

BLAD

A publication by the Horticoop investment cooperative

Year 1 - **Issue 1**



The future of our sector

Horticoop's new investment path

Members talk about Dragons' Den



HORTICOOP
GROWING TOGETHER

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Cover photo: **Rick and Karolien Tesselaar** from Tesselaar Alstroemeria

Foreword

There is no avoiding it: headlines about energy, climate and economic crises follow each other in rapid succession. Now, more than ever, we are called to collaborate, share our knowledge, and invest in the future. In our case, that involves making sustainable investments in the horticulture industry, from which we will then all be able to reap the rewards. Or in other words, making the most of our win-win cooperative! I am proud that Horticoop been a source of added value in the horticulture industry for 120 years, and plays an important role for its members in these turbulent times. After all, cooperatives have brought this sector to where it is today and will also be essential in the future, albeit (in our case) in a different form.

Over the past year, Horticoop has made great strides as a brand new investment cooperative. Our revamped BLAD magazine provides a glimpse into that progress. For example, you can read about the final preparations for the issuing of participations and the introduction of the Horticoop Community Platform. We also discuss current themes that affect our sector: Rabobank, Horticoop's trusted main bank, provides insights into market trends in the sector, and researchers from Wageningen University & Research lift the lid on innovation.

Innovation was also the main theme of Horticoop Day in November, with Horticoop's Dragons' Den being the highlight of the day. This was an inspiring event that looked at the way the investment cooperative works. Innovation and technological development will determine the future of the horticulture industry, and Horticoop is fully committed to making a contribution. It was fantastic to see how enthusiastically the attendees responded to the Dragons' Den. For those who missed it, turn to page 28!

Horticoop is seeking to make connections with interesting companies, relevant educational institutions and, above all, with its members. We do this by bringing people into contact with each other and exchanging knowledge. This issue of BLAD is the first in a new series of inspiring, in-depth stories full of background information and new insights from, for and by members.

I hope you enjoy reading them!

Steven van Nieuwenhuijzen
CEO, Horticoop



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Horticoop's history in a nutshell

More than a century ago, horticulture entrepreneurs established the Horticoop cooperative based on the belief that better progress is made together. That conviction has remained the same throughout the years since, but the form of the cooperative has evolved. As a cooperative dating back several generations, Horticoop knows better than most that progress goes hand in hand with change. And there has certainly been a lot of change in the last 120 years! This is a brief look back on the cooperative's colourful history.

1904

After the agricultural and horticultural crisis at the end of the 19th century, Lent growers feel compelled to establish a cooperative under the auspices of the 'Gelderse Boerenbond'. They use a loan of 200 guilders to purchase some machinery, garden equipment and manure for shared use.

1920

The cooperative becomes part of the Aartsdiocesaenen Boeren- and Tuindersbond (ABTB) and now has a warehouse from which to sell grower supplies, fertilisers and pesticides to its members. There is also a corn and wheat mill.

1940-1945

Despite the difficult war years, the cooperative remains afloat.

1950-1960

A prosperous period leads to major changes in the sector: flower and plant prices improve, so growers place greenhouses on their land at the expense of space for livestock. As a result, sales of traditional cooperative products decline sharply, and the cooperative has to find other ways to generate sales.

1960-1970

Due to a lack of manure and turf for making potting soil, growers search for alternatives. The cooperative starts selling farmyard manure, clay turf and peat moss that growers can use to make their own potting soil. This turns out to be an unexplored niche in the market. The sale of floricultural supplies also commences.

1971

The cooperative opens a modern potting soil company that is very ahead of its time. 'Lent potting soil' becomes a household name in the arboriculture and pot plant sector. The cooperative changes its name once again, to Coöperatief Tuinbouwcentrum Lent (CTL).

1980

CTL, now a strong cooperative company with an extensive customer network in the country's east, celebrates its 75th anniversary. Its business activities include the production of potting soil and provision of horticultural supplies.

1984

A horticultural technology pillar is established under the name of Cotech.

2005

Coöperatie Maasmond-Westland merges with the Horticultural department of Coöperatie Agrifirm. Coöperatie Horticoop is born.

2004



CTL celebrates its 100th anniversary! The cooperative receives the 'Royal' designation.

2001

Slingerland Potgrond is to become part of CTL.

1993

A fourth pillar is introduced in Lent under the name of Colent, for horticultural supplies. In order to spread risks, all of the pillars are placed in separate BVs (private limited companies).

1991

In the Westland region, CLTV Maasmond and Coöperatie Westland merge. They have occupied a particularly strong market position for almost 20 years. The cooperatives continue to operate together under the name of Coöperatie Maasmond-Westland.

2009

CTL and Coöperatie Horticoop merge. The name changes to Coöperatief Koninklijk Tuinbouwcentrum Horticoop. Horticoop acquires shading agent manufacturer Mardenkro. Together with an American partner, Hort Americas is established abroad.

2012

Horticoop Technical Services is established in Bleiswijk.

2015

Mardenkro merges with French shading agent manufacturer Sudiac. The cooperatives continue to operate together under the new name SmartCoat. This name changes to Lumiforte at the start of 2022.

2016

Horticoop acquires the French horticultural supplier Holimco.

2018

Horticoop divests its wholesale fertiliser and crop protection operations, and reconsiders its market position as a result of this sale.

2020

Horticoop becomes full owner of SmartCoat.

2021

Horticoop changes course. The transition from a buyers' cooperative to an investment cooperative is a reality. Horticoop will be actively investing in companies that contribute to the horticultural sector and its members will reap the rewards accordingly.

Onwards to the next 120 years!

If the name changes and expansions over the years reveal anything, it is that Horticoop moves with the needs of its members. While the benefit of the cooperative used to be the joint purchasing of products, allowing members to benefit from the economy of scale, as time went by, this became a less prominent issue. On the other hand, the need to share knowledge and innovations increased sharply. The course set in 2021 embraces this need and has turned Horticoop into a platform for investment, innovation and development, with a single goal in mind: working on a healthy future for horticulture. This means Horticoop is ready for the next 120 years as a cooperative belonging to, for the benefit of and run by the horticultural industry!

Launch receives fiscal go-ahead

An update on the issue of participations

Just over a year ago, Horticoop set a new course as an investment cooperative. A key part of the transition was registering Horticoop's assets through the issue of participations. CEO Steven van Nieuwenhuijzen and CFO Hend van Ravesteyn of Horticoop give an update on the issue of participations to the members.

Members receive participations Let's begin with a brief summary; how was it again?

Steven: 'Horticoop's assets were shared out among the members in the form of participations. A participation can therefore be considered to be a sort of share, so it also represents an asset. Horticoop members are allocated these participations according to their involvement during the 2016-2018 period, with the members' turnover generated at Horticoop companies being the key to how many they receive. Each member therefore receives a certain number of participations depending on how many he or she spent at Horticoop companies in the past. That is the basis. These participations not only represent a certain value, they also entitle the holder to dividends - provided a decision has been taken to pay dividends - and voting rights. The more participations a person has, the more voting rights they are given, as is the case in the election of the members' council.'

The first year of Horticoop's new organisational structure is almost over. The registration of participations has taken a long time though. Why was that?

Steven: 'It's true that we submitted our proposal to the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration at the end of 2021. In response, we received additional questions in spring 2022, and these were promptly answered by our tax consultant.'

Unfortunately, after that we had to wait quite some time for a further response. Fortunately, we have since received part of the redeeming answer; we know that the participations can be registered without tax liability and that we can get started. So it's good news for our members! We have not yet received a final response with regard to the follow-up process, so we're still awaiting that with bated breath.'

Why do we need to wait for the redeeming word from the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration?

Hend: 'Put simply, you receive something, so if that something has a value, the Tax and Customs Administration might consider it to be taxable. Our standpoint regarding this is different. As we are a cooperative, our members were already owners of their part of the business. Nothing changes as far as that is concerned. The only thing that changes is that we are registering the participations to them and consequently allocating the shares among them. There is no new or increased value, and nothing has either been sold (yet) or traded. Only when someone sells their participations and actually receives earnings, the tax liability might be applicable. We now know that the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration agrees with us regarding the registration of current assets through participations. They are untaxed.'

What is the next step?

Steven: 'In terms of the transition, we're on course, and all other preparations have been completed. The files are ready and the processes have been provisionally approved by the members' council. The next step is to issue the participations.'

Hend adds: 'The members will be written to about the allocation of their participations. They will then be asked to agree to the conditions, after which the participations will be finally issued. The next step will be to reach an agreement with the Tax and Customs Administration about the additional annual issue of participations.'

So you're well on the way! How do you view the future?

Hend: 'Although as a society and industry we're living through difficult times, I am positive about

the future. Horticoop is a cooperative with a robust, solid financial foundation. Despite these turbulent times, this year the group of Horticoop companies is growing in terms of sales and we'll achieve positive results, so the total assets and consequently the value of participations will grow. In addition, Horticoop is expanding its portfolio, partly due to input from members, to include interesting parties that can help the horticulture industry grow more sustainably. This too will cause the cooperative's assets to grow together with the value of the participations.'

Steven: 'I can only entirely agree with that. I too am confidently looking forward to the future!'



The future of our sector

In conversation with **Rabobank** about market trends



Rabobank has been Horticoop's trusted main bank for over 100 years. With its knowledge of and investments in the food and agricultural industry, the bank also proved invaluable during Horticoop's transition into an investment cooperative. This was a reason for Horticoop's CFO Hend van Ravestein to talk to Lambert van Horen, sector specialist at RaboResearch Food & Agri, about market trends.

Hend: 'Lambert, the food and agricultural sector currently finds itself facing tough times, partly due to the energy crisis. An energy transition is necessary. What is Rabobank advising entrepreneurs in our sector?'

Lambert: 'The high gas prices and the forced energy transition can be both a blessing and curse for companies. In any case, it is forcing entrepreneurs to think about future-proofing their business models and to introduce measures where necessary. As a company, it is of course always wise not to put all your eggs in one basket. In this case, we would therefore advise them to opt for several energy sources wherever possible. Although it may make work more complex, it does mean you're more future-proof. In addition, we recommend embracing the changes and have that conversation right now with that interesting startup or scale-up that might benefit you in the future. In that respect, we at Rabobank share Horticoop's opinion.'

Hend: 'I think that the energy transition, legislation and everything related to it are making us realise that we can't return to the old situation anyway. Not just because of rising prices, but also because public opinion is increasing pressure to reduce energy consumption. In many places we are finding it is already possible to save a considerable amount of energy, with only minor consequences for cultivation.'

Lambert: 'The old model is never coming back. In the long term, natural gas will have to be

largely phased out. That is also something that the sector has said; it will be climate neutral by 2040. Nevertheless, natural gas could temporarily help us through the transition to another system in the eventuality of it becoming more affordable again. After all, profitability must be maintained during the transition period. Continuing to include the use of natural gas temporarily would give us an opportunity to roll out other energy sources in the Netherlands.'

Hend: 'How is the energy crisis currently impacting the financial picture of the sector as a whole?'

Lambert: 'The crisis is having a widely varied effect on the different crops. For instance ornamental crops currently suffering a lot more than vegetable crops. This is partly because in vegetable cultivation, surplus electricity can more often be fed back into the grid with a cogeneration system. At the moment, you get a high price for electricity. In doing so, these growers can offset the higher gas prices against the favourable price of electricity. This is less so in the case of ornamental crops where more companies only have a boiler which means they do not generate electricity that they can sell. But you really have to start on the earnings side; the consumers. If we examine food prices, we see that they are inelastic; the market scarcely reacts to price changes. If there is less food supply, the food price will quickly increase but people don't stop buying it. That's different with flowers and plants. These are not primary necessities of life and so demand tails off a little sooner when the prices rise. Fortunately, we have seen consumer behaviour become more robust over the past 15 years, especially when it comes to plants. It is making increasingly more sense to have plants in the home, especially in several northwestern European countries. In addition, it is also good to keep realising that ornamentals have had a tremendous boost. During the pandemic, after an initial blow, sales of plants and flowers enjoyed a huge upswing. Everyone was working from home and wanted to make it look nice. We sent each other flowers en masse to wish each other well and while it was not possible to visit people in person, we surprised each other by sending flowers and plants to each others' >

homes. Consequently, 2021 was a top year. It is therefore unsurprising that ornamental crops are back to “normal”, partly because of the energy transition and the war.’

Hend: ‘What do the current developments mean for the loan applications you receive?’

Lambert: We are seeing a reduction in the number and type of loan applications. Growers cherish their liquidity. The loan applications we receive at the moment are often for investments aimed at optimising the business. For example, we are getting a lot of applications regarding energy-saving measures, such as switching from HPS or SON-T light to LED, for an additional screen and for solar panels. In addition we are seeing a lot of Food & Agriculture entrepreneurs with budding ideas and looking for investors. They have interesting plans for making horticulture future-proof. Examples include robotics, internal transport and employment-related innovations that need to be introduced to greenhouses within the next five years.

Hend: ‘Robotising is certainly set to become more important. It was already a trend before the energy crisis, but because of the labour shortage and high labour costs, a major part of the development in robotics is currently about labour replacement and optimisation. How do you at Rabobank view the future of the sector and the development of the overall acreage?’

Lambert: ‘The scenario we are assuming is that crop production will be maintained in the long run but on slightly fewer square metres. With a number of crops, production per square metre is still increasing, so you need less ground for the same number of products. If, say, with cucumbers you go from 210 unlit to 300 lit, then you need less greenhouse area. The lighting is obviously under pressure at the moment, especially this winter. How do you see this, Hend?’

Hend: ‘Indeed, I think the acreage of the ornamental and vegetable crops will shrink slightly. Some of it will shift to grow other crops. You can indeed also see that the yield per square metre has increased in recent years. This winter, however, costs are going to play a major role in the total volume of products. In my opinion, around

80 per cent of the crops that normally grow under artificial lighting during the winter will now go out of production. We are currently seeing significant changes among orchid growers. I think around 25% of growers have announced that they are stopping or have already stopped. On the other hand, you can see that there is still growth in the European and North American vegetable sector. Consumers are opting for a more plant-based diet. That is stimulating demand for fruit and vegetables.’

Lambert: ‘So far, we have talked mainly about the Netherlands, but geopolitics is also playing an increasingly significant role, especially among suppliers, such as greenhouse builders and LED lighting manufacturers. Since COVID-19 and now because of the war, a lot of countries want to be more self-sufficient. For example, the Middle East no longer wants to depend so much on the EU for its vegetables, and the United States and Canada now consider self-sufficiency to be the Holy Grail. Among the equipment they need to replace production from Mexico, are their own greenhouses, for which they engage international, renowned companies. Nowadays, many greenhouse builders are concentrating in those regions. The market in Canada and the United States in particular appears to becoming something of a battleground, at least when it comes to horticultural supplies.

‘Natural gas could temporarily help us through the transition to another system if it becomes a little more affordable again in a couple of years. After all, profitability must be maintained during the transition period.’



Not a day passes without Rabobank receiving a loan application from a Dutch supplier wishing to enter that market. Although the dollar exchange rate is favourable for Dutch companies, there is a lot of competition in the suppliers’ sector. We are seeing that this is putting pressure on gross margins.’

Hend: ‘And how do countries in Europe view self-sufficiency and local production? In the Netherlands, people sometimes grumble that we produce so much for export, but on a global scale, of course, it’s as good as local for local here. If in Westland we produce for Brussels or for Cologne, then on the scale of, say, the United States or India, that would just be local production.’

Lambert: ‘Indeed, you shouldn’t view your “home production” as too limited. Some people consider home production only if everything

comes from within a radius of 10 kilometres, but I see the whole EU as a single region. That is why I consider the majority of our ‘exports’ to be for the local market. My standard way of seeing it is that the Dutch finished product does not go further than one tachograph card, i.e. the number of hours a lorry driver is allowed to drive without taking an overnight break. That means that he can reach Berlin, Paris, Frankfurt, Manchester or Copenhagen. For example 95 per cent of Dutch tomatoes remain within 800 km of Utrecht. People sometimes think we send tomatoes to South Africa or the United States, but we really don’t. Sadly, there is a lot of ignorance about this. We do send high value tomato seeds there though. We are already doing very well as far as local production and reducing CO2 emissions are concerned!’ ■



Horticoop's new new investment path

Meet **Wilco Schoonderbeek**,
Director Investments



Wilco Schoonderbeek (50) has been Director Investments at Horticoop since 1 July 2022. In this position, which is brand new for Horticoop, he is responsible for Horticoop's investment process and joins Steven van Nieuwenhuijzen (CEO) and Hend van Ravenstein (CFO) on the management team. Who is he and what are his plans for the investment cooperative?

Wilco, can you tell us something about your background?

'Certainly! After completing technical training, I started my career at Heineken before gaining experience as an investor at consulting firms such as Andersen, PwC and KPMG as well as at various investment funds. Since 2010, I have been working in the field of AgriFood and have had the opportunity to make dozens of investments and review hundreds of business cases. I have also been involved in setting up numerous private and public investment funds. I therefore have experience in investments and in the AgriFood business, all of which is in line with Horticoop's new strategy.'

What attracted you to Horticoop?

'I can see a great opportunity for Horticoop in its new role as an investment cooperative. We can support the sector in facing a number of major challenges and help create a healthy future perspective. Ambition, courage, cooperation and innovation - and of course the appropriate investments - are crucial to this. I am happy to apply my investment experience.'

Horticoop is going to invest in both established businesses and in scale-ups. Can you clarify why this choice was made?

'By diversifying, we can cash in on specific investment opportunities and safeguard long-term continuity. Firstly, we do this by making a limited number of lower risk investments in established companies. Secondly, we invest smaller but higher risk amounts in scale-ups. We make sure these two investment strategies are balanced against each other. Investments in established businesses contribute directly to a positive cash flow. With scale-ups this is different; these are focused on future earning power and are necessary for making the sector more sustainable and more innovative. A portfolio that contains a mixture of established companies and scale-ups can also offer added value in terms of growth. For instance, scale-ups often benefit if they can use the network, facilities and distribution channel of established companies in order to get new innovations onto the market more quickly. At Horticoop, we make every effort to facilitate

collaboration between individual members and between members and our companies wherever possible.'

We are currently having to deal with difficult circumstances: war in Ukraine, high energy prices, inflation and rising interest rates. What does this economic headwind mean to the position of Horticoop as an investor?

'The circumstances are naturally having an impact on the existing Horticoop businesses and those we would like to invest in. That impact is different for each organisation, but generally we have to understand the distinction between startups on the one hand and scale-ups and established companies on the other. The terms startup and scale-up are often mistakenly lumped together. First of all, we must appreciate that it is very common for a startup to run at a loss initially. The company still needs to prove that its product is suitable for the market. There are no commercial sales and to focus entirely on developing its product or service, it relies entirely on its own money and input from investors. With one round of funding, a startup often raises enough money to do this for about a year. Start-ups therefore have the security of sufficient funding at least for a certain period of time, whether or not there is an economic headwind. This is different with scale-ups and established companies. Unlike startups, their product has already been validated on the market. In these organisations, an investment is used to generate more customers and sales, thereby scaling up. In this phase, the business is partly dependent on sales. So, if there is an acute fall in demand, scale-ups and established companies are more likely to run into trouble. In view of inflation and rising interest rates, I think the era of cheap money is behind us for the time being. Although annoying for the organisations that depend heavily on it, it offers opportunities for investors and especially for organisations like Horticoop that bring high added value in the form of knowledge and network. Incidentally, times of economic headwind have historically proven to be just the right time to invest.' >

As an investor, what do you look for when deciding whether to invest in a company?

'There are numerous aspects. What does the company want to achieve? In what time frame? Is it realistic? Has the business case been fully developed? In which phase is the technological development? What is the growth potential? As an investor, can I help bring about a growth spurt? What is the risk and what return can you reasonably expect? Horticoop mainly targets investments that might or already play a crucial role in a healthy future of the sector. It is therefore essential that promising companies and innovations are given a chance, even if it is along a high-risk growth path. Otherwise, the sector runs the risk that potentially promising solutions to the major challenges, such as energy transition or the tight labour market, will take off later or perhaps not at all.'

No future without sustainability. Is it not the case that every company now has a 'green' tale to tell?

'It goes without saying that virtually every company looking for capital takes this into account. However, we are not satisfied with a catchy marketing story. A business needs to be able to communicate clearly which solution to which industry challenge it is contributing to and what the added value of the intended investment in it would be. We look beyond simply the current funding round. At Horticoop, we stand shoulder to shoulder with the company and we aim to do more than simply make cash available. For example, it might be facilitating a field test at one of our members', a purchase guarantee for a market launch or using the distribution channel of our existing participations.'

Can entrepreneurs who wish to make their companies impact investor ready call you, Wilco?

'Certainly. At Horticoop, we want to create a healthy future for the sector. It is in our own interest that innovative entrepreneurs with ambitions for growth are able to help us achieve this are given access to the right resources in good time. Funding is one of the resources that we at Horticoop want to use, but we can also

make use of our knowledge, expertise and the network that we have built up since 1904. So to anyone reading this who feels this applies to them: please feel free to get in touch! ■

'I am Wilco Schoonderbeek and I enjoy living in leafy Ede with my wife Pascale, daughter Bodi (15) and sons Davin (13) and Orsen (11). In my spare time I like to play tennis and write books. I have written a professional book on mergers and acquisitions as well as a speculative novel.'



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Photos of bygone days...

1925

Enjoying a well-earned break in the greenhouses of cooperative member Van Elferen.

1925

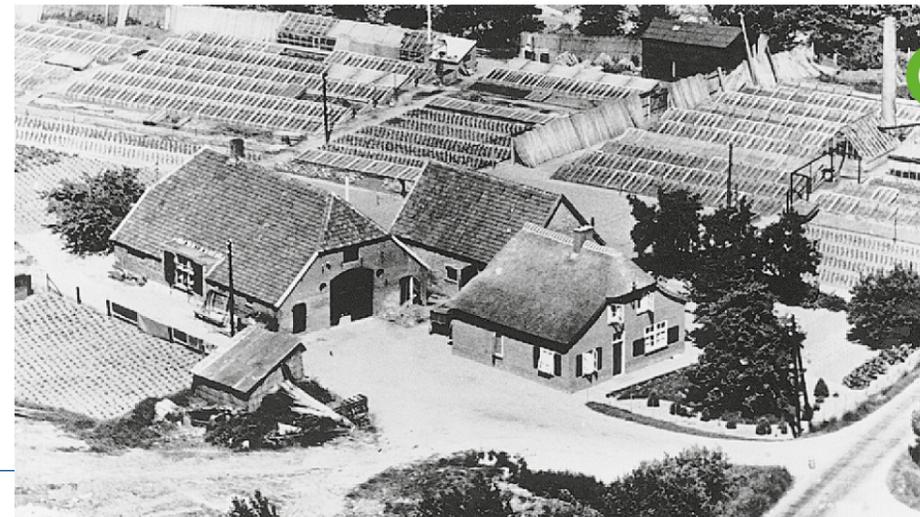
The Lent growers have loaded the lorry, ready to head to the auction.

1940

Thé Kersten, member of the cooperative, pictured among his geraniums.

1946

An aerial photo of the farm and greenhouses belonging to G.J. Meters. This farm was located on Vossenpelssestraat in Lent.



The Horticoop Community Platform has gone live!

In conversation with **David Brand**, Manager of Communication & Community

On 2 November, the time had come: the Horticoop Community Platform went live! The private platform for Horticoop members aligns well with Horticoop's new strategy and means the Horticoop members and Horticoop itself can exchange knowledge even better. David Brand, Manager of Communication & Community at Horticoop, talks about the platform and the road to its launch.



David starts: 'Just under a year ago, we launched Horticoop's new strategy. The strategy rests on three pillars: investment, active shareholding of the Horticoop companies and the community, the latter being essential to the success of the first two pillars. This is because we differ from traditional investment companies in that our constituency consists of 400 members, who together

reflect the Dutch horticultural industry and with whom we jointly invest in the sector. It is therefore of crucial importance for us as well as for the members to shape the investment strategy together.'

Easy knowledge sharing

It is in jointly determining the courses for investment that the community comes into play. David: 'A community is a group of people who share the same characteristics. At Horticoop, the fact is that we are all committed to a healthy future of horticulture. We shape our community both online and offline. Offline in the form of personal meetings at gatherings and member days. The Horticoop Community Platform was developed for the online part. It is a private platform that can be accessed on our new website.' The Horticoop community is made up of three groups: the members, the companies belonging to Horticoop and Team Bleiswijk, in other words, the people who run the cooperative. The main purpose of the community is to encourage mutual cooperation and the sharing of knowledge. David: 'Cooperation is of course an umbrella term. The thing we consider important is being able to find each other. We want all our members to know which companies Horticoop has in its portfolio and, conversely, we ensure our companies have access to our

members. Members can use the platform to get in touch with each other individually or in groups. The latter contributes to one of Horticoop's main spearheads: knowledge sharing. 'The Horticoop companies each has its own professional knowledge in a certain area of our sector', explains David. 'We want to unlock that knowledge for our members. That applies vice versa too: the members can simply share with the community the knowledge that they acquire in their companies. For instance, if they have found a solution to difficult root development with a certain plant or have any smart tips about saving energy, it is great that they can pass the information on to other growers.' Moreover, you can also find practical information on the platform, such as business details of the members and the number of participations that you have. Members can also vote on matters such as new council members and put themselves forward for knowledge sessions.

Build build build

The platform was not thrown together one evening in an attic; on the contrary, it involved months of work by a large number of stakeholders. David: 'We created the platform in direct consultation with the three groups currently active on it. During preparations, we had a strategy group, a focus group and a working group. The strategy group - made up of a few Horticoop members, delegates from the Horticoop companies and Horticoop colleagues - said what their wishes were in respect of the platform. The working group then actively got down to work and guided the development of the platform. Meanwhile, the focus group reviewed and gave feedback on the work delivered. User friendliness was one of the most important points. David clarifies: 'A major section of our target audience is made up of growers that can mainly be found in the greenhouse. They cannot spend day after day at their computers. It therefore needs to be easy for them to keep track of the updates on the platform in their smartphones. This has been fully taken into account.'

Besides user-friendliness, a lot of time and attention was paid to the platform's functionality. David: 'A lot of functionalities are built to make the sharing of knowledge quick and easy. For example, you can easily post a poll or conduct a survey on the platform. These can be used to ask members how they think about, or deal with, certain issues. Horticoop can then use this input for future investments.'

Geared to interests

Knowledge sharing. That is what it is all about. But not everyone is interested in every subject. That is why the Horticoop Community Platform is divided into nine sections: Labour, Lighting, Coatings, Sustainability, Energy, Climate, Substrate, Technology and Cultivation. Members can ask questions on each section, share experiences, answer questions from other members and upload interesting documents, such as white papers and studies. Needless to say, Horticoop companies also have access to this, so they can share their knowledge and expertise, or ask members to test a particular product. David: 'In their account, all of the users can indicate their expertise, which areas they would like to know more about and switch on the corresponding push notifications. Just suppose you're considering switching to a new climate control system. You check out the Technology section and ask the members for their advice. Horticoop Technical Services will also be in this section, so they will also share their knowledge and experiences. The moment an answer to your question is posted, you receive a notification. So, ultimately, we are jointly building a Q&A and a knowledge bank around a range of topics on the platform.'

Successful launch

At the Horticoop Day on 2 November, all members attending were given access to the Horticoop Community Platform. David excitedly explains: 'It was fabulous to see that around a hundred of us putting the platform into use at the same time. And it immediately became active too! We used it to vote for new council members and for those taking part in Horticoop's Dragons' Den, as well as to post photos and comments. It was great to see that it worked just how we had envisaged!' In January, the other members of Horticoop will be given access to the platform. David is looking forward to it: 'We hope that people will manage to find each other on the platform and actively exchange information, post questions and provide each other with answers. If that happens, then to me the platform will have succeeded!'



Visit the Horticoop Community Platform by going to www.horticoop.nl and clicking on the 'Inloggen' button at the top.

The focus group has its say

Of course, the development of the new Horticoop Community Platform did not come about without input from the members. At the start of the process, a focus group of seven Horticoop members was assembled. This group periodically assessed the platform's progress and gave indications about how it might be improved. Four members of the focus group tell how they experienced the process, what they are proudest of and why they believe the platform is important.



Guido Janssen

'On the platform, everyone can learn from each other'



Pim Rikken

'The platform is also great for people who are less at home in the digital world'



René Vissers

'It's now up to the members to make a success of the platform'



Harry Wubben

'If I can use it, anyone can'

Guido Janssen
CEO at Lumiforte

'It is fantastic if you can help one another, especially in this day and age. The new platform brings together the various Horticoop parties: the internal organisation ("Team Bleiswijk"), the members and the Horticoop companies. It is a community run by and for the benefit of the members. I think that is wonderful! Everything is in one place. The platform rests on three pillars: helping one another, sharing knowledge and being able to find each other. Horticoop wants to improve the connection between the various parties and make it easier for them to work more intensively together. It will allow everyone to learn from and inform each other. There is a huge amount of profit and strength to be gained in the sharing of knowledge. In my opinion, the platform provides a wonderful opportunity to develop something together or to position products or companies in a different way. Moreover, we can obtain a better picture of what is going on in the sector. For it to work though, it is crucial that the members really start using the platform. That is the most exciting challenge; how do you get hundreds of members involved in this community? The content is key: everything posted has to be relevant and geared to the sector. Growers want to know, for example, what a piece of national news is going to mean for their business. Combining this and making it relevant for the horticultural sector is the strength of a platform. We therefore need to guard against the creation of chat rooms and the platform becoming a hotchpotch of irrelevant content. The aim is to take each other to the next level, and if everyone on the platform actively participates, it is sure to succeed!'

Pim Rikken
Director of Rikken Hedera Kwekerij

'I have always been a little sceptical about using platforms, so my expectations were not particularly high when I agreed to take part in the focus group. I joined because I think connection between members needs to be improved, but how are you going to get everyone on board when it comes to using a platform of this kind? However, during the design process, I became increasingly enthusiastic. A lot of time went into it and the result is something to be proud of! The most important thing was for it not to become too complicated. I believe that has worked out well. It is not difficult to log in or read something. Breaking the content down into themes means you are not overwhelmed with information. The platform is also great for people who are less at home in the digital world. The most important thing at the moment is to fill the platform with content and get the members enthusiastic. I find this exciting: will it take off among the members? I think it adds a lot of value that the Horticoop website has now been tackled and everything is now bundled together. When you log in, you now have direct access not only to your participations, your personal details and financial matters but also to the platform. It is also great that you can easily reach a specific group of people, for example if you want to run a pilot scheme. The platform allows you quickly to select, say, all vegetable growers, which makes the sharing of information or questions so much easier. You have all the professionals together at once. In the future, I'd like outsiders to be added to the platform; people not involved with Horticoop, but with a certain expertise, such as a consultant or someone from a university who can add value to a particular topic. That would make the platform even more interesting. But firstly, let's turn the current platform into a lively community!'

René Vissers
General Manager of Maarel Orchids

I was already enthusiastic about the platform before I was asked to take part in the focus group. The involvement of members and modern communications are of huge importance to a cooperative. That is why two years ago I put forward the idea of a digital community. Using this platform, Horticoop has laid the foundation for this. Now it is up to the members to fill the platform and make a success of the community. Those who were involved in the development phase, including myself, already have a bond with Horticoop; we are happy to invest time in things such as developing the platform. Now, the time has come for the next step: getting members whose bond with Horticoop is not as strong to feel more involved by using the platform. The project will stand or fall depending on how we interact with one another. I cannot wait to find out! I hope that the platform will be used as widely as possible by the affiliates. What matters is that everyone in the company is actively involved, not just management. It will mean there is a wide range of specialists in the community and consequently a greater chance of all users' questions being answered. For me, the platform will be a success if people share good, up-to-date information and we can occasionally engage in discussions on new, current topics. Since as a focus group we put ease of use first and made sure the platform was uncluttered, I'm confident that everyone will easily be able to find their way around it!'

Harry Wubben
Director of Harry Wubben Flowers

'When I was asked to join the focus group, I was immediately enthusiastic. Nowadays, exchanging knowledge is increasingly done digitally, so Horticoop cannot allow itself to fall behind. Around nine months ago, our focus group got together for the first time at a meeting with the platform builder. Together, we initially considered questions such as "What would Horticoop like to achieve with the platform?", "How accessible can it and must it be?" and "Who is it for?". We also reflected on key points such as how to connect with each other and make it easy to find what you are looking for. I have insisted from the beginning that, above all, the platform should have a low threshold and that everyone should be able to access it easily. I myself am a good indicator because if I can use it, anyone can! We designed the platform to be as practical as possible. We saw no point in making it too technical. Usually, if you have a problem or question and you want to talk to an expert about it, you need to know where to find the right person. On the platform, a lot of people who understand the issue can respond to your question. It's all about helping each other; about give and take. In other words, it's about asking questions and answering questions posted by others. If you're going to invest, do something new or if you have a problem, you can put it out on the platform and then see what comes back. Of course the platform not only hosts colleagues exchanging experiences, but also Horticoop companies. For example, if you need advice about coating, then a company such as Lumiforte can give you a good answer, but there's probably a commercial reason behind it. On the platform, you can get instant verification from fellow growers. Over the next few months, our focus group will assess the experiences: are we doing what we want and are people doing what we expected? Can it be even more practical or done differently? In the end, the ultimate aim is to have a fabulous Horticoop platform!'

Members in the spotlight:

Five questions for **Roland Meeuwsen**, joint owner of Escaro Plants

Let's introduce you: who are you and what do you do?

'My name is Roland Meeuwsen (41). Working in agriculture is something I've done from a very early age. Even as a six-year-old boy, I could be found in my father's greenhouse. It therefore made sense for me to become an entrepreneur in the same field. In 2005, my brother, sister and I took over our parents' company and set up Escaro Plants commercial nursery. So it's a real family business! At Escaro Plants we produce spring bloomers and succulent plants. The advantage is that we have a long season with most of our plants. We can sell our succulent plants from March to the end of October. Being able to supply plants virtually all year round is really nice.'

What is the best thing about your profession?

'I love being surrounded by nature. I think the process of watching something grow from nothing into something beautiful is fantastic. You're continuously working on making the world a little greener and consequently more beautiful.'

How do you keep your customers satisfied?

'We do our very best to create a good product for a fair price. There's no point in making products too expensive because, quite simply, you can't sell them. In this day and age, that is pretty

tough because we're facing considerable cost increases. All of the raw materials are getting more expensive. This is putting our margins under pressure. By purchasing more smartly and being economical with the raw materials, we try and remain affordable.'

How do you cope with the price increases?

'We adjust the numbers according to the demand. Obviously we always do that, but now we need to take even more care not to overproduce. It's also important to keep a tight rein on the costs. During the coronavirus crisis - when business flourished - we invested a lot in increasing sustainability. Consequently, we now have two hundred solar panels on the roof. In difficult times such as these, we are reaping the benefits from them.'

Do you have any tips for other members?

'My tip? Be bold with organic pest control. Let nature sort it out. At Escaro Plants, we use an organic cultivation method a lot. Instead of chemicals, we call on nature. For example, we use ichneumon wasps and predatory mites to deal with pests. It works really well! Although you have to accept that occasionally you'll come across a louse or some other harmful insect.'



From biorationals to taste test

We look back on a successful **Horticoop Day**



On 2 November, the Greenhouse Horticulture Business Unit of Wageningen University & Research (WUR) was the setting for the Horticoop Day. It proved to be the perfect environment to be immersed in the technological developments within our sector. We look back on an inspiring day marked by collaboration and looking ahead.

A wide range of speakers who shared their future vision of the greenhouse horticulture sector treated those attending to a professional programme full of fresh insights. For example, Frank Kempkes, researcher in Energy and Climate at WUR, took the audience through the latest findings in the area of fossil-free cultivation. He reflected on the effect of energy innovations and the corresponding risks on greenhouse emissions. Renske Landeweert of the One-

Planet innovation centre spoke about smart applications for sustainable agriculture and food supply and shared the first results of a test with autonomous cultivation. It is an important topic, given that the global population is predicted to reach 9.7 billion by 2050. Major efforts are therefore being made to develop sensors to gather digital data, which is then analysed and converted into algorithms.

Horticoop's Dragons' Den

One of the highlights of the day was Horticoop's Dragons' Den. Based on the highly acclaimed television programme, which involves entrepreneurs pitching their ideas to investors, Horticoop put its own spin on this format. Four companies presented their innovations for the greenhouse industry. A jury comprising professional investors asked them pertinent questions. But they weren't the only ones who had their say. Those members attending were given the opportunity to air their preferences for the future investments via the Horticoop Community Platform. This provided insight into the novelties that Horticoop's supporters believe are important.

In the pages that follow, you can read all about the companies that pitched their ideas and how they were received by the audience.

Into the lab!

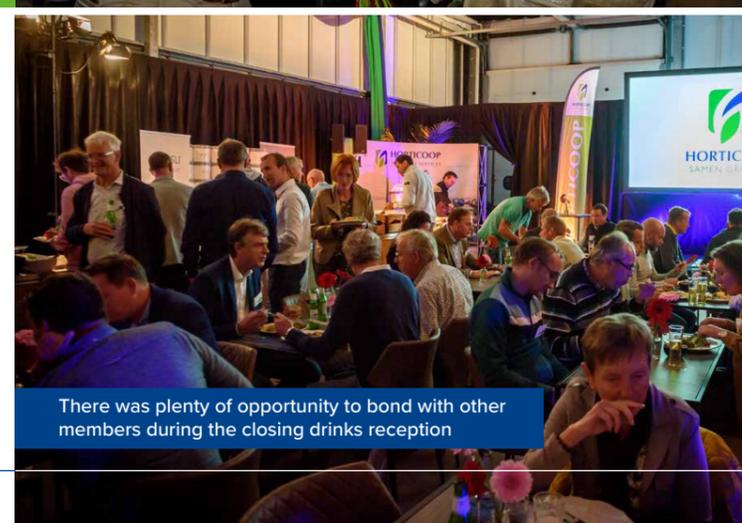
After the inspiring presentations and pitches, researchers from WUR took members through several trials currently underway. Clad in lab coats, attendees took a peek in the greenhouses where experiments are underway for year-round biological disease control, using the LED light spectrum, biorationals against diseases such as fusarium, and the greenhouse of 2030. An interesting peak behind the scenes!



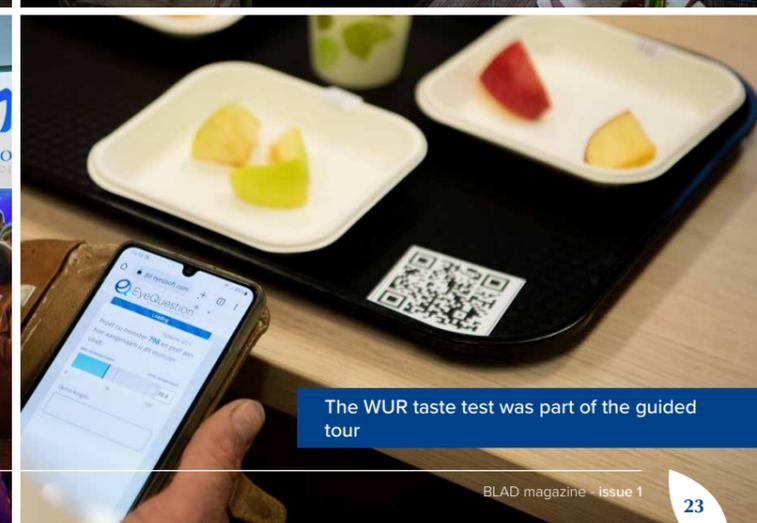
A visit to the Greenhouse of 2030 was a must



Joris Elstgeest congratulates Majolein Huisman and Jens Kool on their appointment as members of the council



There was plenty of opportunity to bond with other members during the closing drinks reception



The WUR taste test was part of the guided tour

Members have their say about the Horticoop Day

A members day is not a members day without members. So finding out what the members think is part and parcel of Horticoop Day. Letting the members in the hall have their say reflected their enthusiasm. Here's a few of their responses.



Cees Klein and Bart den Broeder, Bunnik Plants

Cees: 'Each and every one of the speakers got me thinking. During OnePlanet's presentation on autonomous cultivation, I noticed that the little wheels in my head started spinning at full speed: "How can we implement this at Bunnik Plants?" Because we have a wealth of information at our fingertips, yet that information is not very transparent. Suddenly, ideas started surfacing about how to capture information and translate it into relevant data. I'm dying to get stuck into this. For the rest, I thought the energy-efficient greenhouse of 2030 was very interesting. The developments that we witnessed in the WUR greenhouse are the future, if you ask me, especially if you combine them with autonomous cultivation. So I got plenty of inspiration and I can look back on a successful day!'

Bart: 'I found the opportunities that autonomous cultivation offers, and all the tools available to help you monitor it, like using sensors, extremely interesting. I thoroughly enjoyed the tour of the various trials that WUR is carrying out at the moment. I would have liked it even more if we had actually been able to go into the various greenhouses, like the one where they're studying how the light spectrum affects things, although of course I understand that we couldn't enter the greenhouse because of its sensitivity to the surroundings. All in all I thought it was a great interactive programme. This is the first Horticoop Day that I've attended. Hopefully I will get another opportunity in the future – but with over 300 colleagues, I'm afraid I'll probably have to give up my spot to someone else next time.'



Kees Stijger
Tuinbouwbedrijf Kees Stijger BV,
and members council member

Kees: 'It was a full programme! Actually, I thought all the various parts were interesting, from the speakers and pitchers to the tour of the university past trials of pathogens, fusarium and biological crop protection agents. It was good to see the issues and innovations that companies are exploring, what they can do for growers and how we all stand to benefit from them. OnePlanet's insights on technical developments in sustainable food production were particularly interesting, although not all the findings can be translated one-to-one to greenhouse horticulture. And that's precisely why a day like today is invaluable, not only for the growers, but also for the companies that are given a platform. The audience was full of people who know their business, know what they're talking about. And so they ask critical questions and, by doing so, they keep a company or an institution on the right track. There is a vast amount of knowledge in our sector, and a day like today helps us bring it together, share it among ourselves and use it to our own advantage. That is so important.'



John van Santen
Van Santen Gardenplant

John: 'At the moment, we at Van Santen Gardenplant are producing and not selling. That's why I had an opening in my agenda to come to the Horticoop Day. I'm so glad I did! Under the current circumstances, with rising energy prices, my job has become a whole lot more challenging. This very current topic got plenty of attention, which was great! It was interesting to see what is possible in the greenhouse industry, both in the short and long term. Especially the pitch about robotisation that Organifarms gave during Horticoop's Dragons' Den. That was really interesting. All in all it was an inspiring day that exceeded all my expectations.'



Peter van den Berg
Konst Alstroemeria

Peter: 'The Horticoop Day certainly met my expectations. What appealed to me the most? Dragons' Den, of course! I have a lot to do with crop protection, so I voted for Alex Schmeets with his pitch on biofungicides and plant enhancers. New developments in this field are always very relevant to me, so I found his idea very interesting. I got a lot of inspiration during the Horticoop Day, and I had very useful conversations with the other members. It's important as a company to attend days like today. There's a good reason to be a member of Horticoop. We have to join forces!'



Horticoop's Dragons' Den

The pitches and the reactions

Whereas the winners of the popular television programme leave the building with a contract in their pocket, the pitchers who presented their innovations on Horticoop Day had other things to take home with them. What were those things? Let's hear it from the horse's mouth!

+ Infracreen, Switzerland

Infracreen uses nanotechnology to design and produce smart products for greenhouses. Their latest innovation? A type of foil that doubles the efficiency of energy-saving screens. The material keeps outbound long-wave radiation inside the greenhouse, resulting in a drastic reduction in radiant heat loss. www.infracreen.com

A reaction from Henri de Lalande, CEO of Infracreen

'StartLife approached us about pitching our product on Dragons' Den. I didn't know about Horticoop at that stage, but when I heard about the cooperative's background, I thought the match was logical! Talking to our target market is always very valuable. Having a professional panel of investors made it even more interesting for us, because it gave us a two-sided perspective on our proposition. This made the round of questions with investors and the audience particularly valuable. The questions about the details of the product confirmed that the horticultural sector stands to benefit from our

innovation. The other pitchers also had interesting propositions and there was a good range of innovations. Hats off to Horticoop, too, for the excellent organisation of this Dragons' Den event.'

+ Organifarms, Germany

Organifarms develops robots for the greenhouse industry so that they can automate labour-intensive tasks. At the moment their harvest robot, BERRY, is doing this for those involved in strawberry cultivation, but expansion to other fruit and vegetables is just around the corner. The robot is so advanced that it can replace a worker. This means that staff shortages can be solved and labour costs can be cut by 30 to 40%. At the same time, quality is guaranteed: For instance, BERRY detects ripeness and damaged fruit, and picks strawberries by their stems to minimise actually touching the fruit. www.organifarms.de

Organifarms got the most votes and, with that, they were the winners of Horticoop's Dragons' Den.

A reaction from Mario Schäfer, CSO of Organifarms

'I've known Horticoop for quite some time. We're a German company, but many of our customers are in the Netherlands. We actively try to reach potential customers. So we were very keen to give our pitch here today. It's fantastic that the Horticoop members showed their confidence in us and that we were declared the winner! It proves that we are on the right track. It's always been important to us to have close ties with the market and to get its feedback. Growers are always welcome to give us their feedback. For example, I'm always keen to find out how our product could be geared to their specific needs.'

+ Voltiris, Switzerland

Voltiris' solar modules make it possible to use the entire surface area of greenhouses to generate electricity. These solar modules filter the incoming light spectrum, allowing some of the light waves through to the crops, while using the remaining light waves to generate electricity. The advantage for the grower: a doubling of the use of the available land while at the same time meeting some of its own energy requirements. www.voltiris.com

Reaction from Jonas Roch, CTO of Voltiris

'Horticoop's Dragons' Den offered us a great opportunity to present what we do to growers and to get their feedback on it. On the one hand, we got feedback from questions during the pitch, and on the other through the various discussions that ensued. "Have you thought about this? Maybe this addition would also be useful!" several interested Horticoop members told me. Seeing things from a growers' perspective was very useful. We can carry on with the development based on that. The most important takeaway from today is that we have to

test our innovation more broadly in practice. We're going to start doing so in January. Only then do you know for sure whether you've thought of everything.'

+ BioMosae, the Netherlands

The demand for environmentally friendly plant protection products is growing as an alternative to chemical pesticides used to prevent plant diseases and increase food capacity. BioMosae's solution for this? To develop a broad-spectrum, cheap, biological plant protection product using bacteria as mini-factories of substances that protect plants from fungi. These bacterial substances are known not only for their antifungal properties, but also for their growth-enhancing effect. The efficacy of BioMosae's biological plant protection product against Botrytis has since been demonstrated. www.biomosae.com

Reaction from Alex Schmeets, CEO of BioMosae

'My network has expanded quite nicely today! Especially during the dinner afterwards: that's when I managed to glean very interesting market information. The best part was finding out that WUR is carrying out a very similar project: using bacteria to combat specific fungal diseases in soil. That means we're on the right track. We're not competitors, because WUR works in the scientific world and we're in the corporate sector. I was particularly impressed with the amount of funds that Horticoop has to put towards investments in the coming years. That makes Horticoop a very interesting investment partner for a company like BioMosae.'



Members have their say about Dragons' Den



Jens Kool, Bouman Anthuriums

'I think Horticoop's Dragons' Den is a great concept and the pitchers performed very well. That said, if you asked me: "What would you invest in?" I wouldn't really know. I didn't really have a favourite. What I believe is particularly important in the current situation with high energy prices is to focus on how we can get through the winter in our industry. Combining the various ideas that the candidates in Dragons' Den put forward may well be a good thing. For example, a solar panel combined with a protective screen: that could have advantages.'



Bram Wennekes en Gerrit Hoogenraad, Handelskwekerij G. Hoogenraad

Bram: 'All four companies that pitched had interesting perspectives. Of course they don't all apply to all companies. Thank goodness, otherwise it would be even more difficult to choose. For example, Infrascreen's plan is very interesting for vegetable growers, but less relevant for us as a nursery for wholesale production of seedlings because we don't use heating. For me, Voltiris' presentation on solar panels and BioMosae's pitch on using biostimulants stood out. We're also exploring these aspects. Our basis is organic, but the efficacy of biofungicides fluctuates. If we're facing the loss of our crop, then we fall back on chemical pesticides and change tack if necessary. What we're aiming for is to take this last remaining step organic too. If BioMosae manages to increase its success rate and reduce costs, it will be even more interesting for us.'

Gerrit: 'I thought Dragons' Den was a great initiative. In the end, the company we voted for didn't win, but I don't think that was necessarily what today was about. It was the approach that counted – involving members in the investments being made and informing growers about developments. The pitches as they were given today are interesting for the companies that were given the opportunity to tell their stories and show us what's possible in the future, as well as for us, the growers. It's also important – and great fun! – to look beyond your own company. Robotisation may not be directly relevant to us, but the fact that Organifarms won the most votes with their pitch means it is relevant to most growers. This Dragons' Den showed me what's going on in the sector, and that's valuable too.'

Horticoop's Dragons' Den in perspective

Horticoop's Dragons' Den

offered an insight into investments opportunities that will help to make the horticulture sector future proof. Wilco Schoonderbeek, Director Investments at Horticoop, explains how this version of Dragons' Den underscores Horticoop's foundation as an investment cooperative and puts the presentations into perspective.



Wilco recounts: 'Our aim was to use Horticoop's Dragons' Den to introduce our members to innovations that could offer a solution to specific problems in their businesses. We also believe that it is important to demonstrate that at Horticoop we're not only looking in the Netherlands for the best investment opportunities. Innovations are taking place all over the world and our aim is to ensure that entrepreneurs, wherever they happen to be in the world, think of Horticoop if they're looking for funding for innovations in the field of horticulture.'

A peek under the bonnet

Even though the pitches give a good impression of the companies in which Horticoop might invest, in reality, investing is more complex. Wilco explains: 'Entrepreneurs who are good at pitching in a Dragons' Den situation and whose ideas capture the imagination quickly get the audience on their side, and with that their fictitious money. A proper investment round at Horticoop is a much more thorough process. Before investing in a business, we examine the value of the proposition to the cooperative, and take a long, hard look under the bonnet of the business to see how it works and how it is set up.'

The influence of the members

The way we choose an entrepreneur is also different in reality to the way it's done in Dragons' Den. In the den, members were able to award their points to the pitches via the Horticoop Community Platform. The jury, consisting of delegates from investment funds, gave them insights, which meant that they could take the opinions of a professional investor into account. The pitch with the most points then won Horticoop's investment, as it were. Wilco: 'Our aim was to use Dragons' Den to illustrate the influence that members have on Horticoop's investment decisions. After all, the members are the core of our cooperative. But, in reality, they wouldn't be voting for the pitches that developers put to us. This is because the members have given Horticoop's management and board of supervisory directors a mandate. Management makes investment decisions, under the supervision of the supervisory board.'

From the platform to the greenhouse

Wilco looks back on a successful fictitious investment round with excellent pitches. While he didn't really have a favourite pitcher, he understands why the members chose Organifarms as their favourite. 'The shortage of labour is a problem that is familiar to many growers. That's why I absolutely believe in robotics for greenhouses: not only because of staff shortages, but also because of the other opportunities that this kind of technology can offer in the future. Inspecting crops is one of them.' Incidentally, Organifarms' victory does not automatically mean that Horticoop will invest in the company. Wilco explains: 'Experience shows that you have to speak to a lot of companies to make one investment. Statistically speaking, the likelihood of there being one among these four pitchers that you can actually invest in is not high. That does not negate the fact that we will be engaging with the pitchers going forward. Whether we actually do invest in them depends on a lot of factors, including the potential size of the market they're hoping to reach, the advantages for the sector, but also the extent of the financing requirements and the added value of Horticoop as an investor.'



Helping hand

One thing is for sure: if we do invest, it is not just about money, but also about knowledge and our network, which includes our existing participations. Wilco: 'We only invest if it is relevant for our members. Linking our members and participating in these enterprises can have major advantages for everyone. There's a good reason why we are a win-win cooperative!'

Members in the spotlight:

Five questions for **Karolien Tesselaar**, co-owner of Tesselaar Alstroemeria

How long have you been in the business?

'Eight years ago I came across my husband Rick Tesselaar. He had a nursery, and I had a socially responsible company. We decided to join forces and we now run Tesselaar Alstroemeria together: a family business that has grown from one two-hectare site to three 10-hectare sites in twenty-five years. At our company, it is important that we grow beautiful flowers that people love, while at the same time having as little impact on the environment as possible.'

What do you like the most about your line of business?

'That we sell a fantastic product that people love. Besides that, we make sure that more than eighty people are able to earn a living by working for our company. I'm very proud of that. Together we make sure that we produce a fantastic product each and every day.'

What is the biggest challenge?

'The biggest challenge at Tesselaar Alstroemeria is to build a stable organisation with people who have the right knowledge and skills. We need good people who can help us to support the organisation. Rising energy prices have unfortunately compelled us to end all temporary contracts. It was a difficult decision, which was very tough on the people we had to let go.'

So rising energy prices have had a huge impact. How has that affected your business operations?

'Fortunately, alstroemeria is a relatively sustainable flower. The flower originates from the Andes in Argentina and likes having cold feet. Above ground, it needs a stable temperature of around eighteen degrees. So compared to many other greenhouses growing cut flowers, our greenhouse temperature is much lower. That's not to say that we don't have to make changes to adjust for rising energy prices. This winter we'll probably turn down our heating and lighting to half power. That affects the growth of the plant and that in turn means we'll produce less.'

You do a lot in terms of sustainability. Do you have any good tips you can share?

'What opened our eyes was when we calculated our ecological footprint. In other words, we calculated the impact our business has on the environment. I advise other companies to make that calculation, too, because you can make adjustments where necessary to minimise the negative impact based on these insights.'



Invest, innovate, profit

StartLife and Horticoop support **innovative start-ups**

Horticoop recently became an investment partner of StartLife: an initiative of Wageningen University & Research (WUR) that promotes innovative start-ups. This partnership promises to be very beneficial to the Dutch horticultural sector according to Jan Meiling, Director of StartLife, and Sebastiaan Berendse, Director of Value Creation at WUR.



Jan Meiling



Sebastiaan Berendse

Jan, what role does StartLife have in the horticultural industry in the Netherlands?

Jan: 'Wageningen University & Research and a few of its partners founded StartLife in 2010. We are an independent organisation that works closely with WUR. StartLife's objective is to support innovative start-ups in the food and agricultural sector, which involves horticulture to a large degree. We coach young entrepreneurs and hook them up with potential

investors so that they have the capital to develop their ideas. By doing so, we promote innovation in the sector and contribute to the competitiveness of Dutch growers.'

How much influence do start-ups have in the industry?

Jan: 'We recently compared how much capital is invested in innovative start-ups in this industry in Europe, compared to the capital that large

companies invest in-house in research and development. We found that the two are converging. Of course large companies are still the driving force in this respect. But it is a clear sign that the industry are recognising the benefits of start-up-driven innovation more and more. Growers who are keen to find out more about this topic are welcome to come to F&A Next: an annual, international conference on investment and innovation in the food and agricultural sector, which will be held in Wageningen on 24 and 25 May 2023.'

What does the collaboration between Horticoop and StartLife consist of?

Jan: 'Horticoop has been StartLife's investment partner since the summer of 2022. That is to say, through StartLife, Horticoop invests in companies that are developing a promising innovation for the horticultural sector in the Netherlands. StartLife has a mediating role in this, which entails spending a lot of time on and paying attention to selecting start-ups that match Horticoop's investment goals. We are very excited about this partnership and see it as a logical step for both parties. Horticoop is a trusted and established organisation, which we are keen to introduce to fledgling entrepreneurs.'

StartLife was already working with several investment partners. What does Horticoop add to this?

Jan: 'Horticoop focuses on a very specific segment, the horticultural sector in the Netherlands, with the aim of strengthening the competitive advantage of Dutch growers. By doing so, we are able to link Horticoop in a very targeted way to companies that have something to offer in that field. What's more, committed investment partners are always a welcome addition to our network. What we notice is that investors prefer to co-invest with other organisations, and that investments have a greater impact as a result. The fact that Horticoop is becoming part of a community of several investment companies will definitely increase the success rate of its affiliated start-ups.'

Sebastiaan, you became involved in StartLife because of Wageningen University & Research. What role does WUR play?

Sebastiaan: 'We are not directly involved in the collaboration between Horticoop and StartLife. For example, we are not involved in bringing together investors like Horticoop and the companies affiliated with StartLife. But what we are doing is constantly looking for ways in which WUR can add something to the collaborations, for example by involving the start-ups in WUR research projects. And perhaps trend-setting growers affiliated to Horticoop can also play a role in this in the future. Together with start-ups and growers, we are keen to build a partnership in which we can complement one another.'

What do Horticoop members have to gain from the investments? Should growers not be wary of competition from start-ups?

Sebastiaan: 'No. On the contrary! This concerns start-ups that develop supporting products and services, so they add value for entrepreneurs in the horticultural sector. Consider, for instance, energy-efficient greenhouses, more efficient robotics and drones that detect diseases as they fly through greenhouses. These kinds of innovations ultimately benefit the entire industry. At the same time, they are very valuable to society because they help the horticultural sector grow in a more efficient and even cleaner way.'

Jan: 'I can imagine that start-ups are keen to work with Horticoop members, for example to test their products in practice. They may well be the first to start using these innovative techniques. I'm looking forward to seeing what we are capable of achieving thanks to this collaboration, and what opportunities we can create so that everyone benefits.'

'I believe this is a golden opportunity for you as shareholders'

Horticoop talks to former referee and entrepreneur
Björn Kuipers

As owner of two Jumbo supermarkets and a hairdressing salon in the east of the country, the renowned former referee, Björn Kuipers knows the entrepreneurial ropes. And that's not all: as a former C1000 franchisee, he also knows what it's like to own stakes in companies. Our CEO Steven van Nieuwenhuijzen and CFO Hend van Ravestein talked to him about the opportunities he sees for Horticoop members as shareholders of the cooperative.



Björn Kuipers gave an inspired lecture on 'scoring together' during the members day in June 2022.

Steven: 'Björn, you attended the Horticoop Day in June where you spoke about the importance of collaboration, performing at the highest level and the power of innovation. We're keen to discuss the developments we're currently undergoing. As you may be aware, Horticoop's assets are in the names of our members. Members are given their share in the form of participations – a type of shares – that are eventually tradable. The share of Horticoop's value that they hold thus becomes clearer to members. If we deliver on our promise and successfully expand our company portfolio, the value of our participating interests will grow too. The remarkable thing about this is that, when our members buy products or services from the companies in our portfolio, this also affects their own dividend and share value. This is how we aim to become a vibrant investment group in horticulture, with members who feel they are active shareholders in Horticoop. You mentioned at the Horticoop members day in June, that it reminds you of what went on at C1000 and Jumbo. Can you tell us something about this?'

Björn: 'That's right, although things were slightly different at C1000. Unlike the Horticoop members, at C1000 we had to buy depositary receipts. Fortunately, this was in our favour because these certificates became much more valuable over a three-year period. That exceptional increase in value was unique, so I don't think the same will happen with the shares Horticoop members get. But they get their shares for free, simply because they are Horticoop members! It's fantastic that Horticoop has set it up like this. I believe this is a golden opportunity for all the shareholders that are your customers; I can't see a single disadvantage.'

Steven: 'You will see that some members will recognise the potential and start trying to grow their share. Others will think "I'll believe it when I see it." I think this is the time as a member to say: "I'm sticking my neck out because I believe in this, and I also understand that I'll get that value as a matter of course as soon as I do that".'

Björn: 'So wake up, you Horticoop members, because this is your opportunity to do business and invest in the companies of those people who can increase the value of your shares. You are now at the start of something that is set to grow and grow!'

Hend: 'Björn, you decided to participate in the C1000 brand when you had C1000, and later in the Jumbo brand. What did you take into account when deciding whether or not to go ahead with it?'

Björn: 'It was really simple. I asked myself: do I have faith in the C1000 brand, in the Jumbo brand? And that's exactly the same question Horticoop members should be asking themselves: do I have faith in the Horticoop brand? Do I have faith in the companies who are linked to Horticoop?'

If that's the case, then I can't see any downsides. If you don't believe in a brand or organisation, then you mustn't join them. But if you

think "We have a future together and we'll be stronger together," then I would say get on board and get involved!'

Hend: 'How do you think our transition from a traditional buyers' cooperative to an investment cooperative will affect our members' commitment to us?' >

'Wake up, you Horticoop members, because this is your opportunity to do business and invest in the companies of those people who can increase the value of your shares. You are now at the start of something that is set to grow and grow!'



Björn: ‘Significantly! Because I think you can grow in strength simply by dint of the fact that you are deliberately going into the future together. As a member of Horticoop, I would start examining my procurement policy very carefully: who am I buying from now, and could I perhaps buy from a company in the Horticoop portfolio? Because if I do that, my share will become more valuable. Quite apart from the fact that obviously there are advantages to being able to do your purchasing jointly as members. These days at Jumbo, we are trying to buy from the whole of Europe instead of just companies in the Netherlands, because buying on a larger scale brings your cost price down. In the supermarket sector, too, we know very well that working more intensively together has huge advantages.’

Steven: ‘On the subject of supermarkets, if you look at our products, like vegetables, from the perspective of someone running a supermarket, what significance does that product group have on the supermarket shelf?’

Björn: ‘It’s very significant. Your products are very valuable in terms of the share of the turnover in our market. We’re witnessing a drop

in turnover in the share of meat. This is not a product that we can grow our share of, because people are not eating as much meat anymore. The share of fruit and vegetables, on the other hand, is consistently growing. The way these products are delivered is also excellent. It boils down to a 24-hour service: what we order today, we get tomorrow. The product group that you excel in will always add value.’

Hend: ‘That’s good to hear. We see from the foreign companies in our portfolio that consumers there are more interested in local and domestic products, and are willing to pay more for them. Do you see opportunities for our sector to promote that trend in the Netherlands?’

‘I’ve learnt over the years: there is always resistance to change, but often these changes are a very good thing, or even essential.’



Björn: ‘Us Dutch people are demanding. We want to keep everything as local as possible. As much as possible. But also as cheaply as possible. As soon as we have to pay more, we’re suddenly a whole lot less demanding. If we have two types of baby marrow in the supermarket – a locally produced baby marrow that is a bit more expensive, and a baby marrow from a bit further away at a slightly lower price – very few consumers will take those locally produced marrows. If the price is more or less the same and the quality is good, then coming from a “close by” location plays a much bigger role in their decision. The reality is: we are still quite wary in the Netherlands when it comes to buying more expensive products as long as there are cheaper alternatives.’

Steven: ‘And what about if there is also a defensible difference, for instance, in nutritional value? Take peppers, for example, if one is Champions League and the other is relegated to the amateur division as far as nutritional values like vitamins are concerned?’

Björn: ‘If you add value to products, it’s a totally different story. But then the difference has to be really obvious. That said, if you want to play in the Champions League as a grower, i.e. add a lot of value and be locally involved, then you’re part of a different culture. Because Champions League is completely different to the Premier League: it’s a different culture, with a different

standard. I do wonder, though, whether everyone actually wants to play at the highest level.’

Steven: ‘Björn, finally, on the Horticoop Day you mentioned that you have often implemented major changes in your business and in your career as a professional referee, and that it has not always been smooth sailing. Do you have any tips for our members who are on the brink of a major change? What would you share with them?’

Björn: ‘It’s true, I’ve been through major reforms in both fields. Take football, for instance: a lot of innovations have been implemented in recent years. We now have semi-automatic offsides: cameras can determine within 10 seconds whether someone is offside or not. We now have headset communications. VAR as been introduced. But a lot is changing rapidly in the world of supermarkets, too. Where we used to have till operators, we now have self-scanning. I’ve learnt over the years: there is always resistance to change, but often these changes are a very good thing, or even essential. Everything that’s new, all innovations, all changes that you’re faced with, go hand in hand with trial and error. And sometimes it takes a lot of resilience to swim against the current. It’s precisely those entrepreneurs that can see past the bumps in the road, those are the ones that are worth their weight in gold.’ ■



Björn Kuipers (1973) is a former football referee and successful businessman. For many years, he worked at the highest level of football in Europe and the Netherlands. His dream came true in 2021 when he refereed the European Championship final. He owned three C1000 outlets and a hairdressing salon in Oldenzaal during his time as a referee. He has since replaced the C1000s with two Jumbo outlets.

Members in the spotlight:

Five questions for **Koos de Vries**, owner of Drenthe Growers

How long have you been in the business?

'Drenthe Growers is a family-run business, based in the village of Erica, and focuses on growing cucumbers. My father founded the company in 1956 and I took over from him in 1980, at the age of 20. My successors are now also in sight! My son, my daughter and my son-in-law all work for the company, and my other son will soon be joining the team. I love the entrepreneurship and challenges of cucumber farming and I hope my children continue to build our business with the same passion.'

What is the biggest challenge?

'It involves growing the crop as best we can. Every crop is exciting. You start with a small plant and after twelve weeks you can see whether you've been successful. And a lot can go wrong during those twelve weeks. Diseases, especially, are a major factor. It's important to keep the cucumbers healthy; that's when you can produce the most. We plant the whole year round, so that we can be sure that there are good crops among them.'

How do you keep your customers satisfied?

'We supply some major organisations, like Lidl and Aldi. We try to keep our supplies as stable as possible. The best thing is if we present our traders with a steady supply of cucumbers. Unfortunately, we can't guarantee that we will be able to present the finest cucumbers

on a platter every week. Apart from disease, the weather is also a crucial factor. Especially because we're cultivating cucumbers without lighting.'

What effect do rising energy prices have on your crop?

'Now that energy is so expensive, we are trying to restrict our consumption as much as possible. We now grow cucumbers without lighting because otherwise the cost price is too high. Unfortunately, this comes with plenty of repercussions. Whereas we used to produce a million cucumbers, we're now down to 600,000. I'm hoping that energy prices will soon fall so that we can start using lights again. Although I must say I'm afraid that that is not going to happen any time soon.'

What would you say is the way to become a successful entrepreneur?

'If you learn from your mistakes, you will automatically become a better entrepreneur. I try to pass that on to my children. As a father, I can tell them how to do things, but ultimately they have to do it and experience things for themselves. That is a process of trial and error, but the point is that you have to carry on developing!'



Knowledge as the driving force in greenhouse horticulture

The Club of 100 supports **scientific research**

To promote scientific research, the Greenhouse Horticulture and Flower Bulb Business Unit at Wageningen University & Research (WUR) collaborates with private organisations a lot. An example of this is the Club of 100, a successful initiative in this respect and one that Horticoop is also part of. On the subject of how this collaboration is shaping the future of the horticulture sector, Jacqueline van Oosten, Club of 100's Business Development Manager, had the following to say.

Building greenhouses, cultivation, process automation... these are just three examples of sectors in horticulture that cannot do without scientific research. Because, before companies can develop new technologies in this field, they need scientific insights to build on. Companies in the Club of 100 from across the entire greenhouse horticulture supply chain work together with researchers from Wageningen University & Research (Greenhouse Horticulture and Flower Bulbs Business Unit). The aim is to develop sustainable and profitable production systems that help growers to produce their products in a sustainable and future-proof way. 'Solving complex issues that growers face often requires an approach that examines the issue from various angles,' Jacqueline van Oosten, Business Development Manager at the Club of 100, explains. 'We bring the various organisations together so that they can work on solutions. This often starts with strategic applied research, which produces practical applications in five to ten years' time.

Affiliated companies can then use the findings to develop a service or product for the market. Because the whole sector benefits from joining

forces, companies that are normally one another's competitors can work together as part of the Club of 100.'

Game changers

In its short history, the Club of 100 – founded in 2014 – has become a force to reckon with in the horticultural industry in the Netherlands. For instance, the club plays an important role in the development of circular greenhouse horticulture, the year-round use of biological control and the advent of light control to boost crops. 'Themes we deal with are as diverse as the companies and production methods in the sector,' Jacqueline tells us. 'But there are also issues that are relevant to everyone. For example, many growers are looking for ways to produce crops with resources that are becoming increasingly scarce, such as energy, water and labour. The Club of 100 can contribute to this with sound scientific research.'

Engaging with companies

An important component of the Club of 100 are the discussions between WUR and busi-



Image: Wageningen University & Research

nesses in the greenhouse horticulture chain. Jacqueline: 'This encourages WUR to gather knowledge that benefits the corporate sector, while at the same time encouraging companies to test innovation strategies against existing scientific insights. That's how you keep inspiring each other. At the Club of 100, we start projects by asking affiliated companies what their long-term needs are. These are extremely interesting discussions. The challenge is to find out exactly what it is that is driving the company's requirements. Once we know what that is, our experts are keen to share ideas about research projects that are in line with their needs. And, if that knowledge is available, we help them to come up with ideas about how we can make it applicable to the individual companies.'

Doing more with technology

Exchanging knowledge is an interactive process. Whereas WUR searches for solutions to issues facing companies in the horticulture sector, these companies gain knowledge in practice that is useful to scientific research.

Companies also develop new techniques that are sure to attract the interest of researchers in Wageningen. 'At WUR, we aren't in the business of developing technological innovations ourselves,' Jacqueline explains. 'But our scientists are very interested in researching the potential of the latest technological developments, for example to optimise their use. A few years ago, for example, research was done on software that

can detect diseases and pests. The technology was already available. But when we examined how it worked, the software turned out to collect so much useful data that, with a few modifications, we could also use it to predict harvests. One of the companies in the Club of 100 went on to expand this concept, which has recently been launched in the market, seven years after this study began. This is a prime example of turning knowledge into practical applications.'

Ideal network

In her work, Jacqueline is committed to seeing the Club of 100 succeed, and this is partly because she is convinced that it is an excellent initiative. She reckons the diversity of the affiliated network is the ideal basis for promoting scientific research for the benefit of the horticultural sector: 'What is special about the Club of 100 is that researchers, companies and government institutions are part of one network, and as such it has all the components for successful innovation. What's more, the entire supply chain is represented, for instance it includes greenhouse builders and installation companies, as well as banks and suppliers of substrate, plant propagating materials and plant protection products. Because these organisations think things through from various perspectives, we come up with innovations that make greenhouse farming more profitable and future proof in a relatively short space of time. I'm looking forward to demonstrating – together with all our members – how we can contribute to a sustainable and future-proof sector.'



Image: Wageningen University & Research

The Horticoop companies

Horticoop heeft diverse bedrijven in haar portefeuille. Deze bedrijven dragen stuk voor stuk een ander steentje bij aan een duurzaam ontwikkelende, toekomstgerichte tuinbouw. Welke bedrijven er momenteel in de portefeuille vallen, en wat ze voor u kunnen betekenen, zetten we op een rijtje.



Lensli

Lensli has been developing and producing high-quality substrates for professional horticulture at home and abroad for more than 115 years. This substrate specialist does so for all sectors and crops in this industry in close collaboration with its customers: from flowering and green pot plants to orchids, fruit and vegetable cultivation, bedding, seeds and cuttings, and tree nurseries. Regardless of which crop the substrates are produced for, consistent quality is always paramount. Lensli's customers can count on getting the same substrate properties for every crop. Add to that a tireless team of specialists totally committed to offering the precise substrate composition that helps make a crop successful, and you have captured the essence of Lensli. The organisation is constantly on the lookout for innovations and improvements that make substrates – and with that crops – even better.



Lumiforte

Lumiforte launched its new name in 2022. Whereas the company first consisted of several divisions, including Mardenko, Sudlac and Smartcoat, its new name gives it a unified, all-encompassing image. 'Lumi' for light and 'forte' for power and strength! Lumiforte makes highly intelligent coatings that help growers protect their crops from too much heat and light, for example. Growers can regulate conditions in the greenhouse by using these coatings. This creates the right greenhouse climate for each season, which enhances crop growth. Lumiforte's coatings can even influence the length of a rose's stem! With more than 50 years of history and knowledge behind it, Lumiforte can safely say it's an international leader in the field of coatings. That said, the company is not resting on its laurels: it is constantly introducing innovations to the marketplace. Growers can rest assured that this coating specialist is doing everything it can to maximise the returns per square metre for the growers.



HORTICOOP
TECHNICAL SERVICES

Horticoop Technical Services

Horticoop Technical Services produces smart technical solutions for every horticultural business and is a reliable, stable partner that all horticultural businesses can count on. The company applies its technical knowledge and expertise to make horticultural businesses more sustainable and efficient so that they can achieve higher returns. Together with the grower in question, Horticoop Technical Services provides tailor-made technical solutions in the fields of water, electricity, climate and light. The company then combines and installs these techniques. The company offers maintenance services, but also implements new build projects and replaces and optimises existing installations. And added to this: whereas many companies only specialise in one brand of climate systems, Horticoop Technical Services is a dealer for two of the largest manufacturers of climate computers. Greenhouse climates can be fully automated using both Ridder and Hoogendoorn technology.



holimco

Holimco

Holimco is based in the French village of Villevêque close to Angers. It specialises in horticultural items and technology. The company combines French courtesy with Dutch progressiveness and, in part because of this, it has now become an authority in the French horticultural industry. Using a wide range of machinery, robots and equipment, the company helps to promote crop growth and high-yield cultivation. Thanks to its wide experience in the French horticultural industry gained over the past 70 years, the company has succeeded in contributing to making the sector more sustainable. In addition, Holimco is open to new innovations and strategic changes in the organisation so that it can continue growing as a company.



GÄRTNEREINKAUF

Gärtnereinkauf Münchingen

Gärtnereinkauf Münchingen (GEM), a company based in the south of Germany, supplies mainly pot plant companies and garden centres with an extensive range of potting soil, fertilisers, pots and other products, including technical products. It also offers retail products for resale to consumers. And not without success: thanks to its expertise, flexibility and efficient logistics, GEM has grown considerably in recent years. GEM's field staff enjoy visiting customers. On site, the GEM team analyses its customers' needs and wishes together with them. By doing so, it is realising the ambition to have a healthy future for horticulture. >



Horticoop Scandinavia

Horticoop Scandinavia is a one-stop shop in Denmark, where growers will find all the products they need for their production processes. Its key customers are pot plant growers in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland. Not only does it add value for growers, but also for manufacturers. This small, expert team has succeeded in taking the burden of sales operations out of hands of manufacturers in the Nordic market. These largely foreign producers can rely on the excellent relationship that Horticoop Scandinavia has with its customers as well as the wealth of knowledge that the team has at its fingertips. Its staff not only draw up sales plans, but also offer proactive advice to growers who are the company's customers.



Hort Americas

Hort Americas started out as a wholesaler in the American town of Bedford, Texas. It has since evolved to become a veritable specialist in urban and vertical farming, horticultural products and LED grow lights. Besides being a sales channel, Hort Americas is also an expertise centre and shares news updates, research and background articles on the agricultural sector through various channels, including its website, books and seminars, and it even offers certified training courses. The company has succeeded in advancing the development of horticulture through technology and education. ■



**Horticoop wishes
you all the best for
2023!**



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