

More and more similarities with foreign countries

This year the `Committee for Study trips in Foreign Countries` is organizing a study trip for the tenth year in a row to a foreign country. Choosing a country is always determined by one thing: a connection with the Dutch agricultural sector. The experiences and knowledge obtained differ from place to place.

The committee doesn't choose a country out of the blue. Cor van der Vaart, president of the committee, working for Alfa accountants and advisors, says: `Our motivation for organizing these trips is because we want Dutch advisors to get acquainted with the agricultural possibilities of a country, how governments of foreign countries approach the agricultural sector and which Dutch initiatives there are across the borders. We analyze which opportunities and threats there are for an entrepreneur, in other words: what is the climate for an entrepreneur? Especially the mix between activities of the local people and those of the Dutch are eye-catching and interesting`. Therefore, the first trip in 2005 went to Denmark, because many Dutch dairy farmers moved to Denmark. Ireland was visited in 2008 to obtain more knowledge about grazing. Last year the group of advisors went to Ukraine due to many Dutch horticultural entrepreneurs in Ukraine at the moment. The next trip will go to Normandy.

Besides the `longer` trips the committee is also organizing two-day excursions since a couple of years. `The excursions go to Brussels, Frankfurt or Luxemburg and are meant to transfer knowledge about international institutions and EU-departments to the advisors. Besides that, the two day excursions are a good opportunity to learn how Dutch organizations like LTO work in foreign countries`.

Connections and network

In most of the cases the committee communicates with the people they want to visit themselves. `Sometimes we are in direct contact with Dutch people living there, sometimes we arrange things via-via. It happened once that we needed to ask for the assistance of the company MeetIn in order to organize the trip`. The trip always arises the interest of a lot of people. Every year 20 to 25 people participate in the trip. Van der Vaart: `Some participants are active in foreign countries themselves. They help establishing companies or are in contact with colleague advisors. Others don't have a connection across the borders, but are just curious and participate. I do notice that advisors feel more and more connection with foreign work and countries. It is becoming more popular`. The other way around is the same: other countries also follow the Dutch agricultural sector. `Especially the Dutch technology is used across the borders. This is especially visible in horticulture; greenhouses and machines to process flowers most of the time come from The Netherlands. And also the Dutch breeding cattle are popular in our neighboring countries`.

Follow-up

The trips can have a positive follow-up. This is what financial expert Hein-Willem Leeraar experienced when he participated in the Ireland trip of 2008. `In the bus travelling to the next destination we passed by a field where, after inspection, maize was grown under a thin layer of transparent film. None of the 25 advisors had ever seen it before, neither had I. The purpose of it was to warm up the soil in order to be able to harvest earlier`. Leeraar found it interesting and sometime later he returned with a Frisian contractor to study the system more intensively. `Now I am importing the film and the machines needed to apply the system of which there are 7 in The Netherlands. At the moment around 100 farmers are sowing 800 hectares in Holland. It has become a part of my income, advising people about this system`. The trip to Ukraine made deep impressions on Van der Vaart: `Viewing the huge contradictions in the

country, the ruling hierarchy, the bureaucratic institutions and the political powers that play a role in daily life`.

About that trip, Justus Bijlsma, trip organizer of MeetIn, wrote the following: `In the morning we are visiting rose grower Ascania Floria. He is the biggest rose grower of Europe with greenhouses located on 50 hectares. After that we continue our trip to an old fashioned Sovjet Kolchoze. This is how most of the farms in Ukraine look like. The farm is, contrary to the places, we visited before, a mess. The stables are dirty and the machines are not maintained. The older owner of the company tells us he wants to renew, but that he needs investors. Like this there are many companies with potential where as far as the organisation is concerned a lot can be improved to achieve higher yields`. The VAB visited many of The Netherland`s neighboring countries. Next year you will start again at the top of the list with Denmark? Van der Vaart: `Yes, maybe. But we also see opportunities to visit Italy. America and Canada are also popular even though it will cost more money and effort.`.