

Fruit for health at the playing field

Fruit trees and bushes have been planted around the Amsterdam Middenmeer-Voorland playing fields to encourage healthy eating among the sportspeople. This is the first pilot of the Fruit4Sport project.

Many Dutch people play organized sports, which makes sports facilities an excellent place for encouraging healthy eating habits and lifestyles. Managing a mini-orchard next to the pitch and harvesting the fruit can be a way of engaging sportspeople, spectators and local businesses more with fruit cultivation and healthy eating. If the harvest then ends up in sports canteens and becomes popular, this may persuade clubs and canteen staff to offer fruit as an option all year round.

The idea is being tested in Middenmeer-Voorland in East Amsterdam, 40 hectares of sports grounds set in a park with football, hockey and baseball pitches, tennis courts and an athletics track. 'We have found space for fruit trees and bushes at 11 different sites', says project manager Marc Ravesloot from Applied Plant Research (PPO), which set up the Fruit4Sport project together with the innovation network of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture Innovation.

Most of the trees and bushes were planted this

spring. Varieties were chosen that were likely to produce a reasonable crop even with low-intensity care. Other factors determining the choice of variety were the soil type and the available space.

The crops will include cooking pears, apples, walnuts, hazelnuts, cranberries, gooseberries, currants, raspberries and blackberries. There is already a path with blackberries on either side that you can pick and eat, and orchards with apple trees that will eventually form a two-metre high hedge. Firms, local residents and sports teams can apply to care for the plants, on condition that the crops end up in the sports canteen. A group has already offered its services for the first three orchards.

The Amsterdam pilot is aimed at getting a better idea of the most effective type of participation and production system, and at seeing how the concept can help improve eating habits. Various provinces and municipalities have already shown an interest in this new community concept. Info: marc.ravesloot@wur.nl