied and were dependent on the openness and situation of the interviewee, which is another limitation of this research. Sometimes, the interview was complete within thirty minutes, without gaining much useful information. This happened for two reasons; one, the interviewee talked easy about the topic, hadn't much to tell about it, and was satisfied with his own situation. Specifically, interviewees who hadn't much formal education remained shallow in the depth of conversation. Two, the interviewee was a closed type of person, and did not offer much information, although he might have a useful story. In other situations, the researcher succeeded in having an in-dept conversation with the interviewee, about the topic. Sometimes, the interview took more than two hours and the interviewee was really emotional. The latter, these kinds of conversations were the most useful ones, however the most emotionally heavy ones at the same time.

Lastly, the interviewees were grouped on their dwelling place. It was expected persons who live in different regions in the Netherlands bring different stories. However, the results didn't show important regional differences in the stories of the interviewees. Maybe it was better to group the interviewees on age, because the results showed that the need for help is dependent of the age of the farmer for example. These results also showed that understanding of the environment is (partly) dependent of farmers' age.

### 5.4. Societal relevance of the findings

The results of the research can be used by agricultural coaches, agricultural psychologists, social workers, the government, care organizations, property visitors (animal feed advisors, agricultural advisors or veterinarians), Platform Stil Leed, organizations like LTO and cooperatives like Agrifirm. These people or organizations could use these results to create appropriate intervention programs. For example, this research found out that some dairy farmers in the Netherlands, have a need to discuss 'closing the farm' with a like-minded dairy farmer. Acting on this information, LTO could facilitate a meeting in which these people could share thoughts, experiences and ideas. If people make use the information from this research, they could have a better view on the complexity of the closing process and which interventions could be successful to support farmers as needed. In this manner, hidden suffering among dairy farmers in the Netherlands could be prevented and/or significantly reduced.

### 5.5. Recommendations for further research

There are several recommendations for further research related to this research. Firstly, this research gives insight into reasons to stop farming. However, this research didn't found out what the relation is between the reason to stop farming and the need for guidance. A farmer who is forced to stop farming, might have a higher need for guidance than a farmer who choose to stop farming because the laws and regulations deprive him the fun of being a farmer. Further research is recommended to explore this relation.

The second one relates to the variety of considerations and dilemmas farmers face in the closing process. Namely, the results show that these differ among farmers and are dependent of the context of the farmers. More research is needed to explore the relations between these considerations, dilemmas and the context of the farmer. For example, one question that could be explored is: "What is relation between the amount of generations a farm is in the family and the acceptance of the family, if a farmer stops farming?"

Moreover, as mentioned before, only one former farmer acknowledged his need for guidance in the closing process himself. The rest of the interviewees said that the ('other'), farmers have a need for guidance in this process. To gain better insight in this need for guidance, more research is needed. When conducting this research, farmers must speak about their own experience and need for guidance.

## 6. Practical recommendations

Besides the recommendations for further research, also practical recommendations concerning guidance are made. Namely, the research showed that the closing process is a complex one and there is likely a need for guidance in this process among dairy farmers. However, it also shown that farmers must overcome certain barriers to become open for help. Furthermore, several challenges related to guidance exist. To offer a better support, to the farmers who need it, several practical recommendations are made.

### 6.1. Farmers must know that the use of guidance is no shame

As mentioned before, it appears that many farmers aren't searching for help, or are often too late. Most of them aren't open for it, so they won't accept help. In many cases, farmers must search for help by themselves, so the first step lies with them. Next to this, farmers must acknowledge that they need help. That is, first they must recognize the signals and then act. How can this be made practical?

People must know that the request for guidance is not a shameful request. Their mindset must be changed. The farmers must feel that it is acceptable to receive help from an external person in complex situations, like closing a farm. It's doesn't matter that they can't solve all problems on their own. They must think that many farmers use help with this, because if it's more common, the barrier in searching help will be lowered (also for the environment of the farmer). This change in mindset can be achieved by promoting stories of farmers who used guidance. Next to this, farmers can recognize signals that they need help in the closing process, by means of extension about these signals. For example, organizations like Friesland Campina or LTO can speak about this theme during their meetings. Furthermore the image of the care organizations must be altered. Now, farmers see this organizations as a last resort leaded by soft and dusty people. Farmers might earlier approach these organizations when they see it as a coaching's agency which helps them in making the right decisions at the right moment. As this research showed, older, poorly educated and farmers with high debts could be most in the need for guidance. To reach this group, care organizations can share data with the Rabobank and the Chamber of Commerce (Kamer van Koophandel), for example.

### 6.2. People must know that guidance is available and accessible

The research showed that the existing guidance is unknown for many people. They aren't aware of a central organization, so they don't know who they can contact for assistance. One suggestion is, that several care initiatives unite themselves so they become one central organization. If it's clear which organization could offer guidance in the closing process of dairy farmers, the organization must promote itself. They can do this by advertising in magazines, promotion on Facebook, going to events like Zwarte Cross, etcetera. In this promotion, the care-organization must emphasize that their service is very low cost and free of any obligations. Lastly, the communication between property visitors, the social team of the municipality, home care organizations, the social department of the LTO and the central care organization must be aligned, so people know who they can call if these persons detect any problems on the farm.

### 6.3. Different guides in different phases are needed

The research showed that various people could play a role during different phases of the closing process. It's recommended that the close environment like family, friends and neighbors talk with the farmer if they foresee any problems or see that the farmer is stuck in his closing process. When these people can't solve this together, then it is suggested that the farmers' social environment contact the care organization. Property visitors like the veterinarian should also call this organization, if he detects the need for help. This must be done in an early stage, which is possible if the mindset about care organizations is changed. The

care organization can determine if it can help the farmer, or that more professional help is needed (like a doctor or an agricultural psychologist). Independently of which person offers guidance to the farmer, he must be really committed to the farmer and engage trust. He must take the time, be open, empathic and objective. He must not have any personal interest. Lastly, he must understand the human mind and have basic knowledge of agriculture. The care organization must offer training in this field to its guides. Property visitors must know how to deal with this need for help. It's recommended that these persons not only learn how to cure sick animals (in case of a veterinarian), but the social side and welfare of the farmer must be more integrated in their education.

### 6.4. Interventions must be low-threshold

Interventions must be easily accessible, because then the barrier to participate is lower. The interviewees gave insight into which interventions could be effective to offer guidance. Firstly, it's recommended to organize an informal convention, whereby farmers who may stop farming can share thoughts with other former farmers. Next to this, a themed evening about e.g. tractors, with a subtheme about the closing process could proceed. This evening must also be informal and with the opportunity to network with fellow agricultural partners. After the themed evening, an opportunity for one-to-one conversations must be created. This intervention can still be organized by the LTO or Rabobank, although the invitation should be extended to all farmers, as well as LTO members. The continuation of an internet platform, like the Facebook group for former farmers is recommended, so people can share thoughts and collect information anonymously. The professionalization of such a platform is highly recommended. Furthermore, it is advised that young farmers work for an employer before they commit to working on the family farm. This could ease the closing process, because it could open the door to a greater future prospective outside of the farm. Moreover, more attention to the farm closing process should be paid in agricultural education. If young farmers are aware that closing a farm is a complex process, but a future option and isn't a shame, this would ease the decision to stop farming. It is also recommended that farmers use a coach once every 2 weeks for example, to discuss their position and goals, as well as discussing their strengths and weaknesses. This person should be paid in coordination with the positive effect he has on the farm. This intervention could prevent or ease the closing process. Lastly, a closed farmer must have the right to have one final conversation with his property visitors, to close the relationship with them. These interventions should offer economic and social advice as well.

### 6.5. Guidance must be funded

It's recommended that guidance is partly funded by government. Laws and regulations, set forth by legislation have after all restricted many of the dairy farmers in the Netherlands significantly, resulting in many of them stop farming permanently. It would be fair, if the government make subsidies available for the care organizations, which help the farmers in their closing process. By means of these subsidies, the volunteers could become trained employees who are able to offer professional guidance. Next to this, cooperation's like Agrifirm and Friesland Campina should make a bigger budget available, so their representatives have more time for 'kitchen talk' with current farmers and final conversations with former farmers. After all, these organizations are created to serve the interests of the farmers, so it's their duty to support the them.

## Bibliography

- Agrimatie. (2017a). Bedrijven en dieren. *Bedrijven en dieren melkveehouderij*. Retrieved from <https://www.agrimatie.nl/SectorResultaat.aspx?subpubID=2232&sectorID=2245>
- Agrimatie. (2017b). Kosten Melkveehouderij. Retrieved from <https://www.agrimatie.nl/sectorResultaat.aspx?subpubID=2232&sectorID=2245&themaID=2272&indicatorID=2052>
- Agrimatie (Producer). (2017c, June 6). Melkveehouderij bedrijven en dieren. *Agrimatie*. Retrieved from <https://www.agrimatie.nl/SectorResultaat.aspx?subpubID=2232&sectorID=2245>
- Bergevoet, R. H. M. (2005). *Entrepreneurship of Dutch dairy farmers*. Retrieved from <http://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/wurpubs/fulltext/19289>
- Berkhout, P., Beldman, A., Bergevoet, R., Dagevos, H., Hoste, R., Poppe, K., . . . Terluin, I. (2018). *Maatschappelijke opgaven voor de agrosector*. Retrieved from Wageningen: <http://edepot.wur.nl/440523>
- Bevir, M., & Kedar, A. (2008). Concept Formation in Political Science: An Anti-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology. 6(3), 503-517.
- Brown, M. L. (1999). *Authority Relations and Trust: Social Cohesion on the Eastern Maosala Peninsula, Madagascar*. Retrieved from St. Louis, Washington, USA:
- Burnes, B. (2009). Reflections: Ethics and organizational change - Time for a return to Lewinian values. *Journal of Change Management*, 9(4), 359-381.
- Case, D. D. (1990). *The community's toolbox: The idea, methods and tools for participatory assessment, monitoring and evaluation in community forestry*. Bangkok, Thailand: Regional Wood Energy Development Programme.
- CBS. (2017, 2 May 2017). Grotere melkveebedrijven en meer melk. Retrieved from <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2017/18/grotere-melkveebedrijven-en-meer-melk>
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications.
- Colding, J., & Folke, C. (2001). *Social Taboos: "Invisible" Systems of Local Resource Management and Biological Conservation*. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3060911>
- Darnhofer, I., Bellon, S., Dedieu, B., & Milestad, R. (2010). *Adaptiveness to enhance the sustainability of farming systems*. Retrieved from [https://books.google.nl/books?id=YsdmCgAAQBAJ&pg=PA107&lpg=PA107&dq=the+ability+to+adapt+to+external+pressures+farming+ari+paloviita&source=bl&ots=NfKRnXOK\\_t&sig=6J7fFkfQw5AjqvDnVV70zpmr\\_rA&hl=nl&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjHtL7p6P3aAhXIMewKHUCSDegQ6AEIKzAA#v=onepage&q=darnhofer&f=false](https://books.google.nl/books?id=YsdmCgAAQBAJ&pg=PA107&lpg=PA107&dq=the+ability+to+adapt+to+external+pressures+farming+ari+paloviita&source=bl&ots=NfKRnXOK_t&sig=6J7fFkfQw5AjqvDnVV70zpmr_rA&hl=nl&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjHtL7p6P3aAhXIMewKHUCSDegQ6AEIKzAA#v=onepage&q=darnhofer&f=false)

- David, F. R. (2001). *Strategic management: concepts*. Retrieved from <http://www.tecnouab.com/strategic-management-concepts-13th.pdf>
- Davis, W. A. (2005). Reasons and psychological causes. *Philosophical Studies*, 122(1), 51-101.
- De Snoo, E. (2018). Fosfaatproductie onder het EU-plafond. Retrieved from <http://www.boerenbusiness.nl/mest/artikel/10877296/fosfaatproductie-onder-het-eu-plafond>
- Everaert, H., & Van Peet, A. (2006). *Kwalitatief en kwantitatief onderzoek*. Retrieved from Utrecht: file:///C:/Users/Sjors/Downloads/KG11\_huisstijl.pdf
- Geerling-Eiff, F., & Van der Meulen, H. (2008). *Bedrijfsbeëindiging in de land- en tuinbouw* Retrieved from Den Hague: <http://edepot.wur.nl/22102>
- Gies, T. J. A., Nieuwenhuizen, W., Naeff, H. S. D., Vleemingh, I., & Paulissen, M. (2016). *Landelijk gebied en Leegstand*. Retrieved from Wageningen: <https://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/wurpubs/fulltext/393440>
- Green, J., & Thorogood, N. (2018). *Qualitative methods for health research*. London: Sage.
- Groot Wassink, N. (2017). Continuïteitsperspectief rundveehouderij. Retrieved from <https://www.dladvies.nl/financieel-management/nieuws/continuïteitsperspectief-rundveehouderij/494>
- Homan, T. (2006). *Wolkenridders: Over de binnenkant van organisatieverandering*. Retrieved from Heerlen: <http://thijs-homan.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/oratie-thijs-homan-Wolkenridders.pdf>
- Klootwijk, C. W., Van Middelaar, C. E., Berentsen, P. B. M., & De boer, I. J. M. (2016). Dutch dairy farms after milk quota abolition: Economic and environmental consequences of a new manure policy. 99(10), 8384-8396. doi:10.3168/jds.2015-10781
- Maitlis, S. (2005). The social process of organizational sensemaking. 46, 21-49.
- O'connor, J. (1997). *NLP-gids voor optimaal functioneren*: Toorts B.V.
- Olsson, R. (1988). *Management for succes in modern agriculture*. Retrieved from [https://watermark.silverchair.com/15-2-3-239.pdf?token=AQECAHi208BE49Ooan9kKhW\\_Ercy7Dm3ZL\\_9Cf3qfKAc485ysgAAAaowggGmBgkqhkiG9w0BBwagggGXMIIBkwIBADCCAYwGCSqGSIb3DQEHATAeBgIghkgBZQMEAS4wEQQMjy5eRXcaHLECVfcqAgEQgIIBXaxGh9\\_4A5\\_RsdtN8T-md7w8Yje1HbVs4chx5AM8qBULZH719EFnb-Tw1BXkvTmwyuxpJxvyolwYsJ0iLS7LPY9Rf8qsFcrgaAodhNaaW160ipZ7I\\_3R01tUbPZGsjJAMFhjb8zaO85WJTapvUmU6nM0onnJHnpF9LAhO2tWIAzm8jVHfWDB-AOu8d6BPgWDDhX6EYX3Q8aldFFuL5VUWTstN341nffj0yFCcuO-M6vFO6X7Kt8QwbSQIVviS-3kZPuDSqgBdHktIizJkzw7t7RmstrJxveqJzKhoFPBHsRNYvGT\\_9jexqaxByUE0KqgOvi\\_M6WPddXHuPubkfeKO6sltM5wU4pLEm\\_jQwqW6axVchlF8E-mmsvGwF2C9RXCitOpvAo8P4IRtCd58dD9mKfJVK543D-wullZ-kZkXm400jBwPzJ1h-SpTGEX4jq9gccVic5\\_x5QgK8edA](https://watermark.silverchair.com/15-2-3-239.pdf?token=AQECAHi208BE49Ooan9kKhW_Ercy7Dm3ZL_9Cf3qfKAc485ysgAAAaowggGmBgkqhkiG9w0BBwagggGXMIIBkwIBADCCAYwGCSqGSIb3DQEHATAeBgIghkgBZQMEAS4wEQQMjy5eRXcaHLECVfcqAgEQgIIBXaxGh9_4A5_RsdtN8T-md7w8Yje1HbVs4chx5AM8qBULZH719EFnb-Tw1BXkvTmwyuxpJxvyolwYsJ0iLS7LPY9Rf8qsFcrgaAodhNaaW160ipZ7I_3R01tUbPZGsjJAMFhjb8zaO85WJTapvUmU6nM0onnJHnpF9LAhO2tWIAzm8jVHfWDB-AOu8d6BPgWDDhX6EYX3Q8aldFFuL5VUWTstN341nffj0yFCcuO-M6vFO6X7Kt8QwbSQIVviS-3kZPuDSqgBdHktIizJkzw7t7RmstrJxveqJzKhoFPBHsRNYvGT_9jexqaxByUE0KqgOvi_M6WPddXHuPubkfeKO6sltM5wU4pLEm_jQwqW6axVchlF8E-mmsvGwF2C9RXCitOpvAo8P4IRtCd58dD9mKfJVK543D-wullZ-kZkXm400jBwPzJ1h-SpTGEX4jq9gccVic5_x5QgK8edA)

## The meaning of closing a dairy farm in the Netherlands

- Orlikowski, W. J., & Baroudi, J. J. (1991). Studying Information Technology in Organizations: Research Approaches and Assumptions.
- Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. (N.D.). Consideration. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/consideration>
- Pauwels, L. (2015). *Oorzakelijke mechanismen en verklaringmodellen voor regelovertrekend gedrag*: Academia Press.
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2008). Semi-structured Interviews. Retrieved from <http://www.qualres.org/HomeSemi-3629.html>
- Russel, B. H. (1988). *Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology*. Retrieved from [https://www.bookdepository.com/Research-Methods-in-Anthropology-H.-Russell-Bernard/9780759112421?redirected=true&utm\\_medium=Google&utm\\_campaign=Base2&utm\\_source=NL&utm\\_content=Research-Methods-in-Anthropology&selectCurrency=EUR&w=AF74AU9S6UQ035A80RSG&pdg=pla-309308959119:kwd-309308959119:cmp-869901575:adg-44181578392:crv-203874853149:pid-9780759112421:dev-c&gclid=Cj0KCQjwxN\\_XBRCFARIsAlufy1YGZq6\\_ThvxtzBg6LgQybRHb6-ntBcWUz8dVXL2m2rD2U7ieXHVwxlaAmbeEALw\\_wcB](https://www.bookdepository.com/Research-Methods-in-Anthropology-H.-Russell-Bernard/9780759112421?redirected=true&utm_medium=Google&utm_campaign=Base2&utm_source=NL&utm_content=Research-Methods-in-Anthropology&selectCurrency=EUR&w=AF74AU9S6UQ035A80RSG&pdg=pla-309308959119:kwd-309308959119:cmp-869901575:adg-44181578392:crv-203874853149:pid-9780759112421:dev-c&gclid=Cj0KCQjwxN_XBRCFARIsAlufy1YGZq6_ThvxtzBg6LgQybRHb6-ntBcWUz8dVXL2m2rD2U7ieXHVwxlaAmbeEALw_wcB)
- Schnabel, P. (2001). *Waarom blijven boeren?* Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Sjors/Downloads/schnabel\_01\_waaromblijvenboerenovervoortgang.pdf
- Schoumans, O. F., Willems, J., & Van Duinhoven, G. (2008). *30 vragen en antwoorden over fosfaat in relatie tot landbouw en milieu*. Retrieved from Wageningen: [http://content.alterra.wur.nl/webdocs/internet/corporate/prodpubl/boekjesbrochures/30vragen\\_fosfaat.pdf](http://content.alterra.wur.nl/webdocs/internet/corporate/prodpubl/boekjesbrochures/30vragen_fosfaat.pdf)
- Senge, P. (1992). *De vijfde discipline - De kunst en praktijk van de lerende organisatie*.
- Silvasti, T., Vesala, K., & Laitalainen, E. (2014). Attributions And Emotional Well-Being: Giving Up Farming In Finland. 26.
- Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (1987). Moral Dilemmas and 'Ought and Ought Not'. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 17(1), 127 - 139.
- Smidt, R. A., Nieuwenhuizen, W., & Gies, T. J. A. (2014). *Vrijkomende agrarische bebouwing in het landelijk gebied*. Retrieved from <https://edepot.wur.nl/296354>
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2016, 24 April 2016). Reasons for Action: Justification, Motivation, Explanation. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reasons-just-vs-expl/>
- Staveren, A. (2007). *Zonder wrijving geen glans: leren samenwerken bij veranderen en innoveren*. University of Amsterdam.
- Stifel, D., Fafchamps, M., & Minten, B. (2007). *Taboos, agriculture and poverty*. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/c8c9/1e935b42f4c144c61d87ba5ab571e0a5b00f.pdf>



The University of Utah. (N.D.). WHAT IS INTERPRETIVE RESEARCH? Retrieved from <http://www.ipia.utah.edu/imps/html/research.html>

Tubbing, L. (2016). Hoe interviews te coderen. Retrieved from <https://deafstudeerconsultant.nl/hoe-interviews-te-coderen/>

Van IJzendoorn, M. H. (1998). De navolgbaarheid van kwalitatief onderzoek I: Methodologische uitgangspunten. *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Opvoeding, Vorming en Onderwijs*, 4(5), 9.

Van Oss, L., & Van 't Hek, J. (2011). *Onveranderbaarheid van organisaties*.

Van Wessel, M. (2018). *Conversation about perspective development of the thesis*. Wageningen University & Research. Wageningen.

Vanclay, F., Silvasti, S., & Howden, P. (2007). 'Styles, parables and scripts: diversity and conformity in Australian and Finnish agriculture'. Retrieved from <https://eprints.utas.edu.au/4337/>

Walsham, G. (1993). *Interpreting Information Systems in Organizations*. New York, USA: John Wiley & Sons.

Weick, K. E. (1995). Sensemaking in Organizations. 237.

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. 409-421.

Yanow, D., & Schwartz-Shea, P. (2006). *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*: M.E. Sharp.

Zeugenhoudery, W. (2016). *Onderzoeksrapportage keukentafelgesprekken zeugenhoudery in de gemeente Hof van Twente*. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Sjors/Downloads/2016-04-14%20Onderzoeksrapport%20Zeugenhoudery%20HvT%20DEFINITIEF%20(1).pdf

## Appendix 1. Interview guide

### Interview guide thesis, concept 3

\* Woonplaats melkveehouders & stoppers ook verwerken in onderzoek!

#### Introductie van Maureen, onderzoek en interview

- Voorstellen
  - Naam (Maureen Booijsink)
  - Leeftijd (24 jaar)
  - Achtergrond (CAH bedrijfskunde & WUR communicatie wetenschappen met APS)
  - Interesse (Interactie tussen mensen achter het agrarisch bedrijf, meer weten van de melkveesector)
- Onderzoek
  - Onderwerp (Stoppen als mogelijk taboe in de Nederlandse melkveehouderij)
  - Motivatie (Geïnteresseerd in hoe melkveeouders en hun netwerk omgaan met bedrijfsbeëindiging )
  - Doel (Menselijk verhaal boven tafel krijgen rondom stoppen van het melkveebedrijf)
- Interview
  - Tijdsduur (± 60 minuten)
  - Anonieme dataverwerking
  - Toestemming opname

#### Introductie van de geïnterviewde

1. Kunt u wat over uzelf vertellen?
  - Naam
  - Leeftijd
  - Aantal koeien
  - Aantal hectare
  - Overgenomen van familie, (hoeveel generaties)?

#### Algemene inleiding

2. Kent u melkveeouders in uw omgeving die zijn gestopt met boeren, (bijvoorbeeld n.a.v. de Stoppersregeling)?
3. Wat zijn redenen waarom (deze) boeren stoppen?
4. Wat zijn overwegingen die hierin meespelen?
5. In hoeverre wordt er over gepraat als melkveeouders gestopt zijn of willen stoppen?
6. Kunt u daar iets meer over vertellen?
  - Hoort u wel eens dat de omgeving van de boeren daar over praat?
  - Hoe merkt u dat?
  - Wie praat dan met wie?
  - Waar hebben ze het dan over?
  - Zijn er dingen m.b.t. stoppen waar ze liever niet over praten (welke)?
  - Met wie niet?
  - Waarom niet?
  - Praat de omgeving dan alleen over de boer of ook met de boer?
  - Hoe gaan deze gesprekken?
  - Heeft u zelf ervaring met deze gesprekken?
  - Kunt u daar iets meer over vertellen?

#### Potentiële gesprekspartners:

##### **Familie**

(Gezin, (groot)ouders, overige familieleden)

##### **Erfbetreders**

(Veearts, vertegenwoordiger en technische hulp)

##### **Overig**

(Buren, studie- en / of sportclubgenoten en vrienden)

##### **Medewerkers**

Eventuele opvolger

## The meaning of closing a dairy farm in the Netherlands

- Hoort u wel eens dat boeren er met anderen over praten? (Bijvoorbeeld als ze willen stoppen of gestopt zijn)
- Hoe merkt u dat?
- Met wie praat de melkveehouder dan?
- Waar heeft hij het dan over?
- Zijn er ook dingen m.b.t. stoppen waar de melkveehouder liever niet over praat (welke)?
- Met wie niet?
- Waarom niet?
- Merkt u wel eens een melkveebedrijf beëindigd was, zonder dat de omgeving hiervan op de hoogte was?
- Waardoor komt dit denkt u?
- Waarom is dit (onderwerp (niet)) lastig denkt u?
- Wat denkt u zelf als melkveehouders besluiten te stoppen?

### Persoonlijke vragen aan melkveehouder

7. *Denkt u wel eens na over stoppen?*
8. *Waarom (niet)?*
9. *Wat zijn overwegingen en doorslaggevende redenen om door te gaan of te stoppen?*
10. *Wat zou ervan vinden als u stopt?*

### Persoonlijke vragen aan stopper

11. *Wat waren uw overwegingen en doorslaggevende redenen om te stoppen?*
12. *Kunt u hier iets meer over vertellen?*
13. *Hoe kijkt u op uw beslissing terug?*
14. *Hoe ervaart u uw toekomstperspectief?*

### Persoonlijke vragen aan dierenarts & voervertegenwoordiger

15. *Heeft u veel inzicht in de (financiële) gezondheid van de melkveehouder en zijn bedrijf?*
16. *Welk soort situaties komt u dan tegen?*
17. *Kunt u daar iets meer over vertellen? (Wat ziet u? / voelt u zich verantwoordelijk om te helpen?)*
18. *Hoe gaat u daar mee om? (Praat u met de boer? Schakelt u hulp in? (voor de boer / uzelf))?*

### Persoonlijke vragen aan melkveehouder & stopper & dierenarts & voervertegenwoordiger

19. In hoeverre praat u hier wel eens over?
20. Kunt u hier iets meer over vertellen?
  - Met wie spreekt u?
  - Wat bespreekt u? (Waar praat u dan over?)
  - Zijn er ook dingen m.b.t. stoppen waar u liever niet over praat?
  - Zoals wat?
  - Met wie niet?
  - Waarom niet?
  - Waarom is dit (onderwerp) (niet) lastig voor u?
  - Kunt u daar iets meer over vertellen?

#### Potentiële gesprekspartners:

##### **Familie**

(Gezin, (groot)ouders, overige familieleden)

##### **Erfbetreders**

(Veearts, vertegenwoordiger en technische hulp)

##### **Overig**

(Buren, studie- en / of sportclubgenoten en vrienden)

##### **Medewerkers**

##### **Eventuele opvolger**

### Indien het om een overgenomen familiebedrijf gaat

21. *Hoe werd er over "stoppen" gepraat in het gezin waar u vroeger bent opgegroeid?*
22. *Kunt u daar iets meer over vertellen? (Bijv. Waarom wel / niet? Effecten op nu?)*

### **Bespreekbaar maken**

23. Is het stoppen van een melkveebedrijf, een onderwerp dat bespreekbaar is?
24. Zou u willen dat het “stoppen van de melkveehouderij” beter bespreekbaar is?
  - Waarom vindt u dit (niet) belangrijk?
  - Denkt u dat andere melkveehouders hier behoefte aan hebben?
  - Waarom?
  - Hoe? (Heeft u ideeën of tips voor het voeren van een open gesprek over stoppen?)
  - Waarom zou dit werken volgens u?

### **Interventie ideeën**

25. Hoe schat u het succes in van een internet platform waarop (ex) melkveehouders gedachten uit kunnen wisselen over bedrijfsbeëindiging?
26. Hoe kijkt u aan tegen één op één begeleiding van de (ex) melkveehouder om bedrijfsbeëindiging beter bespreekbaar te maken?
27. Wat is uw mening over een (door een extern persoon georganiseerde en gefaciliteerde) bijeenkomst waarin een groep (ex) melkveehouders gaat praten over bedrijfsbeëindiging?
28. Hoe denkt u over het betrekken van het netwerk van de (ex) melkveehouder (zoals andere (ex) melkveehouders, de veearts, burens, studieclubgenoten, de monteur of de voeradviseur) in het beter bespreekbaar maken van het onderwerp “bedrijfsbeëindiging” in de melkveehouderij?
29. Op welke manier zou het netwerk van de (ex) melkveehouder betrokken moeten zijn in dit proces volgens u? (Waarom?)

### **Slot:**

30. Is er nog iets anders, wat ik in mijn onderzoek mee moet nemen? (Bijv. Wat & waarom?)

## Appendix 2. Personal reflection on the research

Conducting a master thesis was not always easy for me, but I have learned a lot and I am happy with the result. I found it difficult to start with an empty paper. I mean, during my Bachelor thesis at the CAH in Dronten, I conducted a research commissioned by a company (Pavo). They had a clear question and my assignment was to search for an answer on this question, so I knew what to do and I could start working immediately. However, I was also restricted in my freedom because I had to meet the requirements of the company.

During my master thesis, I didn't conduct a research commissioned by company. So, I had a lot more freedom to choose a topic which I really liked. However, this freedom was also difficult for me. I knew that I like the agricultural sector and I knew that I am interested in human interaction, although transforming these interests into a delineated research question wasn't very easy for me. I was searching a lot in the beginning. Luckily, I had proper guidance from my supervisors and they helped me when I was stuck. My supervisors gave me enough handles to work further and they really forced me think. I didn't always like that, because if I don't know what to do exactly, I feel frustrated. Usually, I am very result oriented. I just start working and I think along the way. I have no patience to think about every sentence I write and to read articles for hours (from which I can maybe use one or two sentences).

However, I do realize that critical thinking about the execution of the research beforehand, saves work in the end. Reflecting on every written sentence and searching for a proper argumentation helps to improve the quality of the research. These three lessons are the most important lessons, I have learned during the thesis process. I am grateful to my supervisors that they helped me to lift my research skills to a higher level.

Furthermore, I found it educational, but challenging to create a structured analysis of my data with a clear storyline. In first instance, I wanted to use all my collected data. However, my supervisor Margit said that only 30% of the collected data is generally used in qualitative research. My other supervisor Evelien said: "Kill your darlings". I found it difficult, because in my opinion all my collected data was useful. Together with my supervisors, I created my final research questions. Once I did that, I was more easy to decide which data I should use for the results.

Conducting the fieldwork, is what I liked the most in the execution of my research. Being on the road, visiting farms and conversations with the interviewees gave me positive energy. I like to see what I am writing about, I like to hear the stories of farmers in real life. It tells me so much more than reading a paper while sitting behind my desk. Especially, I like to use my social skills. For some interviewees, my topic was really emotional and getting them talking was a goal for me. I felt very satisfied when this succeeded, especially when they told me more than they actually wanted.

If I write a thesis in the future again, I would change two things in my way of working. Firstly, I would read more literature before I start writing. If I have a clearer picture of existing literature, I expect I have less trouble in making my thesis topic specific, because I know where I can find my sources to underpin my statements. Secondly, I would not combine the execution of a research with two other courses (grain trading course and first aid course). This was too much for me. The past 8 months, I was studying all day long inside my house. My mood was not very good, because I often felt tired and I had no energy for doing activities like sports.