

## Editorial

Farming systems are complicated and a broad expertise is required to study them. Hence, farming systems research is still scarce compared to research on components such as cultivation, fertilization and protection of single crops. Moreover, most farming systems research is analytic and descriptive. As a result, the crucial question of sustainability of agriculture is mostly studied on current systems and answered in negative terms. Such research does not provide a base on which to build 'our common future'! Therefore, constructive research is needed, following a methodic way of defining, elaborating, testing and improving more sustainable farming systems.

This special issue of *Netherlands Journal of Agricultural Science* offers a survey of activities in the Netherlands on this new and complicated field of research. In the keynote article (Vereijken) a methodic way is presented, as developed during 12 years of research on arable farming and outdoor vegetable growing. In this sector, region-specific prototypes have been developed (Wijnands & Vereijken), which are currently being tested and improved with regional pilot groups of farmers (Wijnands). In all other sectors the work on more sustainable farming systems is still at the prototyping stage. It concerns the environmentally safe production of flower bulbs (Raven & Stokkers), fruits (Schenk & Wertheim), nursery stock (Dolmans) and vegetables/flowers indoors (Welles). In cattle husbandry, prototypes are elaborated with environmentally safe nutrient management (Aarts, Biewinga & Van Keulen) and with integration of nature conservation (Hermans & Vereijken). In the pig and poultry sectors prototype husbandry systems are being developed that combine environmental safety and animal welfare (Den Hartog and Blokhuis & Metz, respectively).

We have chosen as authors scientists actively involved in farming systems research in a creative and coordinating role, and asked them to present the state-of-the-art in their sector, with emphasis on the methodological line they are following. We are satisfied with the result. We wish to thank the authors for their contributions and hope this issue will inspire our colleagues in other countries to start or continue building new and more sustainable farming systems.

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