

## Frisians test 'holy grail'

Three Frisian tillage farmers conduct a trial for an Irish company into an innovative spraying technique. The producer claims a remarkable reduction of used chemicals.

The Agricultural partnership Schuiling from the Bildt (four farms and around 300 hectares of land) is one out of three Frisian trial farms. This spring their contractor (*ed.: Wiersma Agriworks, Brantgum*) will treat 1 hectare of seed potatoes with magnetized herbicides. The expected result is that atomized chemicals will spread and stick to the crop like magnets. In this case the drift problem – the waste of chemicals in the environment due to wind – will be solved. More protection with less chemicals, so the idea is: against lower costs. In Europe the method finds itself in a trial phase, but is already legitimized and operational in Kenya and Ethiopia. "In Africa we work with Dutch flower growers. One of them is already saving a quarter of a million Euro on chemicals", according to Gary Wickham, co-owner of Agricultural Magnetics Ltd. The Irishman visited the farm of the family Schuiling located on the Hearewei just south of Minnertsgea to explain the method. Also present was the Irish ambassador to The Netherlands John Neary, who's government financially supported the company in the start-up phase. "We chose to work with Dutch farmers, because they belong to the best of the world and are very innovative", according to Wickham. If the method works here, it will have a high promotional value. The family Schuiling loves pioneering. In the eighties they were one of the first companies growing crisp head lettuce on a large scale. In the nineties ten wind turbines were built at the farm. Again a bit later the company started with cooling, sorting and wrapping up products for themselves and colleagues. The family is curious for the Irish technology. The technology has been tested by the scientific research center PPO in Lelystad, but working with the method on Frisian clay soils accompanied by always present heavy winds is something else. The presented 25 thousand euro savings on chemicals appeals to them. "We think we found the holy grail", says Wickham. "The technology is simple and maybe therefore it encounters scepticism. The prices of pesticides are kept on high level by the cartels. The only way for farmers to escape from that is to use less. We show them how to do that with this new form of agricultural precision." Another benefit is a considerable saving of used water, a great benefit in countries with lack of water. For small farmers his company is building a portable single module. In all cases the investment would earn its money back after half a year. In The Netherlands agricultural consultant Hein-Willem Leeraar from Raerd functions as the agent for the Irish company. Earlier he also introduced growing maize under film.