

The Dutch wasted about as much food in 2018 as in previous years

No change in food waste in 10 years

This finding comes from the Food Waste Monitor. On average, the Dutch wasted between 96 and 149 kilos of food per person in 2018. ‘Waste’ means that people did not eat the food intended for them. ‘These figures are calculated by looking at the waste in the entire supply chain, so not just consumers but also producers and supermarkets,’ explains Sanne Stroosnijder, Food Waste programme manager at Wageningen Food & Biobased Research. Consumers are still responsible for the most waste, says Stroosnijder. A quarter of the food produced for people is not consumed. ‘But we have seen consumers reduce their waste in recent years. That trend is not yet reflected in the rest

of the supply chain but it could be that it’s too early for that: more initiatives have been taken precisely since 2018 to curb wastage.’

Food waste is not only a problem in its own right, it is also bad for the climate, says Stroosnijder. ‘Take the raw materials required, the water consumption, the plastic packaging and the trucks transporting the food. Wasted food

accounts for six per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions. Cutting back on wastage is a simple way to reduce the food production footprint.’

In addition to preventing waste in the first place, it is also important to find high-grade applications for ‘unavoidable food residues’. Stroosnijder: ‘At present, about 60 per cent of food remains are incinerated, although we *are* seeing some changes. For example, the volume of food remains being turned into animal feed has increased slightly.’

Lower during lockdown

A survey among 1500 consumers carried out by Gertrude Zeinstra and colleagues at Wageningen Food & Biobased Research in partnership with the Netherlands Nutrition Centre shows that a quarter of Dutch consumers wasted less food during the Covid-19 lockdown. Zeinstra has some possible explanations (and tips for the reader). About 40 per cent of the respondents said they went grocery shopping less often during lockdown. ‘They also planned their purchases better,’ says Zeinstra. ‘Over a quarter were more likely to use a shopping list and a third said they made fewer impulse purchases. People also stocked up on less perishable products such as canned vegetables, pasta and part-baked bread.’ TL

Less waste during lockdown as people planned their shopping more

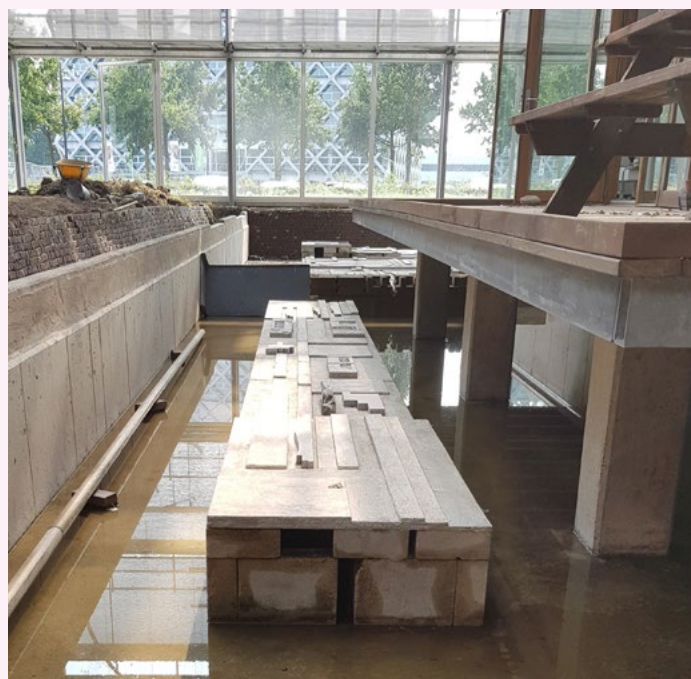


20 billion for knowledge, innovation and infrastructure

The Dutch government has reserved 20 billion euros over the next five years for boosting knowledge, innovation and infrastructure. Hoekstra and Wiebes, the ministers for Finance and Economic Affairs, announced this on Budget Day.

‘Companies, civil society and public authorities’ can submit proposals. Wiebes gave assurances that the funding would not be politicized. The government will borrow the money; this is possible because of the low (or even negative) interest on government debt. Each project must be at least 30 million euros. An independent commission will assess the costs and benefits of each proposal. The final decision will be taken by the cabinet.

The cabinet plans to start signing off proposals early next year. ‘Investments in R&D and innovation deliver most when the government, the business community and scientists work together,’ say the ministers. ^{HOP}



Lumen’s indoor gardens are going to be smartened up. This will reveal art that has long been invisible. The ponds, tiled paths and pergolas are all part of one big artwork, explains Elike Wijnheijmer (Facilities and Services). ‘The whole garden was designed in 1998 by landscape architect Hyco Verhaagen as a natural artwork, just like the Romans did with their gardens. Every tile is a work of art in itself.’ The renovation is sorely needed. Not much is still working in the way it was originally intended to. Read more about this on Resource-online Text and photo: Roelof Kleis

ERC grants for Swarts and Medema

Two Wageningen researchers are to receive 1.5 million euros in funding from the European Research Council (ERC).

Biochemist Daan Swarts has received an ERC grant to find and describe new immune systems against viruses in bacteria. Bacteria have developed different immune systems, each capable of recognizing specific virus particles. Swarts is going to look for new, hitherto unknown, systems in bacteria in order to discover new virus scanners. He also wants to see whether this will enable him to locate and repair deviations in the DNA. Swarts intends to use the Starting Grant he was awarded by the European

Research Council (ERC) to recruit three PhD students and an analyst. He may discover immune systems that can be isolated, which he can then reprogram so as to rapidly identify the target viruses. Swarts previously described an immune system that can now be used in the detection of Covid-19.

Bacteria language

Bioinformatician Marnix Medema is on the trail of the chemical language used by our microbiome, the bacteria with which we coexist. Recent research has shown that these microbial communities are supported by specialized molecules that manage the communication between bacteria and with the bacteria’s

host organism through a ‘chemical language’. Medema wants to decode this chemical language, and to find out which molecules are made by which bacteria, and how these substances contribute to the health of humans, animals and plants. Medema intends to use the new ERC grant to develop new bio-informatics software that can decode this language. He aims to identify the genes that regulate the exchange of information between the bacteria, to look for patterns in the way they are activated and deactivated, and to obtain information on the chemical structure of the molecules in question. ^{AS}