



# AGRITOURISM

As a tool for a closer relationship between farmers  
& citizens.

A study of the influence of  
agritourism on the farmer's  
citizen connection from the  
farmer's perspective.

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Master Thesis



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## SUMMARY

The Netherlands has been an important global player in the agribusiness for years. However, the sector has undergone a change recent years. Because of the shrinkage of the amount of farms, fewer citizens have a linkage with the life on the farm anymore. This development creates a gap between the imagination of citizens and reality on the farm. Many farmers have the idea that the image of the agricultural sector is also largely determined by the media, whereby the recipient, due to ignorance about the sector, is unable to present a good picture of the actual agricultural sector. At the moment there is a tendency where farmers want to communicate what they do and why they do something. The actual image of the agricultural sector can be conveyed through social media but also physically by receiving guests on the farm. According to the experiential learning theory, real life experiences with agricultural activities can rectify visitors misconceptions of the agricultural systems and knowledge is remembered for longer.

Agritourism, also known as a visit to a 'working farm' where the production of agricultural products is central, can, according to various studies, improve the relationship between farmers and citizens. This research shows that a visit actually has a positive effect on the relationship between farmers and citizens. When visiting the farm, the citizen comes into contact with the farmer, but perhaps more importantly, the farmer also gets into conversation with the citizen. In this way, mutual respect is achieved sooner. However, not all Dutch citizens want a farm visit. This group of citizens will therefore not be reached by means of agritourism. This research also shows that many citizens do not feel that negative about the farmer at all and that the farmer often has a more negative view of the citizen than the other way around.

Keywords: Ignorance, farmer, citizen, agritourism, rural tourism



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# 1. Introduction to the topic

The Netherlands has been an important global player in the agribusiness for years. The Netherlands is the second largest agricultural exporter; only the United States export more agricultural goods (Dolman et al., 2019). In 2018, the Netherlands will have earned approximately 45 billion euros from the export of agricultural goods. This also makes it an important sector for the Dutch economy. However, the sector has undergone a change in recent years. The number of farms has decreased from 410,000 farms in 1950 to 55,000 in 2017 (CBS, 2019). A few decades ago, almost everybody has a linkage with a farmer in their family, their parents, uncle or grandparents are running a farm. Because of the shrinkage of many farms, fewer citizens have a linkage with the life on the farm anymore. Citizens have often the idea that animals were held in a nostalgic and old-fashioned way, but the reality is very different. Very large scale on efficiency-tuned factory farms are the mainstream in current farming and the main purpose is producing animal products for a relatively low cost. The gap between the imaginations of citizens and the real life on the farm widens. According to Meerburg and Neuteboom (2010) the public debate and media-derived stories drive them even more apart. For example, the public debate about animal welfare, a lot of citizens are concerned about animal welfare but those same citizens do not take the real conditions of farming sufficiently into account.

This changed relationship between farmers and citizens is also confirmed by multiple authors (Kierkels et al., 2012; Barbieri, 2019). Kierkels et al. (2012) also links declining connections between farmers and citizens with a possible solution: multifunctional agriculture. Multifunctional agriculture is a term for farms who connect their agricultural production and environment with providing services to society (Kierkels et al., 2012). Multifunctional agriculture is a very broad concept and it involves, for example, a farm shop, care farm, daycare for children, a camping, or other touristic offers in combination with farming (Kierkels et al., 2012). In this research project, the focus will be on one kind of multifunctional farms, namely those who combine farming with touristic services, also dubbed as 'agritourism'.

Agritourism is broadly defined as visiting a working agricultural setting, in other words, a farm where the production of agricultural products is still the main source of income (Barbieri, 2019). The provision of agritourism can have many economic and non-economic benefits for farmers, visitors and communities through including recreation and leisure activities for tourists (Khanal et al. 2020). Economic benefits can be seen as an additional source of income for the farmer. According to Arroyo (2012), agritourism can be a proper alternative to enhance income and sustainability of farms when they have difficulty generating income. Besides economic benefits, agritourism can also have other benefits. In this way, a visit to a farm can provide more insight into modern agricultural production techniques and bring farmers and citizens in touch with each other.

In this research, a distinction is made between farmers and citizens. When reference is made in this study to farmers, this means: All agricultural entrepreneurs in the Netherlands. With citizens we mean: A resident of the Netherlands. In addition, a farmer is also a resident of the Netherlands and a farmer is merely an exercise in a profession. These definitions will be discussed further on in this study.

## **1.1 Societal relevance**

Over the past few years, many farmers feel that they are under pressure. As a result, there have been appearances of farmers going into the city to protest. The farmers feel that they are not taken seriously and that they are not heard by both the media and politics. In addition, various rules and legislation have been implemented that make it difficult to run a profitable agricultural business in the future. Much of the Dutch citizens and politicians have other goals, such as environmental standards, animal welfare and the prevention of animal diseases. The agricultural sector in the Netherlands does not always fit in well with these goals.

For farmers, more efficiency at the farm is required to meet the growing demand for farm-related products and to provide a sufficient source of income to the farmer. At the same time, the production system of factory farms is criticised in the public debate for example, because of ethical concerns (Clark et al., 2016). In these ethical concerns also a whiff of nostalgia can be observed, which does not take the real conditions of farming sufficiently into account. Despite their concern, the public seems to have a rather minimal understanding of modern farming practices and the impact on animal welfare (Harper & Henson, 2001). As a result, the dissonances between citizens and farmers are hardly reduced or even widen (Clark et al., 2016).

According to Meerburg and Neuteboom (2010) the public debate about modern farming methods is filled with erroneous arguments, which could endanger the agricultural sector in the Netherlands. The societal debate pushes the agricultural sector in the Netherlands into a direction of sustainable and organic production while at the same time cheaper foreign-produced food is available and also consumed. Partly this is due to less strict regulations on animal welfare and food safety abroad. The attitude of the citizens and consumers is, therefore, rather ambivalent. This reduces the competitive edge of Dutch farmers and therefore more and more farmers are forced to quit farming (Meerburg & Neuteboom, 2010). A more fair public debate about and understanding of agricultural activities without unseemly nostalgic emotions might carve a path toward more feasible and sustainable agriculture in the Netherlands (Meerburg & Neuteboom, 2010).

Agritourism might contribute to this better understanding and could make connections between farmers and citizens (Kierkels et al, 2012). By providing agritourism, not only citizens come into contact with the agricultural sector, but farmers also come into contact with citizens. Through this contact farmers can also get out of their so-called 'farmer's bubble' and better understand the views and opinions of citizens.

## **1.2 Scientific relevance**

Family farms strive to boost and diversify their income through agritourism and an increasing part of people are seeking rural experiences (Lane, 2009). This development led to a steady growth of agritourism. Despite this growth, the knowledge about the impact of agritourism is only very recently emerging and still rather incomplete (Barbieri, 2019).

There are some studies focussing on the relationship between agritourism and community wellbeing (Naidoo & Sharpley, 2016), or on marketing strategies (Embacher, 1994) and on

multifunctional agriculture (Kierkels et al., 2012). But there are also still topics in relationship to agritourism which did not get sufficient attention. Barbieri (2019) confirms the existence of such a knowledge gap in the field of agritourism. One question that is not answered in the literature, according to Barbieri (2019), is the question: *“How can agritourism farms maximize their privileged space to negotiate societal growing dissonances emanated from the rural-urban gap?”*

In her view, there is an increasing gap between citizens and farmers and alleviating problems emanated from this gap might benefit both producers and consumers (Barbieri, 2019).

The rather scarce literature on agritourism mainly focusses on other countries such as e.g. Austria (Embacher, 1994) and Mauritius (Naidoo & Sharpley, 2016), but conditions in these countries differ substantially from those in the Netherlands. We could not find any good study on agritourism in the Netherlands, which motivated us to focus specifically on the Netherlands.

### **1.3 Research objective and research question**

Even though, quite a bit has been written about agritourism and the growing dissonances between farmers and citizens from various disciplinary perspectives. Inspired by the work of Barbieri (2019), this research project will focus on the underlying thoughts and intentions of the agritourism providers in relation to narrowing the gap between citizens and farmers. Due to practical limitations such as resources, time schedule and scope of the research it will, however, be infeasible to fully close this knowledge gap.

Another important note on the circumstances in which this research has been conducted is that it was overwhelmed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Because of this pandemic, it was not possible for Dutch citizens to visit a farm and therefore it was not possible to interrogate visitors. However, providers of agritourism were, nevertheless, willing to cooperate and therefore for the moment we had to focus on the provider side of agritourism. In addition to some farmers, i.e. providers of agritourism, experts were also asked a number of questions. After the conducted interviews what it is possible to answer the following sub-questions.

The main research question will be:

*“How does visiting an agritourism farm contribute to the relationship between citizens and farmers from the perspective of farmers”.*

This main research question can be subdivided into the following sub-questions.

1. How do farmers experience the relationship with Dutch citizens
2. How see farmers the role and contribution of the (social) media?
3. Are there certain elements of agritourism that outweigh others?
4. How do farmers see the future of the agricultural sector in the Netherlands?
5. Can bring a visit to a farm, farmers and citizens closer together and make the sector more sustainable for the future?



## 2. Literature review

In this chapter, the agricultural sector in the Netherlands, the relationship between farmer and citizen, the role of media and the concept of agritourism will be discussed. This will be done based on scientific theories and influential scientists.

### 2.1 The agricultural sector in the Netherlands

The significance and position of livestock farming in Western societies has changed significantly in recent decades. Cattle farms intensified and automated, while the number of livestock farmers decreased. Specifically for the Netherlands, moreover, our country is highly urbanised, with the result that fewer and fewer people have experience and knowledge of livestock farming (Clark et al., 2016). Central statistical office (2019) in the Netherlands confirmed that the number of farms has decreased over the last decades but that the number of animals per farm has increased sharply. As a result of these developments, livestock farming is under increasing social pressure and the amount of social discussions increased (Boogaard, 2010). An example of such as social discussion is farm animal welfare, farm animal welfare is under increasing pressure these days (Clark et al., 2016). More efficiency at the farm is required to meet the growing demand of farm related products. At the same time, those production systems are criticised by the public because of ethical concerns about modern farming methods.

Industrial efficient farms were viewed in general more negatively in comparison to more traditional, smaller and lower intensity farms (Clark et al., 2016). Especially the naturalness and human treatment were mentioned often as negative aspects of the modern production system. Attitudes and concerns about animal welfare vary depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of the citizens. Citizens who have more familiarity to a farm, for example, those who worked or visited a farm or has regular contact with farmers were less concerned with the modern production methods (Clark et al., 2016). This seems to confirm that a large number of misconceptions exists around animal welfare, which are likely to affect citizens' attitudes. Attitudes are predominantly based on perceived farming conditions and media derived stories rather than actual experiences (Clark et al., 2016). The image of agriculture that exists in the minds of citizens is, therefore, not always corresponding with reality (Clark et al., 2016; Vallera & Bodzin, 2016).

In addition to the social debate on animal welfare, other issues have become central to the social and political debates. Examples of other topics are a range of food scandals (horse meat, fipronil, mad cow disease), environmental impact and increased awareness of possible public health risk related to agricultural production (de Olden & Valentinov, 2019). In addition, meat has a relatively high share of greenhouse gas emissions compared to other product groups (De Valk, Hollander & Zijp, 2016). 14.5% of all greenhouse gases originate from animal production. Eating less meat is therefore beneficial for our planet. These developments together with ignorance and a lack of connection possibilities can have major consequences for the image of the agricultural sector (Boogaard, 2010; Meerburg & Neuteboom, 2010).

## 2.2 Origin of changed relationship

More often than others, young people and city dwellers doubt nature and environmental friendliness and are often less involved with farmers. Mostly elderly people who sympathize with the farmers (Clark et al. 2016). Wiskerke (2009) describes in his article three processes that have contributed to the changed relation between farmer and citizen. The processes he mentions go way back in time but can nevertheless be of added value for this research. First, disconnecting, which refers to the process of scaling up production and efficiency. According Karel (2013) the agricultural sector has evolved along with the modernisation of Western society. A modernisation that started with the industrial revolution in the 19th century and is nowadays mainly taking shape in an accelerated globalisation of the economy. By this process, the connection with consumers becomes further apart. Consumers have a different picture of food production than reality is. The second process named by Wiskerke (2009) is 'disembedding' this means that many products are no longer produced locally. On this way, products lose a certain identity. The final process is specialisation of the links in a production process, which allows the components of the production of a process separate from each other. This latter process is called 'disentwining'.

The three processes underlined by Wiskerke (2009) are reasons why the relationship between farmers and citizens has come under pressure. In recent years, however, trends are also visible whereby farmers process their rough product into a full-fledged end product, where citizens show more interest in the production process and local food (Lane, 2009). This means that the processes of 'disconnecting, disembedding and disentwining' no longer always apply.

### *Image*

The image of the agricultural sector has also changed in the Netherlands due to food and environmental issues and animal welfare, these developments have been described earlier. The image that is forming about the sector plays an increasingly important role in the relationship between farmer and citizen. Foster (2000, p.3) defines the 'image' as follows.

*"A mental representation of something (e.g. a visible object), not by direct perception but by memory or imagination; a mental picture or impression; and; a concept or representation created in the mind of the public of a particular person, institution or product – public-image."*

The images that develop in our heads are the result of a selection from an abundance of information. What that selection looks like is different for everyone. Images are mental representations of something, and are therefore much more than just reflections of reality (Nelson 2005). There are several producers who project images about the agricultural sector, Harvey (2006) distinguishes the following; the tourism industry, governments, supra-national institutions, NGOs, the media/entertainment and education.

As Buijs et al. (2013) add here in an article about frames on Dutch nature policy, it is not about the truthfulness of the stories (the frames), but about the credibility and persuasiveness that go with it. A frame is more likely to be adopted when it touches on subjects that appeal to people at the time. A hypothetical example is that a negative image of the agricultural sector is reinforced by food and environmental concerns.

## *Media*

One of the selected projectors of images by Harvey (2006) is the media. In addition, Lengenbreek et al (2006) emphasizes that NGOs and television played an important role in the social debate that arose around animal welfare. In the Netherlands there are multiple notable actors active in this debate. Two of them are The Party for the Animals (PvdD), which is a political party focussing on animal rights and Wakker Dier, an animal welfare activist organisation, focussing on campaigning for public awareness concerning animal welfare (Stevens et al. 2018). In addition to these parties, other actors are also active in the debate, such as interest groups, citizens and other political parties. Demonstrations and debates about animal welfare and media campaigns from NGOs could aggravate the tensions between certain groups of citizens and the agricultural sector (Stevens et al., 2018).

However, there are not only expressions that have a negative impact on the agricultural sector. Take, for example, the program 'Farmer seeks Woman', which attracted 3.1 million viewers in some episodes, has made an important contribution to a positive image of the farmer in the Netherlands (Hilferink et al. 2016). In addition, there are many individual farmers who use their social media account to show citizens what life on a farm is like and to tell what they see as the 'real' story of the agricultural sector. In this perspective, media can also be seen as a means that contributes in a positive sense to the farmer-citizen relationship.

Media is a means of reaching many people and spreading information and/or ideas. Through media it is possible to transfer information or an impression. This can be seen as a material image that acts on the image in our heads. These images influence each other, creating new images or adapted images. However, the images one has about another do not always represent reality (Shadid, 1994). Flows of information have changed with the rise of social media platforms. According Stevens et al. (2018) information is also constructed through the interaction between individuals such as farmers, journalists, politicians, citizens and activists. Different opinions and interests often play a role between these different individuals. Citizens want safe and sustainable food and a beautiful green rural environment, while the farmer has to compete with the globalising world market (Stevens et al. 2018). In this context, (social) media create an important public stage where people with different interest and ideas come together. The number of citizens in relation to farmers is much higher and they are generally are also more active on social media and in expressing their opinion resulting in a rather biased emphasis in the debate (Meerburg & Neuteboom, 2010).

Earlier in this study it was explained that citizens do not always know what is going on at the farm, this in combination with incorrect or unsubstantiated statements in the media often leads to the public debate being conducted with incorrect information and reputational damage for the agricultural sector (Meerburg & Neuteboom, 2010). the group of farmers or journalist active on (social) media to give a dissenting voice is often not big enough to bring out the 'real' story. The combination of ignorance and incorrect stories from the media can lead to a deterioration in the relationship between farmer and citizen. On the other hand, the media can also contribute to a closer relationship between farmer and citizen.

## 2.3 Agritourism

Diversion between farmer and citizens are increasing and the agricultural sector in the Netherlands is coming under increasing pressure. At the same time there is also a growing demand for fair food, connectedness to food production and environmental awareness (Kierkels et al., 2012). Multiple authors see agritourism as a solution for decrease societal dissonances (Clark et al., 2016; Kierkels et al, 2012; Barbieri, 2019). A farm visit could raise awareness of modern and current production practices and reduce the ignorance of many citizens.

There are different reasons why farmers choose to expand their farms with tourism-related activities. Traditionally the main income of farmers is generated by producing food and other animals related products. However, farmers increasingly look for alternatives to sustain themselves when they face difficulties to generate sufficient income through agriculture (Arroyo, 2012). Besides a new and diverse revenue model are there also other reasons why farmers change their way of working. They want to escape from the circle from expanding and produce more and more, and therefore their focus shifts from quantitative from qualitative. Others embrace the direct link with the citizens and prefer to create more awareness for fair food production (Kierkels et al., 2012). According to a survey conducted by Kierkels et al. (2012) 85% of all respondents appreciate their job more with multifunctional activities than before diversifying with those touristic activities.

### 2.3.1 Defining agritourism

Agritourism is a concept that merges elements of two different industries, namely agriculture and tourism (Wick et al., 2003). Different authors used different terms and definitions for agritourism. Schilling, Sullivan and Komar (2012) mentioned that there is no standard definition or description what agritourism really is. Multiple terms are used in the literature for example, agro-tourism, farm tourism and farm-based tourism. The following definitions are given in the literature:

- Agritourism: *“any activity in which a visitor to the farm or other agricultural setting contemplates the farm landscape or participates in an agricultural process for recreation or leisure purposes”* (Tew & Barbieri, 2012 p.216).
- Farm tourism: *“rural tourism conducted on working farms where the working environment forms part of the product from the perspective of the consumer”* (Clarke, 1999).
- Agrotourism: *“Tourism activities which are undertaken in non-urban regions by individuals whose main employment is in the primary or secondary sector of the economy”* (Lakovidou, 1997).
- Farm tourism: *“Activities and services offered to commercial clients in a working farm environment for participation, observation or education”* (Ollenburg, 2006).
- Agritourism: *“any practice developed on a working farm with the purpose of attracting visitors”* (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008)

In the latter definitions, some facets of agritourism are distinguished, facets of a typical agritourism farm:

### Working farm

The first aspect that is often mentioned in agritourism definitions is a farm, where real agricultural production takes place, and therefore, denoted as 'working farm'. So, a working farm is farm where agriculture is being practiced (Iakovidou, 1997, Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008). Agriculture is "*the rearing of animals and the production of crop plants through cultivating the soil for consumption and for sale as food and other commodities*" (Robinson, 2004). This definition helps to distinguish activities and to draw a boundary between activities that take place on the farm but are not agricultural (horse riding or food processing) and the actual agricultural activities (feeding animals or harvesting crops).

### Contact with the agricultural activity

The second aspect raised by Philip et al. (2010) is the tourist contact with the agricultural activity. The level of contact tourists have with an agricultural activity can vary. Phillip et al. (2009) separate the tourist contact into three different types, namely: direct contact, indirect contact and passive contact. In case of direct contact the agricultural activities are a tangible feature in the tourist experience. Indirect contact implies an indirect connection with agriculture via secondary activities such as a crop maze or food processing. Passive contact with an agricultural activity indicates that the tourism experience and the agricultural activity are operated independently. In this case of passive contact, only the shared farm location creates the possibility of these passive contacts.

### Authenticity of the experience

The third aspect related to the definition of agritourism is the authenticity of the experience. Goffman (1959) developed a continuum of authenticity based on front and backstage regions. In frontstage regions are actors performing for an audience. McCannel (1973) compared backregions also with preparation areas to which the general public has no access. Out of curiosity in more authentic experiences tourist have an inherent interest in these back regions especially because these regions are associated with intimacy of relations and authenticity of experiences (McCannel, 1973). In addition, Philip et al. (2010) confirm that when a tourist want to experience an authentic agricultural activity, they must go 'back-stage'.

In these tourist settings, McCannell (1973) states, even more intermediary spaces on the continuum of front to backstage can be distinguished. Tourist settings are often arranged to produce the impression that the tourist has entered the backstage even this is not fully the case. This representation of authenticity is also called 'staged authenticity' (McCannell, 1973). There are various ways in which authenticity can be staged during organised tours whereby tourist can see a small part of the back region or reproduced settings who looks like an authentic farm (Philip et al., 2010). McCannell (1973) distinguishes six different stages of authentic experiences.

The perception on what is really authentic could vary between farmer and tourist, caused by the difference in understanding of agriculture and what it entails. This raises the question in how far the staged authenticity produced by farmers also satisfies the demand of the

authenticity seeking tourists. This also coins the risk that the staged authenticity is identified as 'fake' and is destroying the authentic experience.

A total authentic experience of agriculture is only generated when the activities are practiced as they normally and without visitors would be. According Philip et al. (2010) in the majority of the cases where tourists are able to come in direct contact with authentic agriculture experiences some element of staging it can still be observed.

Based on these qualifications Philip et al (2010, p.757) suggest a typology of agritourism as displayed in Figure 1.

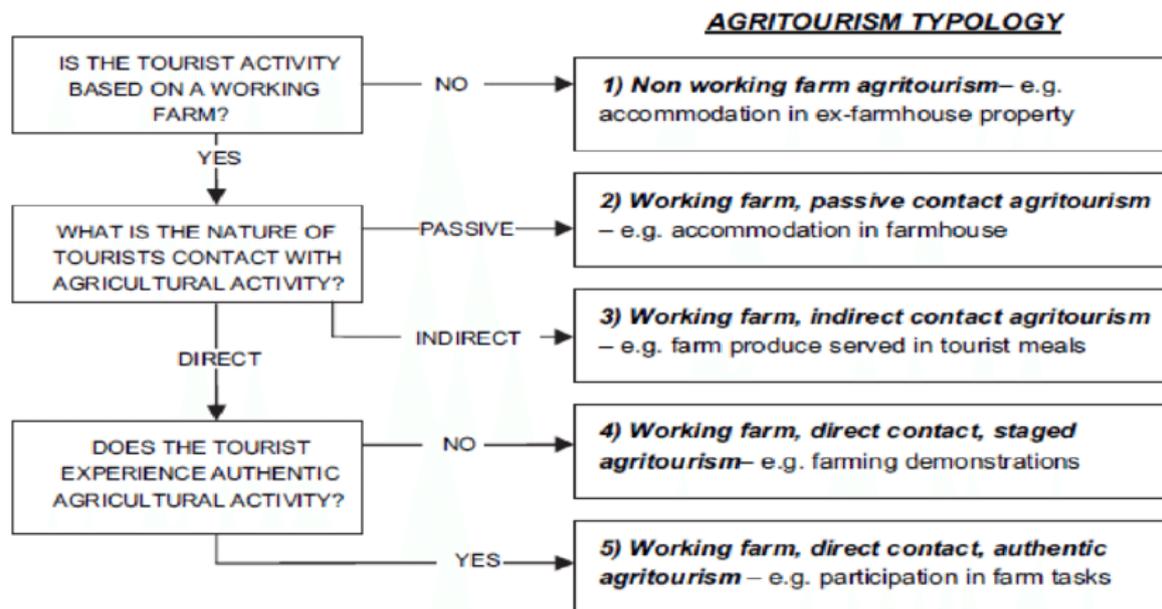


Figure 1 : typology of agritourism, Source: Philip et al (2010, p.757)

In addition, agritourism can also be differentiated based on the purposes of the tourists, such as participation, observation, education, recreation or leisure (Tew & Barbieri, 2012; and Ollenburg, 2006). Therefore in this thesis we use the following definition of agritourism: *“Activities and services offered at a working farm that attract visitors with diverse purposes”*.

All these qualifications focus mainly on the kind of experiences the tourists have on the farm, but next to that, of course, also the more material side of accommodating the tourist plays an important role. Ciolac et al. (2019) for example, imply that there are three elements of agritourism:

- Accommodation is the first element of agritourism. There needs to be a place where the tourist can spend the night. Letting the surplus of rooms existing in the farms will be a possibility for the farmer.
- The second element is food. Food in agritourism is often offered in the form of the traditional cuisine of the place and is prepared with products from their own household and farm, or is sold in a farm food-shop.

- The last and third element of the agritourism product is tourist entertainment. In this case the tourist entertainment is based on traditional activities at the farm wherein the tourist might also actively or passively participate.

## 2.4 Experimental learning theory

There are different kinds of ways to connect farmers and citizens. Earlier, the role of social media, politics and agritourism has been described. However, an actual visit to the farm has different effects than an advertising spot or a message on social media. According Baker et al. (2012) remember people knowledge longer when they have experienced it actively. David Kolb (1984) developed a model for learning that has been used by multiple suppliers of agricultural education. The model, also called experiential learning theory, contains four stages that contribute to the process of learning. The learning process is portrayed as a learning cycle where the learner assumes each of the four domains—experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting (Kolb & Kolb, 2005b). The learning cycle can begin at any of the four stages (Kolb, 1984), but in order for learning to occur, the learner must experience a process involving a method of grasping information and then transforming that information.

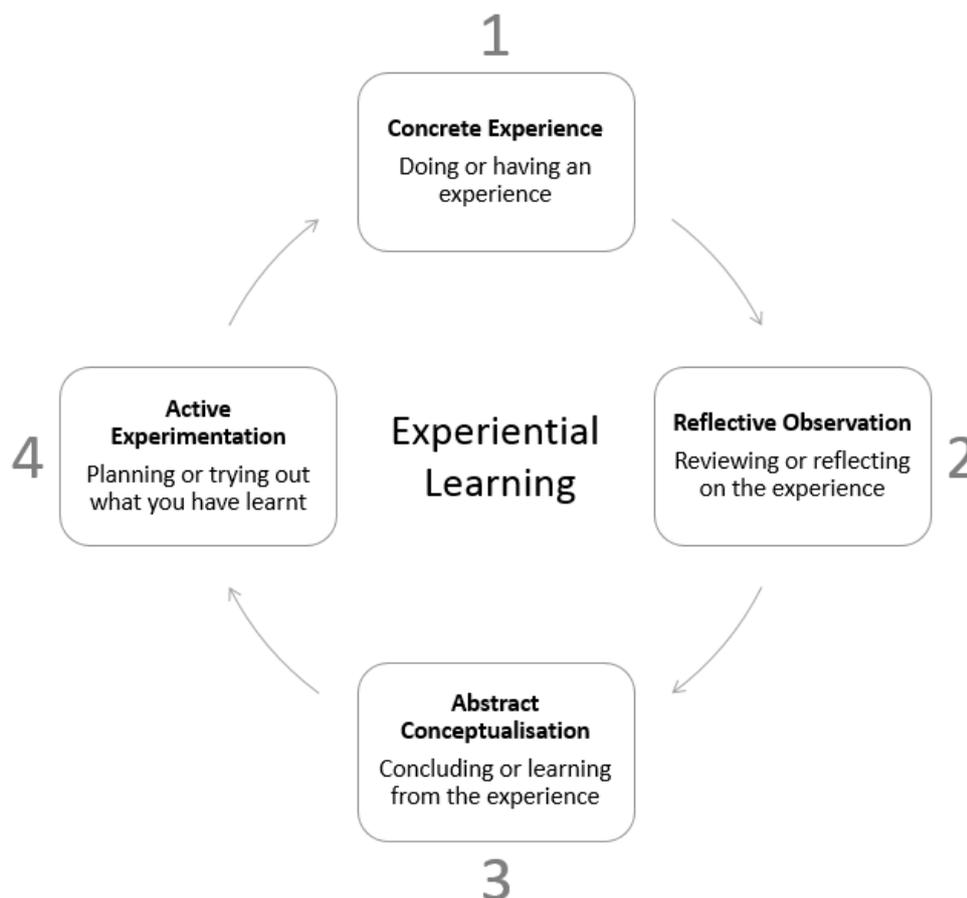


Figure 2: Experiential learning cycle, Source Kolb (1984)

The experiential learning theory of Kolb will connect learner's pre existing knowledge with new experiences (Baker et al., 2012). This theory suggests that experiences with agricultural activities can rectify visitors misconceptions of the agricultural systems (Vallera & Bodzin, 2016). Crucial here is the 'experience based learning' to adapt these misconceptions. Remote

consumption by for example (social) media is therefore not sufficient according to this model of Kolb (1984)

## 2.5 Social Constructivism

This research focuses on the concepts of farmer and citizen. Berger & Luckmann (1966) argues that concepts are also purely social constructions and that the meaning is given to the concepts by the society. Social constructionism understands the fundamental role of language and communication. The majority of social constructionists adhere to the conviction that language cannot be reflected with reality, but that language creates reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

How we experience and name reality therefore depends on the norms and values that apply in society. Therefore phenomena are socially constructed and that they would be different if constructed in another society, with different values, needs or interests. The terms farmer & citizen have been formed and shaped in the Netherlands over the years. It is even emphasised several times that there is a gap between the two parties. But to what extent are they really separate groups and other humans. If you look at it from a different perspective, farmers are also citizens and a farmer is just a profession.

## 2.5 Conceptual model

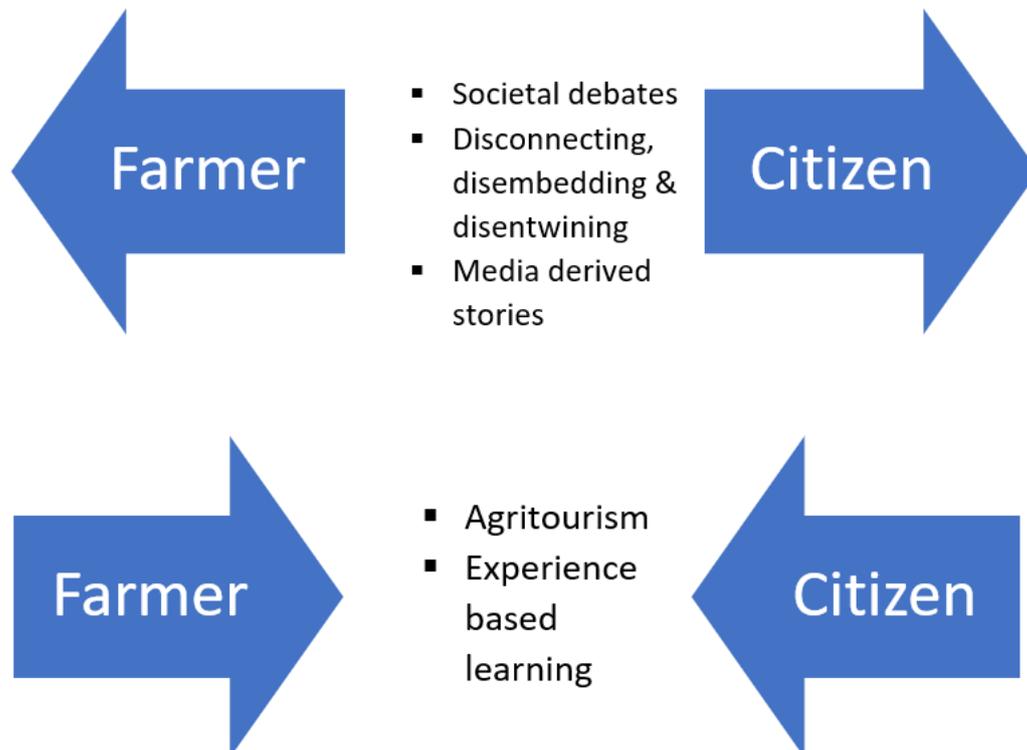


Figure 3: Conceptual Model, self-processed

### 3. Methodology and research methods

This chapter comprises research design, methods of data collection and data analysis by underpinning the research questions and objective of the research with relevant methodological work.

#### 3.1 Research design

This research focuses on the relationship between farmer and citizen and what role agritourism has within this relationship. As described in Chapter 1, the information on the impact of agritourism is still very young and often incomplete. Therefore an explanatory study suits best, the study tries to clarify whether and how the relationship between farmers and citizens change through the provision of agritourism. According to Yin (2014) is a explanatory study *“an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”*. For this reason has explanatory research the goal to understand, gaining insights and explaining the aspects of the study in a detailed manner. And in addition, this study is a qualitative study since it exemplifies to opportunity to uncover a social phenomenon and it is attempted to explore diversity in practices and perception in relation to the contribution to farmer citizen relations. This can be interesting because the agricultural sector in the Netherlands is very diverse and different forms of agritourism can also be distinguished. An organic farmer may have a different view on the farmer's relationship with the citizen than a conventional pig farmer. In addition, Philip et al (2010) distinguishes various forms of agritourism. By including various providers of agritourism in the sample, we can compare whether there is a difference between the various forms of agritourism.

The research starts off with desk research and a literature review. This was conducted to compose a conceptual framework and did help to identify suitable concepts that serving as input for the empirical part of this research. The empirical part of this research consists of several interviews with representatives of the defined population. The interviewees concern Dutch farmers engaged in agritourism and in addition some experts in the agricultural sector.

##### 3.1.1 Methods of data collection

A combination of primary and secondary data is used to secure the internal validity of the research in this study. The secondary resources, consisting of literature and document analysis, are mainly based on the (sub) research questions and are used to confirm and reinforce respondents statements. An example of secondary data used in this study are figures from the Central Bureau of Statistics and an image study carried out by Magis & de Nieuwe Oogst. The image research cannot be found online but is in the possession of the researcher. The primary sources consists of the interviews held with farmers and experts that engage in agritourism. Interviews are one of the most relevant qualitative case study methods facilitating the investigating of unique aspects of the case in deep detail (Clifford et al., 2016). Interviews can be classified as structured, semi-structured or unstructured. In this study, semi-structured interviews are chosen, which are characterized by because it corresponded to understanding of the motivations. In a semi-structured interview, flexibility is allowed and

it is possible to zoom in on a particular subject (Dunn, 2005). At a semi-structured interview an interview protocol is used to ensure that all topics are covered, but that there is still space for additions to the interview. The interviews were performed in Dutch.

### **3.2 Literature Review**

Existing literature, articles, reports and other data will provide a better understanding of the current context of farmer citizens relations and the agritourism sector. Key search terms used in this research are: 'agritourism', 'farmer citizens relation', 'image agricultural sector'. The literature review helped with properly formulating questions for the interviews and helped to conduct some background information. During the desk research, valuable articles, journals and books were not only identified by searching with key terms. Articles, journals or books often referred to other useful ones, this is also named the 'snowball effect' (Clifford et al., 2016). Further on in the process, the most appropriate and suitable literature was found through the so-called 'snowball effect'.

Some questions from the interviews are based on theories and statements of influential scientists. In this way the theories can be compared with the answers of the respondents. In addition, in general broad questions were asked, the respondent was free to give their own answer and was therefore not directed by the interviewer. As a result, many different opinions and views emerged. An example of this question was 'how do you see the future of the agricultural sector in the Netherlands'. Also, during the interview certain aspects were explored in more depth by means of follow-up questions. Interviews were already analysed during the process, so the results of earlier interviews also served as input for later interviews.

### **3.3 Grounded Theory**

The methodology of this research is based on the grounded theory of Glaser & Strauss (1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that the investigator should not allow herself to be influenced by other theories. The assumption that researchers ignoring background knowledge, however, was not tenable (Lakatos, 1978). Also Glaser and Strauss were aware of this. According to them, the investigator had a background knowledge he could use to see relevant data. This is what Glaser called and Strauss (1967) theoretical sensitivity.

From the start, data collection and analysis are aimed at developing a (substantive) theory. In order to give shape to this theory, theoretical sampling is used (Charmaz, 2006). This will be elaborated further in this chapter. In addition, continuous alternation of data collection and analysis takes place during the research. Analysis takes place after each interview and codes / results are included in the next interview. This process continues until theoretical saturation is reached.

According to Charmaz (2006), the image of the neutral researcher, from the objectivist grounded theory, is outdated. She has described constructivist grounded theory and here the researcher is in the empirical world. The researcher enters the research field with his own biographical background, interests, values, experiences and interpretative frameworks (Charmaz, 2006). In the constructivist model there can still be a most logical explanation of to formulate the process. However, there can never be an absolute explanation given the reality.

The result of grounded theory analysis is a hypothesis, open to further research (Charmaz, 2006).

### **3.3.1 Selection of respondents**

In the Netherlands there is a very large number of farmers with expanded activities on their farms. This number is too large to investigate in total. For this reason a sample of a few farmers was chosen. To begin with, different farms have been selected by means of different requirements based on the conceptualisation in the literature (Philip et al, 2010). Philip et al (2010) based his model on 3 aspects, namely a working farm, the contact with the agricultural activity and the authentic experience. During the selection of the respondents, the aim was to create as diverse a group as possible. For example, one farm has a lot of contact with the agricultural activity, another farm tells a very framed authentic story and yet another farm is no longer a real working farm. In addition, the aim was also to represent such a complete picture of the agricultural sector in the Netherlands. This sector consists of various branches, such as the dairy farming industry, arable farming and horticulture, goat and pig farming. The aim is to represent each component of the agricultural sector.

In parallel with striving for as diverse a group of respondents as possible, the theoretical sampling as described by Charmaz was followed. Theoretical sampling means that the researcher searches for persons who can give more, different or specific information about the discovered concepts. The data collection, analysis and reflection are aimed at giving content and depth to the concept or category and thus also at the developing theory about a certain phenomenon.

In addition to a few interviewed farmers, some experts were also interviewed. These experts were found by means of interesting articles on the internet or recommendations from previous respondents. Experts were chosen because they are often involved in the sector but are not in the middle of it, they are able to reflect on it from above. In conclusion, ten people were interviewed, three of which were experts and seven farmers.

### **3.3.2 Data collection**

Semi-structured interviews were performed. The aim of the interviews was to gain more insight into the motivations and opinions of Dutch farmers with regard to their relationship with citizens and receiving citizens on their farms. A semi-structured interview was chosen since this give the researcher the possibility to delve deeper into topics that came up during the conversation (Boeije, 2009). Before the interview, company descriptions and the interviewees' background where, when available, reviewed. The interviews were led according to the interview guide, which contained of a list of topics and potential questions (see Appendix A). All (sub-) research questions were covered by the interview guide.

All interviews were conducted remotely, over the phone. This was necessitated by the prevailing pandemic and lock-down. The respondents were asked for permission to record the interviews, and it was also mentioned that the recordings would only be used for this study, all respondents agreed.

In this study the researcher managed a total of ten interviews, with a length between 32 & 56 minutes. Table 1 describes all interviewees.

Name	Function	Date	Interview time (in minutes)
Bianca Straathof	Owner dairy farm / farm education	31-3-2020	37.17
Christiaan van Dalfsen	Owner of Eben Heazert (Dairy farm, bed & breakfast and meeting venue)	7-4-2020	48.00
Karel Martinet	Owner de drie Hoefijzers - cooking studio / CDA municipal councillor Hulst	10-4-2020	34.16
Erik Stegink	Owner Piggy Palace – pig farm / founder team Agro NL	14-4-2020	32.49
Bert Kots	Owner Brommels / goat farm	14-4-2020	34.15
Patricia Hooiveld	Coordinator Flevoland education / arable farming	21-4-2020	37.02
Goos Schoemaker	Owner 'de kalverweide' – dairy farm	18-5-2020	37.09
Caroline van der Plas	Founder Boer Burger Beweging (political party) and BoerBurgerTweet.	19-5-2020	40.93
Martijn van Rossum	Author trade journal Nieuwe Oogst	5-6-2020	36.04
Tienke Wouda	Editor in Chief Nieuwe oogst / specialist in multifunctional agriculture	9-6-2020	56.45

Table: 1: Overview of the respondents, source: self-processed

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The interviews have all been recorded and transcribed using the 'otranscribe' program. It is a big advantage of recording the data, since recordings guarantee the quality of the data and confirm the degree to which the initial data and the interpretations of a researcher conform to each other (Clifford et al. 2016) . In addition, by only taking notes during the interview, valuable information might be missing in the data due to time constraints. After transcribing the interviews, the interviews were coded and analysed.

The data analysis in this study is also based on the grounded theory developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967). After each interview, the interview is transcribed and encoded. The encoding was conducted using the program Atlas ti. In qualitative research coding helps to develop abstract ideas from text and transform them in interpreted data (Charmaz, 2006). The transcripts are encoded in two different ways, namely coding from the defined concepts in the literature and bottom-up coding. The transcripts were coded by making use of the defined constructs identified in the literature (see Figure 4). This type of coding identifies data from the empirical evidence which is in line with the literature according Charmaz (2006).

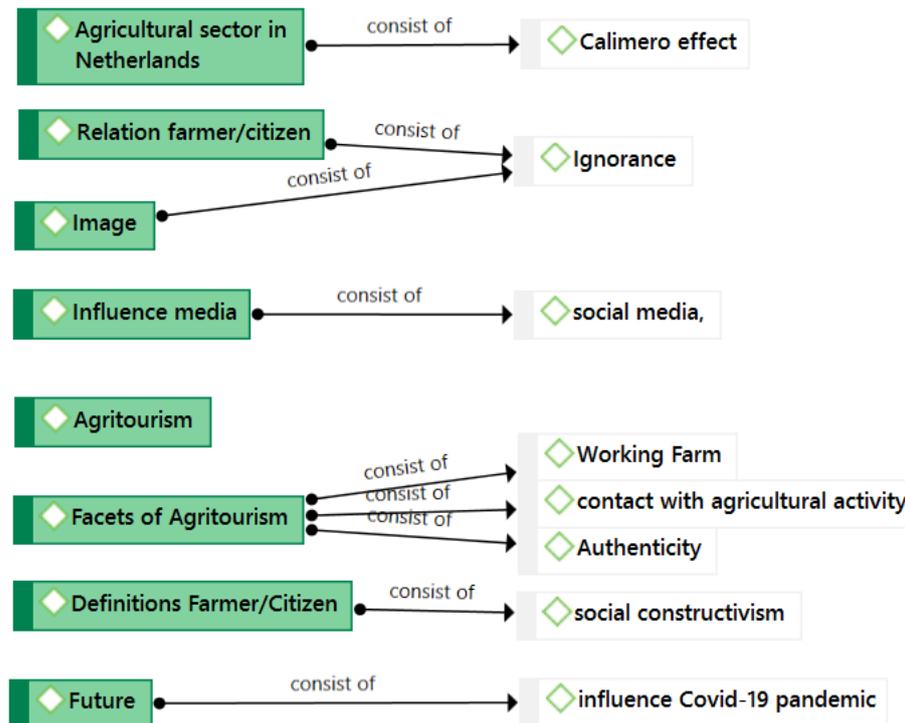


Figure 4: Groups of codes from defined concepts in literature, source: own-processed

However, not all information from the interviews matched the predefined constructs. Therefore, bottom-up coding is used as a second manner of coding. This type of coding remains open for new directions coming from the data and can be an addition to the literature (Charmaz, 2006). Figure 5 illustrates what open coding looks like. This shows a situation of open coding within the main media influence group.

R: Ja precies, een programma als boer zoekt vrouw werkt ook zeker mee aan toch wel een positief imago van boeren. Ze zien echte mensen en ze hebben zoiets van jeetje zoveel koeien of schapen of wat dan ook of met akkerbouw wat moet een boer hard werken het zijn ook altijd sympathieke mensen dat zijn boeren ook net als 99% van Nederland is sympathiek dus de boeren ook dus dat helpt zeker mee. Maar ander soortige media weetje de volkskrant, trouw, nrc, ad daar zit geen landbouwkennis vaak in de twitter moet ik ook zo vaak journalisten corrigeren want hoe kom je daar bij want dat klopt gewoon helemaal niet uhm en het gebrek aan kennis bij de algemene media dat vind ik wel zorgelijk ook zei mogen best kritisch schrijven maar vaak gebeurd dat schrijven ook uit een soort van onwetendheid en ik vind dat de landbouw de boeren hebben daar ook weer een taak want die moeten de media meer meenemen in hun verhaal en nu gebeurd dat ook wel veel meer maar toch zie je daar een soort van afgelopen jaar heb je dat heel erg gezien van dat stikstofgebeuren daar kregen boeren de schuld van laten we het even chargeren he weetje alle natuurgebieden en dat komt door de landbouw. Als je het een beetje gevolgt hebt zouden mensen dat kunnen denken nou nou die landbouw dat moet wel weg want onze natuur gaat eraan maar er zit nog zoveel meer aan vast en het is nog zoveel meer genuanceerder en het is ook maar net wat versta je onder natuur het ene plantje wel en het andere plantje niet dus het is zo ingewikkeld allemaal dus dat kun je niet op die manier framen als 1 groot probleem en dat is hetzelfde als toen uhm wakker dier en partij van de dieren met het dierenwelzijn ging in de jaren 2000 bezig waren dat zie je nu weer met het stikstofgebeuren nu moet je veel meer vertellen wat je wel doet op de boerderij ook bijvoorbeeld over natuur gesproken over insecten en zwaluwen enzo als je op het platteland bent dan stikt het van de insecten en zwaluwen. Laat dat ook zien laat zien dat je zwaluwennesten hebt op je boerderij laat zien dat als je gaat maaien dat je om de nestjes heen maait en dat je op een bepaalde manier maait en dat je akkerranden hebt ingezaaid dat moet je laten zien en uhm en weetje dan zeg ik ook dat zeggen we bij boerburgerbeweging ook landbouw is ook natuur en je hebt niet alleen dat de veluwe of de biesbosch natuur is maar ook landbouw dus ja dat moeten ze ook veel beter voor het voetlicht brengen.

31 Boer zoekt vrouw

32 lack of knowledge

33 carry out own sto...

34 Wakker Dier

35 carry out own sto...

Figure 5: example of open coding, source: own-processed

After the structured coding of all interviews it is possible to create a network of all codes within a group. This network systematically displays the correlations in relation to all codes and the links between them. On the basis of these networks with a substantiation of quotes,

the results chapter is described. Figure 6 shows a network of the different codes under the main theme of media influence.

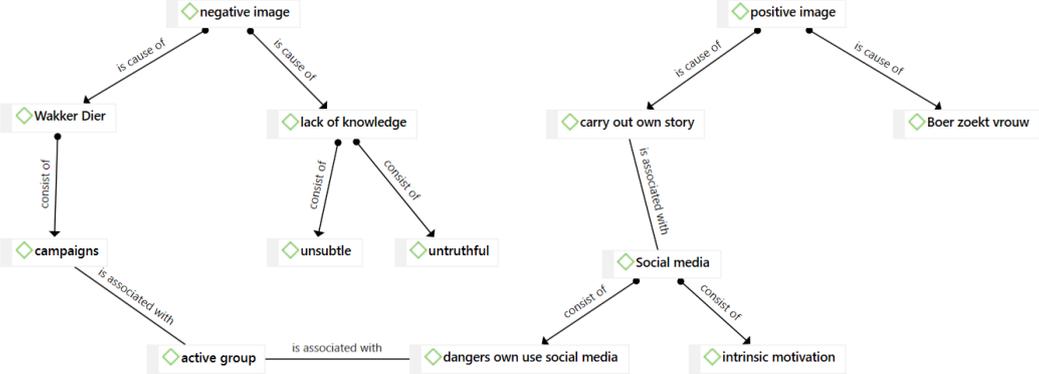


Figure 6: Network view codes influence of media, source: own-processed.

## 4. Research Results

### 4.1 Agricultural sector in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has been an important global player in the agribusiness for years. The Netherlands is the second largest agricultural exporter; only the United States export more agricultural goods (Dolman et al., 2019). But the position of livestock farming in the Netherlands has changed in recent decades. From the Second World War the focus was on producing as efficiently and as much as possible. For entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector the only way to remain profitable and keep the farm running is to grow with the sector. The sector has also grown considerably in recent years, although the number of farmers has decreased (Figure 7) the number of animals and agricultural products is still increasing (CBS, 2019).

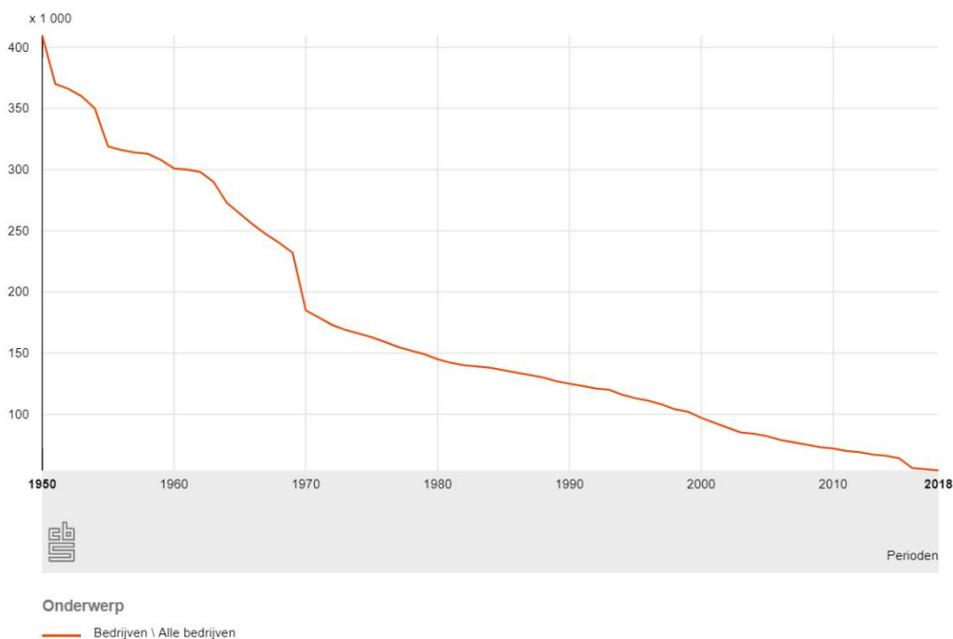


Figure: 7 - number of farms in the Netherlands, source CBS (2020)

Dutch agriculture produces surplus products for its own population. As a result, 70% of the agricultural products are exported. The requirements placed on the products are higher in the Netherlands than in some other countries, which means that the cost price is also higher. This makes it attractive for agricultural entrepreneurs to keep a lot of animals in order to keep the costs per product low. This is also referred to as globalisation. The role of globalization is discussed both in the literature (Karel, 2013) and by the respondents. One of the interviewees considers this to be an economic system on which our global economy is built that promotes that is really merely economies of scale and compete at the cost price. As a result, you get larger farms where fewer people work and all this is made possible by the economic system. One of the examples of this scaled up efficiency is visible in a milk carousel where cows can be milked on a large scale Figure 8.

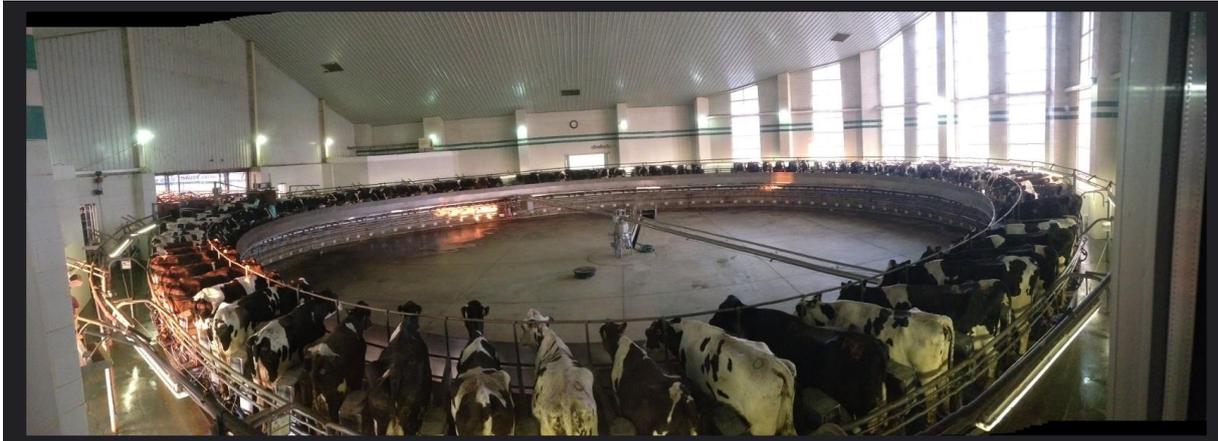


Figure 8 - a milk carousel for efficient milk production, source: self-processed

In the literature review Wiskerke (2009) describes three different processes that contributed to the changed relationship between farmer and citizen. the process of 'disconnecting' is also mentioned by some respondents as one of the reasons for the changed relationship. However, the processes of disembedding and disentwining are not directly related to the changed relationship. However, these two processes are expected to be a future trend and a way to bring citizens and farmers closer together. In the Netherlands this is also referred to as the short supply chain.

At the same time, the livestock sector was plagued by a number of infectious livestock diseases. These include foot and mouth disease, fowl pest and swine fever. As a result of these diseases, many animals had to be killed preventively. This did not benefit the image of the livestock sector. This development was appointed by de Olden & Valentinov (2019) and they stressed that this could have had a negative impact on the image of the agricultural sector. The impact of animal diseases on the perception of the agricultural sector was not mentioned by most respondents as the main reason. One respondent did, however, see animal diseases as a danger because he was not allowed to receive people on the farm due to these animal diseases.

On the contrary, the rise of the party of the animals and awake animal was seen as very essential with regard to the image of the agricultural sector. *"The interest group 'awake animal' was going to intensify campaigns and then I saw that a lot of polarized and unsophisticated information was being communicated about the agricultural sector"* according to one of the respondents. One of the farmers interviewed describes it as follows *"you have a group in the Netherlands that's just very active in painting the whole meat and animal sector black and boycotting it as if"*. According to most respondents, the presence and influence of these organisations has a negative impact on the image of the agricultural sector in the Netherlands. On the other hand, one of the respondents also thinks that there are positive aspects to the rise of these parties. In this way, the agricultural sector has become more transparent and creates an opportunity to show what the sector is actually doing.

In conclusion, we can say that the vast majority of farmers feel the pressure of the globalizing world and need to grow with modern times to remain a profitable business. However, society does not want farms to grow; aspects such as animal welfare and the environment play an

important role here. Some farmers feel like they're in a splits and have the idea that *"they're growing a little against the odds right now"*.

## 4.2 Dutch farmers in society

As shown in Figure 8 the number of farmers has decreased considerably in recent years and as a result a lot less inhabitants have a direct link or connection with a farmer. Nearly all respondents cite this as one of the main causes of the changed relationship between farmers and citizens. *"In the past, every citizen who lived in the village knew a farmer or everyone knew someone in his area, but that is no longer the case."* This most probably also explains Clark et al's theory (2016) that older people have more sympathy for farmers compared to young urbanites. It is presumably that these older people were raised on a farm or among a close relative or friend who had a farm.

Citizens, and then in particular the young city dwellers, have moved on from farmers and know far less often what it's like on a farm. But at the same time, farmers have also moved further away from the citizens. An interviewee believes that *"the biggest problem is that the farmer has no contact with the outside world"*. This was also seen as the so-called 'farmers bubble', in which farmers only have contact with other farmers and other people within the agricultural sector. Many other respondents disproved this statement, it is important to keep in mind that every farmer is also an individual and makes different choices. Therefore, one individual farmer will live more in his 'farmers bubble' than another does.

Farmers and citizens move further apart, besides that, the world is more globalizing and according an interviewee expert *"farmers sees that the whole world is changing and your sector and your way of life is getting smaller and smaller and is being understood by fewer and fewer people"*. He also calls it the Calimero complex, i.e. the feeling of people who are structurally deficient or not taken seriously because of their small size. This feeling can also be recognized in some of the statements made by the interviewed farmers *"you're just a small minority and you have an opinion of your own. But the opinion of the people in the city, who may not know about it at all, does determine how the policy and everything is made."*

In view of the previously mentioned trend in the number of declining farmers, this Calimero complex will become more and more common. Even in politics, for example, farmers do not feel they are being listened to. *"So in terms of numbers, we don't represent anything in politics either"* according one of the respondents. Many farmers do not feel sufficiently represented in national politics. Caroline van der Plas, one of the founders of the new political party, 'de boerburgerbeweging', wants to do something about this. *"If you want to truly put things on the political agenda then you have to go into politics yourself and that's why we were founded"* said Caroline. The most important goal is to represent the rural inhabitants, among the rural inhabitants are the farmers but also all the people around them who live or work for the agricultural sector for instance as a contractor or builder. The political party expects that 'rural inhabitants often do not feel connected to the urban politics of The Hague'.

The Boerburgerbeweging emphasizes that it will not become a counter movement of the party of the animals. However, the Party of the Animals has succeeded in putting animal welfare on the Dutch political agenda. *“The subject of animal welfare would never have become so influential and important if the party of animals had not been part of national politics”* according Caroline van der Plas. The Boerburgerbeweging is a novice and the future will show whether they manage to represent rural populations and include their interests on the political agenda.

**4.2.1 Ignorance**

An additional consequence of the ever declining population of farmers is that city dwellers also know less about the agricultural sector. In the literature chapter, ignorance was also seen as an important cause of the sector's deteriorating reputation. This was also a subject that was often raised during the interviews and some respondents were visibly annoyed that, in their opinion, citizens drew wrong conclusions on the basis of wrong information. Table 2 gives a small summary of citates, showing that farmers feel that citizens have too little information about agricultural practices.

<i>“There are people who know the difference between animal friendly and sustainable and animal friendly and organic and yeah who know think for example organic is also sustainable while that at all you have a larger footprint and that is not sustainable”.</i>
<i>“I often get the reaction from people that they had no idea that mainstream farmers were also so much concerned with sustainability and animal welfare”</i>
<i>“at is every man wants to do right but he's doing the wrong damn thing”</i>
<i>“I am annoyed by people who shout a lot because they have seen something on a photo or a picture and don't know how it works and then I think so then you don't even know why you made that choice”</i>

Table 2: quotes about ignorance, source: self-processed

The respondents for this survey are only a small sample. The questions about ignorance of citizens have also been investigated in other studies and questionnaires. As a follow-up to an image survey on farmers in December 2019, Vakblad de Nieuwe Oogst also carried out a survey among its members in which they were asked for their opinion on the Randstad population. This survey showed that 54.8% of the farmers questioned felt that the Randstad population knew too little about the agricultural sector.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements below about Randstadelingen?				
	Totally agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally disagree
They think only their own city/environment is important	22.2%	45.2%	29,8%	2,8%
They know little about the countryside	46.8%	47.0%	5,0%	1,1%
They have too little knowledge about the agricultural sector	54.8%	39.9%	4,1%	1,1%
They are important to our country	6.4%	58.5%	28,9%	6.2%
They are unworldly	5.7%	24.1%	63,3%	6,9%
I'd like to have more to do with them	3.2%	37,8%	47,9%	11,0%
They only think negatively about the rural areas	9.6%	31,4%	53,2%	5,7%
They place themselves above others	16.5%	50.0%	30,7%	2,8%
They are working a lot on sustainability	5.7%	27.8%	53,7%	11,9%
They emit most of the nitrogen	16.7%	49.9%	31,4%	3,9%
They care a lot about animal welfare	8.0%	47.0%	39,2%	5,7%

Figure 9 - outcome of image research by Nieuwe Oogst. Source: Nieuwe Oogst, 2020 (own translation)

It might be wondered whether it is bad that residents do not have enough knowledge about the agricultural sector. *"We don't know what a doctor or a lawyer does"* said one of the respondents. However, the difference is that the farms operate in the spatial environment and the work and activities are directly visible to the Dutch inhabitants. In addition, the agricultural sector is heavily involved in a number of social discussions, examples of which are nitrogen, animal welfare and the environment. As a result, the sector is coming under pressure and is expected to operate transparently.

The vast majority of farmers interviewed believe that much of the public debate is fuelled by a lack of awareness on the part of citizens. Often the information is obtained through media, politics or advertising commercials and not through a visit to the farm. This corroborates Clark et al's (2016) theory that images of the agricultural sector are caused by stories from the media and outside instead of real experiences. On the basis of this incomplete or unsubtle information, people make certain choices. This particularly bothers the farmers, many have no problem with someone choosing to eat organic or vegetarian, for example, as long as the reasons are based on the truth. One of the experts give the following example: *"If you ask someone in Amsterdam what is an organic farmer he will say that is a farmer with five cows, three chickens and two pigs while that is the image that people have, they think it is a fairy tale. it is not about the number, the production method is organic but people just know very little about it."* According to the same expert, the origins of this also lie to a large extent with the farmers themselves. *"The reason for this is because in recent years only that romantic picture has been presented and the sector has not communicated enough about it to the agricultural sector itself"*. That's how many of the citizens think that farm life is as depicted in the Figure 8. Reality looks different because of the globalized world, it looks more like the milk carousel in Figure 10.



Figure 10: Traditional way of milking cows, source: own processing

In besides putting 'the blame' on the citizen for ignorance, the farmer will also be able to listen more to the wishes of society. For example, according to one of the respondents, farmers should stop spreading artificial fertiliser "*a quarter of our natural gas is used up in artificial fertiliser and then you go and tell all those citizens you have to get rid of the gas and then the farmer will just go on spreading artificial fertiliser full of gas*". According to this respondent, this is not proper and the working method of the farmer will also have to change when the farmer and the citizen want to get closer to each other.

In the literature chapter it was stated that ignorance and a lack of connection points play an important role in the relationship between farmer and citizen (Boogaard, 2010; Meerburg & Neuteboom, 2010). Based on the mentioned statements in Table 2 we can conclude that ignorance also plays an important role among the respondents.

### 4.2.2 Role of media

The literature chapter named the media as one of the producers of images of the agricultural sector. Many respondents are of the opinion that information about the agricultural sector is often unsubtle and misrepresented by the media. The following statement by one of the respondents also emphasises this frustration: *“good journalism highlights both sides of the story in my experience and that doesn't happen all the time and that really bothers me.”* Many farmers feel that the media contribute to a negative image of the agricultural sector because they often spread unsubtle and sometimes untruthful stories. An example cited by one of the respondents was the campaign programme of Wakkerdier, a foundation that stands up for the rights of animals. *“Wakkerdier was going to intensify campaigns and then I saw that there was a lot of polarised and unsubtle communication about the agricultural sector”*. The reason for this is also to be found in ignorance. According to the farmers, many journalists know too little about the agricultural sector to be able to write down a story properly. According one of the respondents is *“there indeed still a lack of knowledge there, but it is all so complicated and it will only get more complicated in the future”*.

Stevens et al. (2018) emphasizes the presence of activists, NGOs, political parties defending animal rights & media campaigns conducted by these parties. These parties were also named several times by the respondents. One of the respondents distinguishes between groups in the Netherlands. One with the common citizens who don't think very negatively about the agricultural sector at all *“and you have a group in the Netherlands that is just very active to paint the whole meat and animal sector completely black and to boycott, as it were, the vegetarians and awake animal and all those parties that are actively involved in putting it in a negative position”*. Often this active group appointed by Stevens et al. (2018) shouts the loudest. This does not necessarily mean that it represents the majority in the Netherlands.

Many farmers have the idea that the media writes negatively about the agricultural sector. While there are also positive messages to be found. Hilferink et al. 2016 pointed out in his research that the programme 'Farmer seeks woman' has a positive influence on the image of the agricultural sector. All respondents certainly agreed. But still the overall picture is negative. Probably this is also due to some kind of prejudice. Every time a negative message comes out it attracts attention. At that moment you only see and notice the negative messages and the positive messages don't attract attention anymore.

In addition to the national media, according to many farmers there is also a task for the farmers themselves to ensure a good image. This can be achieved, for example, by using their own social media account and explaining what the farmer is doing and why he is doing it. In this sense it brings farmers and citizens closer together, but there are also some disadvantages to the use of social media. For example, the farmer in question must be able to make a proper assessment of which messages are or are not posted. For example, one of the respondents mentioned a moment *“on which I felt threatened just by using social media”*. Some activists in this case had posted reviews about her farm, reviews that could not be removed and this was a very annoying experience for her caused by the use of social media. Since then, this farmer's wife has been thinking carefully about which messages she does or does not post. In addition, the farmer or farmer's wife should also like to post messages on

social media. If they have no intrinsic motivation for this, it will not be carried out. Because of this it does not suit every farmer to spread messages on social media. The last comment that can be made about the use of social media by farmers is the reach. Meerburg & Neuteboom (2010) higher than the number of farmers. In this way it is difficult to reach all citizens through social media. One of the respondents also stressed the following: *"It usually does not reach a new target group. They are people who are or have been connected to your company in some way"*. However, the more individual gardeners & farmers will use social media, the more citizens will be reached and the greater the effect will be.

### 4.3 Farmer Citizen relation

In the literature review Wiskerke (2009) describes three different processes that contributed to the changed relationship between farmer and citizen. The process of 'disconnecting' is also mentioned by some respondents as one of the reasons for the changed relationship. However, the processes of disembedding and disentwining are not directly related to the changed relationship. However, these two processes are expected to be a future trend and a way to bring citizens and farmers closer together. In the Netherlands this is also referred to as the short supply chain.

Some media and literature studies call it a gap between farmers and citizens (Barbieri, 2019). Some respondents are also of the opinion that there is a gap, others claim that this gap is caused solely by the media. What exactly does this gap mean? What all respondents do agree is that farmers and citizens have moved further apart from each other, but whether you can call this a gap, it is different for each individual.

In order to narrow this 'gap' or improve the relationship between farmers and citizens, farmers will have to deal with it themselves according almost all interviewed farmers. According to some respondents farmers can *"put yourselves in a positive way shows you what you are doing"*, *"now others are telling your story and you have to tell your own story"* and *"And I think if we don't do something that affects the farmer's position"*. Caroline van der Plas, one of the respondents and initiator of the farmer citizen connection, has set up a project, 'de boerburgertweet', in which she gives farmers a platform to show what they really do and give citizens the opportunity to ask questions to the farmer. In addition to participating in this 'boerburgertweet', agrarians can also distribute information via social media or open their doors to visitors. Another way of showing the 'real' image of the agricultural sector is by opening up the farm and welcoming visitors, also called agritourism.

### 4.4 Agritourism

In recent years, a turnaround has been visible, more and more agricultural entrepreneurs are willing to open their doors or express their actions and intentions through social media. This development was also noticed by the respondents, one said *"When I look at the old days, the farmer really didn't let anyone into his stable and certainly not with a camera"*. More and more agricultural entrepreneurs are willing to open their doors or express their actions and intentions through social media.

#### 4.4.1 Reason to provide agritourism activities

The literature review gives several reasons for expanding the activities. Arroyo (2016) distinguishes the source of income as one of the main reasons for farmers to expand the production business with additional branches. This motivation also plays a role among the respondents, economic aspects were mentioned by almost all respondents. So did this respondent: *“Additional income because I was firmly convinced that agricultural products would generate less and less income and I didn't want to increase scale”*.

Besides the economic reason for agritourism activities, the contact with the citizens is also an important reason to carry out agritourism activities. In many cases the visitors also have an influence on the farm and it gives the farmers more insight into the way of thinking of the citizens. In a few cases it has changed the way the farmer works and the farmer has started to listen and adapt more to the wishes of the citizens. The third reason that was mentioned is to bring food production to people's awareness. For example, one of the respondents *“found it a very big and beautiful challenge to show how common agriculture has come to think very much about its food production”*. The three most frequently mentioned reasons are also those mentioned by various authors (Kierkels et al., 2012; Arroyo, 2012) in the literature chapter. No major discrepancies are visible here.

Furthermore, there is no clear difference in reasons for different types of farms and agritourism. However, for one farm it is easier to welcome guests on the farm, for example a farm that only has a few hobby animals. One of the respondents who runs a pig farm did indicate that a lot of hygiene measures are involved when guests come to the yard. These hygiene measures are more intensive compared to, for example, an arable farm or a dairy farm. Altogether, all interviewed farmers like to welcome guests and get enjoyment out of it. It was clearly stated that this aspect is very important, if a farmer doesn't have an affinity with this he shouldn't do it, *“it should suit you”* as several respondents indicated.

#### *Revenue model*

In addition to the intrinsic motivation for the farmer, there must be a revenue model attached to the additional activity. The earnings model turns out to be more important and more leading than described in the literature chapter. Ultimately, the farmers are also entrepreneurs with the aim of earning a living.

#### 4.4.2 Three facets of agritourism

The literature chapter highlighted three facets of agritourism. These facets concerned a working farm, contact with the agricultural activity and the authenticity of the experience. During the selection of the interviewed farmers, these facets were taken into account.

#### *Working farm*

The selection of different farmers includes one farmer whose main source of income is not in the agricultural sector, this respondent works in a different sector. He still grows some crops on his land and keeps some animals which he then slaughters for meat consumption. This means that he does live on a 'working farm' in view of the definitive appointment in the

literature chapter. In the Netherlands these kind of farmers are also called hobby farmers. According an expert it is especially important that *"that farmer with those few animals explains clearly that this is a hobby farmer and that things are different on a common farm"*.

In addition, there are also a few farmers in the Netherlands who have made their side branch tourism the main branch. As a result, agricultural activities are no longer the main source of income on these farms. *"In the end it's all about being able to eat a well-filled sandwich and whether that comes from the production branch or from the recreation branch doesn't matter that much"* according to one of the experts. However, it is still important to distinguish between the two disciplines so that citizens are not presented with a 'wrong image' of the agricultural sector, this task lies with the provider itself, according to some experts.

#### *Contact with agricultural activity*

The second aspect of the typology of Philip et al. (2010) is the degree of contact with agricultural activity. The following three types of contact were considered, direct, indirect and passive. All three types of activities take place among the surveyed farmers. According some respondents are mostly the direct activities are aimed at children, *"this often involves a guided tour during which the calves are fed and their hands become dirty"*. For the adults, the in-depth conversations about farm life are most often conducted with the overnight visitors.

In the case of one of the respondents on the farm, meetings are also held on a regular basis; these meetings do not always contain a link with farming activity, also called a passive contact by Philip et al. (2010). The possibility of a guided tour of the company is always offered, but not all visitors choose this option. In these kinds of activities, the farmer has the idea that the visitors do not learn much about the agricultural sector, but that is often neither the intention of the visitor.

The degree of involvement also influences the learning process of the visitor. The more direct contact between the visitor and the farmer, the more influence it will have. The experience based learning of Kolb (1984) indicates that an experience is required to adjust the image. In conclusion, we can assume that a direct experience with the agricultural activity will have more influence than a passive or indirect experience with the agricultural activity.

#### *Authentic experience*

The third aspect related to the definition is the authenticity of the experience. Philip et al. (2010) confirm that when a tourist want to experience an authentic agricultural activity, they must go 'back-stage'. Visitors also come to the farm to discover the real farm life and the real authentic activity. The providers respond to these wishes of the tourists. This also applies to one of the respondents answers. *" The visit to a farm also consists of a piece of experience of what people want to have: that farm life is romantic, beautiful, peaceful and restful and entrepreneurs respond to that by creating that atmosphere, but that is not a realistic image of agriculture of course"*.

In general, the interviewed farmers tried to show what they were doing and give the visitors the real image of the farm. On the other hand, you also want to keep your visitors satisfied and farmers therefore neglect some information. One of the respondents outlined the

following reaction of one of the visitors when he told his opinion about the agricultural sector. *“Well they're gonna be so unhappy now you're gonna take them out of their dream and put them with both feet on the ground.”*

The farmer tries to balance between the tourist's demand and what he tells about the agricultural sector. The farmer's ultimate goal is to make a profit, either for the tourist branch or for the agricultural branch. One of the respondents stressed that the farm remains a commercial company with the following statement: *“Of course we are commercialising and it's not so that everyone can just come and cuddle piglets with us, there is an organized whole behind that makes us pay because otherwise I wouldn't do it.”*

On the basis of the above, you could say that the farmer is going into a dilemma. On the one hand conveying the real image of the sector but on the other hand also fulfilling the wishes of the visitor. What has also become clear is that the earning model for the agricultural entrepreneur is often leading, so one will always strive to live up to the expectations of the visitor. The image of a real authentic experience on a farm is different from reality for many tourists. The agritourism providers want to welcome as many visitors as possible on their farm and therefore it is very plausible that agritourism providers offer their activities in such a way that they offer what the visitors want. Because the wishes of the visitors are not always equal to reality, in some cases a different reality is presented. This is also called staged authenticity.

For example, many farm education companies have a fake cow where children can milk cows. This responds to people's wishes and idealistic ideas. In reality, the cows are no longer milked this way. Figure 8 and 10 mentioned earlier in this chapter also indicate the difference between reality (Figure 8) and public perception (Figure 10). Maintaining such fake cows as shown in Figure 8 does not always reflect the actual image of the sector.



Figure 11: Fake cow milking with farm education for kids, source: own-processing

#### 4.4.3 Connection farmer and Citizen through agritourism

The literature chapter suggests that agritourism can be a way to bring farmers and citizens nearer to each other. According to most farmers, this also applies, and see it as a good way to get closer to citizens. Respondents also felt that these visitors learn more about farm life and that a visit improves the relationship between farmer and citizen. These observations are in line with the conclusions of Kolb (1984) theory. According to the experiential learning theory of Kolb (1984), a real experience on a farm is very important for the perception of the agricultural sector. This is also confirmed by almost all respondents, according to one *"citizens also have to smell, see and experience a farm, which is the most important thing."*

A visit to a farm contributes positively to the relationship between farmers and citizens, but certainly not everyone has the desire to visit a farm. One of the respondents mentioned the following: *"but of course there's also a very large group of people who are less interested in uhm the farm life, they don't have that knowledge"*. Research by the Nieuwe Oogst (trade journal for the agricultural sector) has shown that 50% of the inhabitants have no desire for contact with a farmer or gardener. *"It's an illusion to think that all citizens can be linked to a farmer"* according on of the interviewed experts.

From this we can conclude that farmer-citizen initiatives certainly contribute to a better relationship between farmer and citizen. These initiatives currently only reach a small part of Dutch society, the other part has no desire for them either, so they will also be difficult to achieve. In order to reach a larger part of the population, other changes will have to be made. As a result of image research, the trade journal De Nieuwe Oogst advises that children from a younger age should be better educated about the agricultural sector. However, another expert thinks that it is *"a utopia to think that we are changing the education that we get more knowledge of agriculture and horticulture because of course there is much more to it than agriculture and horticulture he children need to know about everything"*.

#### 4.4 Definitions 'Farmer' / 'Citizen'

During this research, two concepts are regularly discussed, namely farmer and citizen. These two concepts are also regularly mentioned in the media or by, for example, the political party 'farmer citizen movement'. One of the respondents, as well as an outsider from the agricultural sector, stated the following: *"I have the idea citizen is really a farmer's word, but before I can work at a farmer's magazine I have never called myself citizen or felt like one. I think the concept citizen has come into being a bit from a farmer's perspective."*

Berger & Luckmann (1966) mentioned earlier the literature chapter that concepts are social constructions, this means that our actions are determined by what we think is reality, the way we talk about things is seen as reality. In the case of the farmer and the citizen there is often no substantial difference in both concepts. A farmer is also a citizen a farmer is only a profession just like a doctor or lawyer is a profession. By naming the differences by different concepts, namely farmer and citizen, a difference could being created in people's minds. Most of the respondents were not aware of the differences that the terms might suggest. These terms were probably not chosen on purpose either, but arose unconsciously over time.

## 4.5 Future

The agricultural sector in the Netherlands will change in the future. According one of the respondents *"It's certainly not going to get any easier in the future"*. Expectations vary among the respondents. For example, one farmer expects that *"there will remain a limited number of professional businesses that can simply keep up with the pace and it will be a smaller number of businesses that are large"*. If the processes of modernization & globalization continue, the connection between farmer and citizen will only diminish. The average age of the farmer is 54,86 years (AgriDirect, 2017), many of these farmers do not have a successor so the farm will cease to exist. *"And of course there are of course quite a few company successors, but those successors are of course often able to take over a healthy company that, for example, if you look at a dairy farm company, is often larger companies, more mechanized"* according one of the experts. The population of farmers will become even smaller and this will increase the Calimero effect. In addition, the image of the idyllic countryside in people's minds will become increasingly detached from the increasingly industrializing reality. Furthermore, one of the experts thinks the biggest challenge is to *"to fit the businesses much more into the landscape."* Surfaces are limited in the Netherlands and many functions are located next to each other. This makes it difficult to fit these large industrialized companies into the Dutch landscape. In addition, one of the experts expects that the regulations in the Netherlands *"are much more on the nature side than on the agriculture side"*.

In addition, almost all respondents see opportunities for the multifunctional sector in the Netherlands. For example, one of the experts thinks that *"the climate is changing, we won't have to go abroad for the nice weather"*. Furthermore, last year many people were forced (because of the Covid-19 pandemic) to go on holiday in the Netherlands. This trend could continue in the future when people discover how many beautiful places the Netherlands has to offer. One of the experts also sees *"great opportunities for the future in agritourism for the farmers who want to stay a bit smaller but with his side branch with for example a bed&breakfast"*. By means of agritourism, companies can generate additional income through a side branch and in this way maintain a healthy income. In addition to the respondents, there are also new scientific articles that predict a positive future for local agritourism and link this development to the recent outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (Mastronardi et al. 2020; Martinus & Boruff, 2020). The article of Mastronardi et al. (2020) describes the first effects of the Covid-19 pandemic following five case studies in central Italy. It shows that local markets, at least in the short term, have an effect on food demand in favour of local markets and short chain channels. Martinus & Boruff (2020) carried out a similar research in Perth (Australia). Compared to the rest of the world, Perth succeeded fairly quickly in minimizing the number of Covid-19 infections. As a result, Perth residents were again allowed to travel to regional destinations. This gave the agritourism a good boost and made it more widely recognized. A agritourism company in a relatively Covid-19 safe environment can have a competitive advantage to initially attract local visitors but later on also visitors from around the world.

In agritourism, citizens come into contact with the agricultural sector, but agritourism also offers the possibility for farmers to enter into dialogue with citizens. In this way farmers and citizens can stay in contact with each other. Besides that, farmers are often more negative about the relationship with citizens than citizens are about the relationship with farmers. In 2019, the Magis research bureau conducted an image survey among more than 500 inhabitants of the Randstad conurbation. In response, the trade journal de 'Nieuwe Oogst' also conducted a survey among its members. Farmers were asked for their opinion on the Randstad urban areas. These two studies showed that urban residents are more positive about the farmers than the farmers are about them. Farmers are not only more negative about the inhabitants of the Randstad. They also appear to be prejudiced about what the city dwellers think of them. Many farmers think that inhabitants of the four big cities think negatively and in stereotypes about farmers. For example, 71.5 percent of farmers think that inhabitants of the Randstad think they walk all day long in boots or clogs and in overalls. In addition, the same research shows that especially the younger target group of city dwellers aged between 25 and 34 are much more critical and less positive about farm life. For the future there seems to be a winning world for education and a farmer-citizen connection with young people as a specific target group.

## 5. Conclusions

In the first chapter several sub-questions have been defined. Below, these sub-questions will one at a time be answered to eventually answer the main question. The first sub-question reads as follows: how do farmers see the relationship with citizens?

The farmers notice that the farmer and the citizen have grown further away from each other. The main reason for this is that the number of farms is decreasing and the number of urban residents in the Netherlands is increasing. As a result, many Dutch people no longer have contact with a farm and farmers have the feeling that they are not understood. The number of farmers will also continue to shrink in the future and as a result the Calimero complex will continue to grow. This Calimero complex will not limit itself to the farmers and citizens, but also all other facets, such as politics or the media. The trend in which farmers feel less understood and represented has already started and will only become more in the future. In conclusion, we can say that farmers do not feel understood, and farmers feel that citizens think very negatively about the agricultural sector.

According to the farmers, this negative image of the agricultural sector is largely caused by the media. This certainly does not mean that the media only report negatively on the agricultural sector. Programmes such as 'Farmer seeks wife', for example, do put farmers in a positive light. When farmers have the idea that there is negative reporting about them, only these negative news items will stand out. In addition to the reporting by 'outsiders', more and more farmers themselves are becoming active on social media to spread their own story to the outside world. Social media is a good way for the agricultural sector to communicate what you do and why you make certain choices. An individual social media page of a farmer does not reach a significant part of the citizens. However, the more individual gardeners & farmers will use social media, the more citizens will be reached and the greater the effect will be. There are a number of dangers to using social media yourself. For example, the farmer will have to weigh up which photos radiate which image and what you want to achieve with a message on the social channels. As a result, the social media platform is not suitable for everyone. It certainly has to suit the farmer in question. The answer to the next and second sub-question ' How see farmers the role and contribution of the (social) media ' is as follows: In general, most farmers are negative about the influence of the media, but when they can use the media themselves, it can also make a positive contribution to the image of the agricultural sector.

In this research we found out that agritourism can be a suitable tool to bring farmers and citizens in contact with each other. This conclusion can be underpinned by the experiential learning theory (Baker et al. 2012). The experiential learning theory discussed by Baker et al. (2012) states that people store information better when they have experienced it actively. So that in this case a visit to a farm produces more effects compared to commercials or messages on social media. Furthermore, it is possible to rectify misconceptions about the agricultural sector after a visit to a farm. Agritourism is already emerging in the Netherlands in recent years and more and more farmers are willing to open their doors to tell their own story. However, there are several types of agritourism underscores by Philip et al. (2010) as can be read in chapter two. Philip et al distinguishes between a working farm, the degree of

contact with the agricultural activity and the degree of authenticity. As a result of this research it can be said that a farm where production of agricultural products is still the main source of income is very important, in this research this has also been one of the selection requirements for respondents. Secondly, the more contact the visitor has with the agricultural activity, the more impact it will have on the relationship between farmer and citizen. Finally, this research shows that visitors are looking for an authentic experience. However, an authentic experience does not always have to reflect reality. The various providers of agritourism make use of this, they use a few 'decoys' to attract visitors. As a result, the providers are constantly balancing between showing the actual image of the sector and showing what the visitor would like to see.

The future of the agricultural sector in the Netherlands is uncertain. Global processes such as globalization & modernization will continue and the farmer will have to deal with more and more different interests. The Calimero complex that is visible at the moment will get even more serious and in the future more farmers will quit and therefore there will be fewer farmers. Many farmers oppose this process and start protesting against the new trend and legislation. Recently (2019/2020) several farmer protest actions have taken place in the Netherlands. The farmer protest actions have contributed to increasing the visibility of farmers to society. Conversely, many farmers have also acquired a different image of citizens by leaving the farmyard and going into the city. Farmers' protests are one of the means of bringing farmers and citizens into contact with each other. By means of various investigations following these protests, it appeared that citizens do not have such a negative attitude towards the farmer at all. In order to give the agricultural sector a proper place in the future, farmers and citizens will therefore continue to maintain a dialogue with each other.

Ultimately, we can say that a visit to a farm makes a positive contribution to the relationship between farmer and citizen. However, it turns out that agritourism only reaches a small part of the population. Hereby it is also very crucial that the farmer comes into contact with the citizen and can start the dialogue with them. By continuing to enter into dialogue, you can continue to understand each other.

## **5.2 recommendations & discussion**

In line with the constructivist grounded theory of Charmaz (2006), the outcome of this research is only an hypothesis open to further research. Below is a small list for further investigation and other recommendations.

First of all, this is only a master's thesis where limited resources were available. Due to the outbreak of the COVID -19 pandemic, it was not possible to speak to visitors of tourist farms at this time period. As a result, this research only outlines a perspective seen from the viewpoint of the farmer plus a few experts. The role and experiences of the visitor remained in the background. For the next research it will be very interesting to focus on the visitor. In what way does the visitor experience a visit to a farm and can a visit influence the opinion about farm life? With a similar research from the perspective of the visitor, it is possible to paint as complete a picture as possible of reality and the systematics of the farmer-citizen relationship.

In this research the concepts of farmer and citizen have been used repeatedly. As a result of this research, these concepts may also raise questions. Is there indeed a difference suggested when these terms are used? Or will the use of these terms evoke prejudice? The role of these concepts is therefore also an interesting point to explore in more detail in further research.

This research shows that the younger generation in particular knows little about the agricultural sector and often has a more negative view of the sector compared to the older generation. Farm education, a part of agritourism, is a suitable means to reach primary school children in a low-threshold way. In recent years, the number of educational farms has strongly increased, but not all Dutch children have visited a farm yet. At the moment a visit to a farm is being motivated by various interest groups & the government. It is very likely that a visit to an educational farm also contributes positively to the relationship between farmers and citizens. Further research will look at how primary schools can be motivated to actually visit a farm.

Currently, the story about the agricultural sector is often told by others. It is advisable for farmers to propagate their own story. A transition has taken place in recent years and currently the agricultural sector is in the middle of it. It is advisable for farmers to propagate their own story. Currently, the story about the agricultural sector is often told by others. More and more farmers tell their own story through social media & receiving guests on the farm. Although it does not yet reach all inhabitants of the Netherlands, it is nevertheless of added value if this trend continues in the future. Every little bit helps and every farmer & citizen who comes into contact with each other generally contributes to an improvement of the relationship. Here it is important that farmers are still encouraged to open their doors and demonstrate just what they are doing.

It is advisable for farmers to propagate their own story. Currently, the story about the agricultural sector is often told by others. A good representation of the agricultural sector is desirable in order to present yourself as a positive sector to the outside world.

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## 7. Appendix

### Appendix A - Interview Guides

Interview Boer Burger Beweging - Caroline van der Plas

#### General

- How did you end up in the agricultural world like that?
- What's the reason you started the farmer's world?
- What kind of reactions do you generally get from farmers and citizens about the boerburgertweet?

#### Relationship between farmer and citizen

- Do you think we can speak of a gulf between peasant and citizen?
- Why do you think the relationship between farmer and citizen has changed so much in recent years?
- How does the media contribute to the relationship between farmer and citizen?
  - o Program farmer seeks woman
  - o Campaigns awake animal etc.

#### Agritourism:

- What do you think about agritourism and farmers who open their doors to citizens?
- Do you think that physical presence and a visit to a farm is necessary to strengthen the connection between farmer and citizen?
- Do you think that visitors to farms get the real image of the sector, or is another more beautiful picture often presented?

How do you see the future of the agricultural sector in the Netherlands?

## Interview guide farmers / providers agritourism

### General:

- Can you describe your own company?
- Why did you choose for this side branch?
- How many visitors do you receive annually on your farm?
- What is the target group? Children / families / westerners?

### Debate:

- How do you view the current social debate and the role of farmers in it?
- Do you think we can speak of a gap between farmers and citizens?
  - o If so, what will have created this gap?
  - o If not, why do you think this is often reported in the media?
- What role do you think a visit to the farm plays in this social debate?

### Agritourism:

- What is the general reaction of the visitors who come here?
- Are there specific elements of the visit that are more important than others? Think of these elements as accommodation / food / entertainment or education...
- Do you have the idea that visitors change their way of thinking / working after a visit to the farm?
- How do you see the future of your farm?

## Interview Editor Nieuwe Oogst

### General

- How did you personally end up in the agricultural world?

### Research

- What was the reason for setting up the image research?
- Did you personally expect this conclusion to come out?
- What will be the reason why farmers view citizens more negatively than the other way around?
  - Does the media also play a role in this?
- Do you think that the farmer lives in his own peasant bubble and has too little contact with citizens?
- How will this image/gap have developed over the years?

### Agritourism:

- What role will agritourism play in the connection between farmer and citizen?
- Do you think that physical presence and a visit to the farm is necessary to restore the connection between farmer and citizen?
- Do you think that visitors to farms will get the real image of the sector, or is there often another more beautiful picture presented?