

LABOUR ORGANISATION IN DUTCH THERAPY AGRICULTURE

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Abstract

Dutch farmers and horticulturists are forced to reconsider their future perspectives because of increasing competition and a changing market. Besides that, some strong social trends have their effect in the agricultural sector as well, like urban agriculture.

In the Netherlands therapy farming is a fast expanding form of broadening production. From the year 1995 ca. 300 farms faced the challenge to combine a profitable agricultural enterprise with the care and support of a group of clients. These clients may be mentally handicapped people, but also psychiatric patients, ex-convicts, ex-addicts or even stressed managers are target groups for the newly founded therapy farms.

All farms have one goal in common; they promise to offer (easy) work to 1 up to 15 clients the whole year around. Many enterprises have drastically changed their production scheme to create more manual labour. Most of them grow a mix of biological, labour intensive crops, without much mechanisation. The main problem is that the farmers have no experience with the complicated labour organisation they have to deal with. Underestimation of the necessary support/supervision and of the amount of 'more difficult' work to be done has given many farmers a lot of overtime work, while on the other hand the clients may have too little work of a lower level.

In 1999 IMAG has developed a labour budgeting system for therapy farming with the goal to give insight in the amount and level of the available work, the labour peaks, the bottle necks (in terms of too much high level work for the farmer himself) and periods of under-utilisation (not enough work for the clients).

The labour budgeting system consists of:

- Basic information of an enterprise; *Description of operations (with time of the year, task time and level of the work)*
- Planning form; *Method for calculation of the labour budget*

Compared to other labour budgeting systems the work levels added to each operation are newly developed, specifically for therapy farming. The system has been applied to two cases in practise, a chicken and a vegetable farm. The resulting labour profiles clearly show the labour demand linked to the work level and for the vegetable farm labour peaks and periods of under-utilisation can be detected in an early stage. In a future study the system will be extended to other farm types and a tactical planning system will be added.

Next to the practical issue of daily labour planning two courses for 'labour training' were developed. For the entire enterprise and for the farmer himself it is important to acquire a certificate to demonstrate his quality as a therapeutic supervisor. IMAG is now in discussion about the possibilities of a specific 'Accreditation of Prior Learning' (APL) certificate for therapy farmers. Though it may be on a low level, it is very important for the clients as well to be able to obtain a certificate for the skills they learn.

1. Introduction

1.1. Changing Times

Times are changing, also for the agricultural sector. At the beginning of the

twenty-first century Dutch farmers and horticulturists are facing a number of challenges. There is increasing competition through open trade, combined with the formation of a demand-market with very critical consumers, the development of collaborations in the agricultural chain and the arising (information) technology. Especially horticulture is seen as an unattractive sector and therefore has to deal with problems concerning labour supply, employability and the increasing flexibility of labour. Then there is also the call for more sustainability and the rules and regulations concerning environment, ecological values, nature preservation and the fit in the 'pretty scenery'. And last but not least there is the so called 'planning uncertainty', practically no Dutch farmer or grower knows whether he will be allowed to continue his enterprise on the same grounds for the next ten years.

Under the stress of the uncertainty and changes, many new initiatives arise from the farmers themselves. As a result urban agriculture is a big topic in the Netherlands (V.d. Ploeg, 1999). Many farms spread their risk by adding activities from other sectors to their primary agricultural production. Examples are the creation of a farm camping, farm restaurant, cheese making and farm shops.

The foundation of therapy farms is a similar form of integration of two very different sectors. Farms offer labour and support to a number of clients that are excluded from normal employment and depend on the social service or health care. These clients may be mentally handicapped people, but also psychiatric patients, ex-convicts, ex-addicts or even stressed managers are target groups. All clients apply for help or support to make the step into society or the labour market (V. Schaik, 1997).

Therapy farms are faced with the challenge to combine two completely different types of business, the agricultural enterprise with its own costs and benefits and the therapeutically care for the clients. The result is a very innovative but complex operational management that still has to grow to a professional level.

In 1999 three studies were performed on therapy farms in a collective research project by the Institute of Agricultural and Environmental Engineering (IMAG), the Centre for Agricultural Training - Middle Netherlands (AOC-MN), the centre for trainers-training (Hoge Woerd) and a small scale therapy farm (Bossewaard). The main goal of this project was to stimulate labour organisation and education in Dutch therapy farming and it was called '*The quality and quantity of labour in therapy farming.*' In this paper mainly the organisation of labour on a therapy farm, which was studied by IMAG, will be discussed.

1.2. Therapy Farms

A therapy farm may be defined as 'an agricultural enterprise, that integrates specific health care tasks with the primary agricultural production, creating the opportunity for one or more clients to perform therapeutically labour'.

This is a fairly new and very fast expanding development, right now there are about 300 initiatives in the Netherlands, from which 80% was started after the year 1995 (Kouwenhoven, 1997).

Besides the main point of similarity - offering therapeutically labour to clients - therapy farms may differ considerably. When the emphasis is laying on the agricultural production, only a small number of clients is offered to work on the farm (1 to 5). Other farms focus on the health care part and they attend to a larger number of clients (6 to 15), who sometimes also live on the farm.

The therapy farms (either of an agricultural or horticultural nature) may be classified as follows:

- small scale farm
- mixed farm
- specialised farm
- antroposophic farm

The antroposophic farms work according to the cycle of nature. They have already existed a long time already and have produced good results, therapeutically speaking. Newer, and therefore more interesting are the recent initiatives, also called the 'rational therapy farms', for they originate from the well known 'farmers common sense'. To serve the restricted capacities of the clients, the small scale and the mixed farms choose production methods with a lot of (simple) manual labour. Almost no mechanisation is used and this gives them the opportunity to choose for biological production methods as well.

2. Problem

All farms have one goal in common; they promise to offer (simple) work to 1 up to 15 clients the whole year around.

Many enterprises have drastically changed their production scheme to create more manual labour. The main problem is that the farmers have no experience with the complicated labour organisation they have to deal with.

In essence they have to manage and incorporate two completely different enterprises. New for them is the health care business, no matter how small it may be, but also new is the reformation of the farm into a small scale (not mechanised) biological production unit, on behalf of the restricted capacities of the clients. Both enterprises have their own budget, organisation and administration which means an extensive complication of the farmer's tasks. On top of that many farmers over-estimate the performance of their clients and under-estimate the amount of support and supervision needed. This causes real tension between the agricultural work that has to be done, without delay, and the needs of the clients.

They need work that suits their capacities and they require support and supervision. As examples of misjudgement the set up of a camping, cheese production unit or farm shop may be named. In these cases more difficult work (of a higher level) is created. When the clients are unable to perform this job (alone) the farmer has to do it himself. But he is also obliged to offer his clients 'work and support', in case he puts them to work elsewhere on the farm he has to be there as well! This type of misjudgements have given many therapy farmers a lot of overtime work.

3. Goal of the Research Project

Therapy farms have to deal with the following conditions:

- 1) the agricultural farm has to deliver a profitable production, the necessary work has to be done and the products must be of good quality
- 2) enough work has to be offered to the clients, requiring limited capacities and they have to be attended to with the needed support and supervision

A need for more insight in the labour organisation, to support the management of this tricky combination of requirements, was required. A first tool to accomplish more insight would be a labour budget in which the different forms of required labour are joined together:

- (supported) labour carried out by the clients
- support and supervision by the farmer or his wife and
- the performance of the normal agricultural work and management activities by the farmer.

This part refers to *the quantity of labour* in therapy farming.

In addition the need was growing for training courses for farmers who have no experience with therapy activities, as well as clients that start to work in agriculture for

the first time. Courses that examine *the quality of labour* in therapy farming from both sides.

4. Results

4.1. Developed Instruments

In the first place an instrument for practical support on the labour organisation was developed by IMAG. This labour budgeting system is primarily meant to give insight in the labour need of the farm and supports especially starting, expanding or changing therapy farms. Next to the amount of labour needed and also the level of this labour is important, the answer to the question; how difficult is the work? This information is needed to accomplish a tactical planning for the clients, because every person has his own capacities and limitations. A tactical planning for the farmer and his wife will follow, depending on the clients need of supervision. For a good judgement of the work fitting to the clients capacities a new system of work-levels was developed from the existing 'checklists for adults with a handicap' (Mosk e.a., 1996). Levels one to four are defined and linked to all the operations occurring on the farm. In summary the following levels are distinguished:

- 1) Simple work, to be performed by people with very limited capacities, continuous support and supervision are needed
- 2) Less simple work, to be performed by clients with some sense of responsibility and a reasonably developed motor system
- 3) Difficult work, reading and writing are necessary skills and a large degree of independence
- 4) Specialist work, which basically can only be performed by the farmer himself, or a very well trained client

With the work levels added to the operations, the complete labour budget answers two objectives. In the first place it shows the labour-need for the agricultural production. What operations have to be performed in which period and how many hours will it take. Thus the farmer may point out bottle necks in advance and his attention is drawn to possible periods of under-utilisation (not enough work for the clients). In the second place the level of the work is distinguished, indicating what work can be done by the clients and what has to be done by the farmer himself. Mainly answering the question; is there enough work for the clients and not too much for the farmer?

The labour budgeting system consists of two parts:

- Basic information of an enterprise;*Description of all operations (with time of the year, task time and level of the work)*
- Planning form;*Method for calculation of the labour budget*

Next to the practical issue of daily labour planning, two courses for 'labour training' were developed. For the entire enterprise and for the farmer himself it is important to acquire a certificate to demonstrate his quality as a therapeutic supervisor. It does not seem realistic to offer an entire educational program in school for farmers, for they cannot leave their business and invest a large amount of extra time in training. Additional training and final testing should take place at the farm itself, as much as possible. IMAG is now in discussion about the possibilities of a specific certificate for therapy farmers, like the system of certification called 'Accreditation of Prior Learning' (APL). In principle, given the restrictions in time available, we aim for an approach which allows farmers to acquire the competencies related to run a therapy farm in practice, instead of taking time off to follow a course at a training institute. Moreover, whether or not they meet the standards should be tested in practice as well. In brief: learning by

doing, and then certifying the knowledge and experience acquired in this way is what we aim for (cf. König and Verhaar, 2000). As a start the Hoge Woerd developed a course for starting therapy farmers, in which they learn how to create optimal learning situations on the farm (V.d. Schilden and Dibbits, 1999).

Though it may be on a low level, it is very important for the clients as well to be recognised through a certificate. It might stimulate their independence, a growing sense of usefulness and appreciation and have a positive therapeutic effect. Many clients have no agricultural experience when they start to work on a therapy farm. Especially when they pass through a learning, and integration period of one or two years it is important for them to obtain a certificate for their basic agricultural skills. This item was emphasised on a workshop on therapy farming. The starting point of the discussion was the success of the agricultural course for clients that is developed by the AOC. Clients really apply for training, but they also want to become a part of society by a certificate.

4.2. Case Studies

As a first case study basic information of the vegetable garden of the Bossewaard (0.8 ha) was gathered and listed, resulting in; the operations needed, the number of hours needed to perform them and the additional work levels (1 to 4). A labour budget was calculated using these data, under the presumption of certain surface areas per crop and certain sow and harvest periods. Figure 1 shows a graph of the labour profile for the whole year (in 13 periods) for the vegetable production, divided in the work levels one and two, whereas work levels three and four did not occur.

In the labour profile in figure 1 two problems become clear. There is a large labour peak in the summertime and there is a period of under-utilisation in the winter. These types of problems will always occur when small scale vegetables are grown. In warm periods in the summer, the crops will grow fast and need to be harvested all in a short period of time. At the same time new crops have to be sown or planted, meaning a lot of different operations to be performed. When working with a group of mentally handicapped clients they will need a lot of instructions and support, because they learn slowly and it takes them a long time to build up routine.

A very different labour film was made for a stable with 1000 laying hens, held according to the bio dynamic principles. Both labour profiles can be compared in figure 2, where they are plotted as graphs. It is clear that the labour profile for keeping laying hens shows a more regular pattern because the labour need is rather constant (every day approximately the same) and the work is more routine. This is the same for all types of cattle breeding. For therapy farms with a larger number of clients it is advisable to reserve at least a part of the farm for keeping live stock in order to create a constant labour supply of a routine character (little instruction and support needed) (V.d. Schilden and Vink, 1999).

5. Discussion

A special course for starting therapy farmers was developed as well as a course for clients who start to work in the agricultural sector for the first time. Both courses were given to a small group of 'students' as a pilot study. They were received very well by the farmers and clients and form a good start for development of more extensive courses. Both for the farmers as for the clients it is important to be able to gain a certificate and receive the needed education at the farm itself. In a following co-operative project special attention will be paid to the development of a certificate similar to the APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) standard for therapy farmers and a low level certificate for 'general agricultural work' for clients.

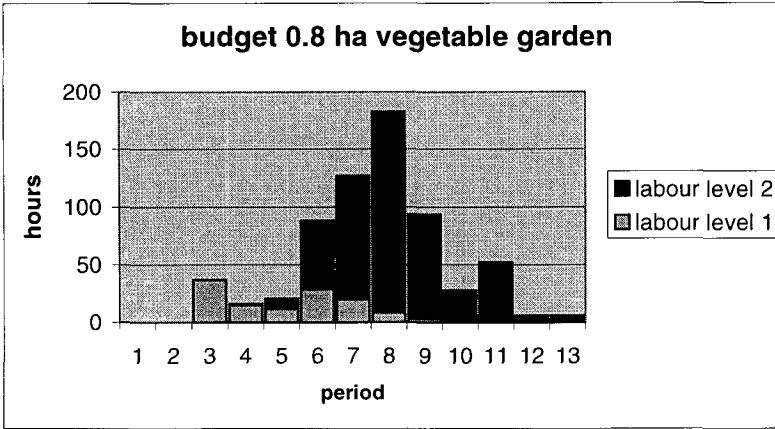
The labour budgeting system for therapy farming, developed by IMAG, has proven to be a useful instrument for the management of the complicated labour planning. In summary it gives a helpful insight in the amount and level of the available work, the

labour peaks, the bottle necks (in terms of too much high level work for the farmer himself) and periods of under-utilisation (not enough work for the clients). In a future study all problematic assets of the new therapy farms will be integrated, namely the possibilities to finance the therapeutic support, the labour organisation and the training and certification of farmers concerning their therapeutic competencies and of clients for their obtained agricultural skills. In this respect the IMAG labour budgeting system will be extended to other farm types and an extensive tactical planning system will be added in which the clients performance rate and the need for support are included.

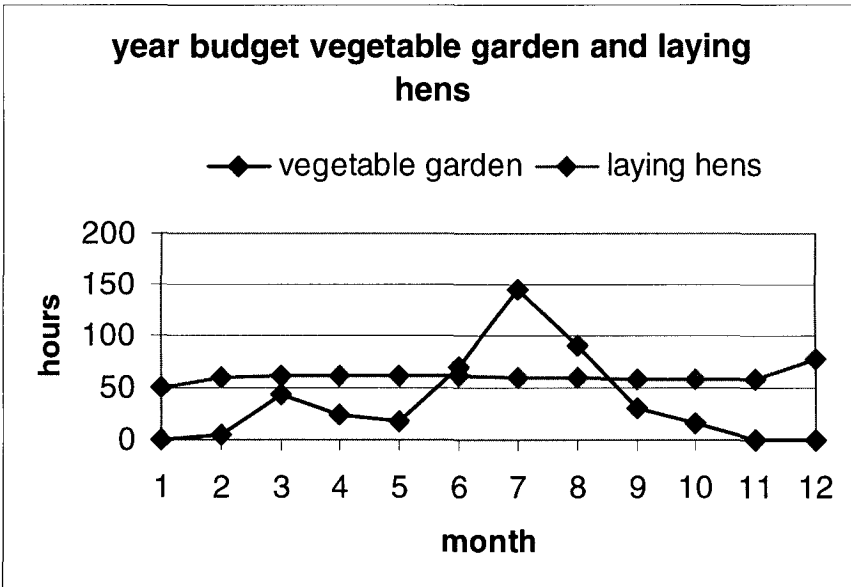
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Figures



1. Labour budget from 0.8 ha vegetable garden, divided in work levels 1 and 2 (in 13 four week periods).



2. Diagrams of the labour film of 0.8 ha vegetable garden and a stable for 1000 laying hens (in hours per month).