

Scientists at Wageningen's weekly market

It was kind of a wild idea: wouldn't it be fun for a group of researchers to visit the market and talk to local residents? To tell them what WUR is doing at the moment and ask them if they have any questions. In other words, to bridge the gap between the town and the university.

The idea was put to the test Wednesday last week, to mark the start of the academic year. Around 30 WUR researchers manned standing-height tables next to stalls on a sun-drenched day at the market.

Associate professor Sonja de Vries and PhD candidate Roseanne Minderhoud, for example, were stationed next to the poultry stall. Both study proteins — De Vries in the context of animal feed and Minderhoud for human nutrition. They let local Wageningen residents guess how much an average person needs to eat per day in peanuts, chickpeas, chicken, cheese or white fish to get enough lysine, an amino acid that the human body is unable to make.

Casper Quist, a lecturer in Biosystematics (Plant Sciences), could be found next to the flower stall. He thought it was a good idea for WUR to strengthen ties with the townspeople. He is working on this too, for example with ultra-local biodiversity tours in which people from the neighbourhood and a WUR expert explore which species can be found in a random Wageningen front garden. That



Explaining protein at the market. Sonja de Vries on the left, Roseanne Minderhoud in the centre • Photo Resource

idea got an enthusiastic reception at the market.

Real people

A little further along, behavioural scientist Ana Coiciu was finding out what 'the average Wageningen' thinks of an app that gives personal dietary advice. The chats she had with people visiting the market were an eye-opener and gave her new insights for her PhD research, she says. 'You hear what people really think here. It's quite different to the setting of a research panel.'

Jasper Scholl, a Consumption & Healthy Lifestyle, had a similar experience. Armed with a dish of Dutch waffles and headphones for an audio test, he gauged the willingness of local seniors to use a mindfulness app that would help them change their eating habits (by chewing

more attentively) and thereby improve their cognitive health. The waffles helped ensure him a steady stream of customers. 'This is the perfect opportunity for me not to base everything on the literature. I've already spoken to more seniors in the couple of hours here at the market than in the whole previous six months of my PhD,' he concludes with a laugh.

Bridging the gap

What about the locals themselves? 'How lovely the university is doing this!' say one couple. 'I'd like to see it happen more often,' replies a Renkum resident whose son studies at WUR. And: 'I didn't really know what to ask the scientist, but once we got talking it was very nice,' says an older lady.

WUR president Sjoukje Heimovaara and Wageningen's mayor Floor Vermeulen were both strolling between the WUR tables, with plenty of market visitors coming up to them for a chat. The president and mayor were both enthusiastic. 'We have long wanted to bridge the gap between the town and the campus,' says Vermeulen. 'I think today has been very successful in that regard.' ME

'YOU HEAR WHAT
PEOPLE REALLY
THINK HERE'