



HORTICOOP
GROWING TOGETHER

Annual report 2021



Foreword

After a turbulent year with the pandemic raging through the country, changing needs and new developments in horticulture, we are now taking stock. This time, we're taking a different approach to what you are used to. This is because we are proud of what we have achieved and are keen to share it with you. Because, even though it was an eventful year thanks to the global Covid-19 pandemic, 2021 was also good for Horticoop in many ways.

This annual report gives an impression of the exceptional steps we took in 2021. Horticoop is presenting a strategic plan that will take it out of the shadows and focus its attention on investments in companies that contribute to the horticulture industry. Much has been done to prepare for this, which we will explain in this annual report. And even though an annual report looks back on things, we are taking this opportunity to look forward. While 2021 saw the launch of Horticoop as an investment cooperative, 2022 is the year in which we intend to continue building on this foundation. On the new Horticoop, on our investment portfolio and on our relationship with our members.

We are ready to build a new future, together with our brand new Supervisory Board. They are pleased to have the opportunity to introduce themselves to you in this annual report. This report also sets out how the companies in the Horticoop portfolio profile themselves in the market, and our foreign companies share their vision of the international horticulture industry. Trading partners shed light on the changing demand in the marketplace and members share their experiences of cooperating with our companies. In short, what lies before you is an annual report that is not only about the figures. It is also about taking a journey in the daily experience of our cooperative, a cooperative with its eye on the future.

I am looking forward to working together on our win-win cooperative!

Joris Elsgeest

Chairman of Coöperatief Koninklijk
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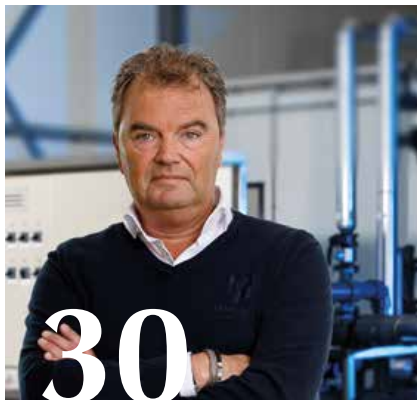
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Looking back on 2021

Investing together in the future of the horticulture industry

2021 was the year Horticoop shook off the label of 'buyers' cooperative' to go forward in a different direction. As an investment cooperative, the 'new Horticoop' is ready for a future in which it actively invests in companies that contribute to the horticulture industry. Thanks to Covid-19 measures, the official launch that was due to take place on 1 December 2021 could not be held in person. That didn't stop Horticoop from launching its new self enthusiastically via an online live broadcast. This festive occasion was celebrated on 1 June 2022 together with the members during a successful kick-off meeting at the Royal Netherlands Football Association. CFO Hend van Ravestein and CEO Steven van Nieuwenhuijzen look back on 2021, the year Horticoop opened a new chapter for the horticulture industry.



Why has Horticoop struck a new path?

Steven: 'Horticoop has been around since 1904 and was founded to support members with their business operations. Although Horticoop's mission has not changed after all these years, its relationship with its members has. As a buyers' cooperative, members benefited for years from competitive purchase prices for fertilisers and crop protection, as well as from joint purchasing. As time passed, that model started to show cracks. For starters, because market players began to consolidate, allowing members to get better prices. And, secondly, because competition grew and prices became more transparent in the wake of the internet and online sales.'

Hend: 'Other factors that played a role included scaling up and other organisations becoming active in the marketplace. This resulted in members not really needing a cooperative that specialised in supplying generic products to horticultural companies.'

Steven: 'On the back of that diminishing demand, a decision was taken in 2018 to sell Horticoop's wholesale business. That prompted us to have a long, hard look at ourselves. What was Horticoop's raison d'être? What added value did it offer? What have we got to offer our members? Now that the relationship with our members was no longer based on joint purchasing advantages, we had to change the way the cooperative was structured. This resulted in drawing up and working out a new direction, one in which the interests of the members, the companies and Horticoop's position in the sector were taken into consideration. The sale of the wholesale side of the business was the trigger and highlighted the urgency; the transition we then embarked on was the answer.'

Does this change in tack mean that Horticoop will in essence change?

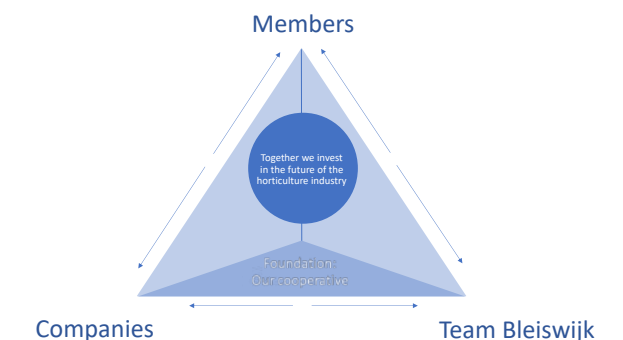
Hend: 'First and foremost: Horticoop is and remains a cooperative of and for its members. We will continue to offer support to horticulturists in their business operations and contribute to a sustainable and healthy future for the sector. In essence, the transition boils down to a change in the form in which we will be doing this. We came about because there was a need for joint purchasing, and we are now moving on to a need for joint investment in horticulture. Horticoop has been around for several generations and we know better than anyone that

progress goes hand in hand with change. That is why Horticoop is going to be investing more, and more actively, in the sector.'

You're moving forward as an investment cooperative. How will that work in practice?

Hend: 'As an investment cooperative, Horticoop invests in established companies, start-ups and scale-ups that are enhancing the knowledge, network and growth opportunities in horticulture. Besides this, the assets will be put in the members' name. This will strengthen involvement in the cooperative, because the members will have a direct interest in investing in companies that add value. Members can help to develop products and share ideas about how they can be applied. This is how we will create a win-win cooperative. After all, this will help members because the new company will address a need and, for its part, it will instantly have a group of customers, which gives it a financial advantage. If the financial returns are good, Horticoop can invest in horticulture-related companies and – in part – distribute profits to members, because they will be given participations in Horticoop. That is how we intend to join forces to grow our sector with a focus on the future!'

Steven: 'The cooperative is like a triangle. Our 400 members, all horticulturalists in the greenhouse sector mainly in the Netherlands, are one point of that triangle. The second point consists of the companies in which Horticoop has a share: our companies. Virtually all those companies are suppliers to the horticulture industry. For convenience, I call the last point of the triangle "team Bleiswijk", where Horticoop's head office is located. That team tries to make the flywheel between the members and Horticoop companies turn faster.'



Hend: 'That's what distinguishes us as investors in this sector. We have more than a century of experience plus the network and access to the market. We are horticulture. Of course, there are lots of investment companies out there, but they don't have the advantage that we have: we are the only ones specialising in greenhouse horticulture, with members as owners and the support base. That is a rock-solid combination.'

What does this change in tack mean for the partners in the triangle that you've just described?

Steven: 'The transition means something different for each of the three partners. Let's start with the Bleiswijk team: for them, it means that we have to develop in certain areas, expand our capacities. We have to focus on mergers and acquisitions, i.e. become good at identifying organisations in the market that we can take over, and then manage that process properly. Active share ownership is another area requiring special attention. Here we have in mind allowing our companies to excel and flourish. The final topic that requires a different approach is community and data. How can we ensure that we communicate properly with the others in the triangle I've outlined, while at the same time storing and utilising the data we have collectively as effectively as possible?'

Hend: 'That's when the role of the members comes into play. For them, the transition means that assets will be registered in their name and they will be given participations in the cooperative. In theory, they were all owners of Horticoop, but the change in course makes it more tangible. This makes their involvement much more important, because we will determine which types of companies we add to the Horticoop portfolio based partly on their input. If a new company meets the needs of the members and at the same time is worth the investment, we'll add it to the portfolio. That is how we intend to create a win-win situation.'

Steven: 'It also means that we will be reviewing the portfolio of Horticoop companies. As a result, companies may not be part of the investment cooperative in the future because they don't contribute directly to supplying the horticulture industry. That said, our focus will mainly be on expanding the portfolio. So we're going to be investing more in companies, both in established businesses and in scale-ups.'

You've mentioned them already: the participations. What do participations mean in concrete terms for the members?

Steven: 'Horticoop's assets will be put in the members' names in the participation structure. The cooperative has many members, but some contribute more than others. This will become clear with the participation system. The number of participations a member receives depends on the turnover he or she generated at Horticoop companies in the period from 2016 to 2018. Members then get a share in the profits through these participations, as well as certain voting rights in decisions we make in the future. For instance, about the investments we are going to make, or about elections for our members council. Horticoop will issue 10% at most of its outstanding participations annually. And this will be done each year. That way, more and more participations will be in circulation. Logically, the more involved someone is, the more participations they will be awarded and the more dividends they will receive. The meaning of "member engagement" is defined more broadly than turnover. Engagement with Horticoop can also be strengthened, for instance, by being active on the Horticoop platform, by attending Horticoop meetings, or by contributing to knowledge sharing.'

What is Horticoop expecting from its members?

Hend: 'We are hoping to be able to count on our members when it comes to their specialist knowledge and experience. Take, for instance, investment in tomato-harvesting robots. That's when we really welcome input from tomato growers.'

It's important that members contribute actively, by sharing their knowledge and making data available. That's how we can strengthen the community and, as a cooperative, ensure that our sector stays strong and healthy, and that we can continue to provide for our own growth. We will also be asking members to buy the products and services they need from the Horticoop companies under similar market conditions. Ultimately, the objective is that we arrive at the right investments through engagement and the input of knowledge. Those investments are then companies that deliver to the members and, as they become more successful, the members benefit because they are given dividends.'

What can Horticoop members expect?

Steven: 'Members can expect us to scale up the organisation and prepare it to achieve their growth targets. They can also expect us to actively involve them by organising face-to-face and online meetings so that they can exchange knowledge and experience. It's important to them, but also for the sector as a whole. Members can also be part of the decision-making process when it comes to the course we have set, and they can think along with us when it comes to future investments. Our plan is to hold events throughout the year on topics like innovation and sustainability. And, as is normal in a cooperative, we are happy to discuss the specific details with our members. So we will be asking them for their opinions regularly, so that we offer them what is necessary and what they are looking for. The online platform that is now being built – a process in which Horticoop members as well as companies are involved – is an important tool in this. It's going to be our digital meeting place, and it will be playing an important role in how we shape the new Horticoop.'

The transition was officially launched on 1 December 2021. How's it gone thus far?

Steven: 'We've taken huge steps by setting up the internal organisation. The strategising as well as the implementation were done in close consultation with the members council and the Supervisory Board. We've raised Horticoop's profile in the market in terms of our ambition and the necessary governance changes have also been set in motion. We're also busy setting up an acquisition facility, and we have strengthened the management teams at the Horticoop group companies, particularly at Lensli, Lumiforte and Hort Americas, where we have appointed managers with impressive CVs to key positions. In other words, we are now at the point when we can exit the starting blocks to become a real force to be reckoned with!'

What's on the programme for 2022?

Hend: 'Wilco Schoonderbeek is due to take on the role as director of investments in July 2022. This is a new position that has been added to Horticoop's management team. His arrival is the green light for the mergers and acquisitions department, i.e. the investment department. We are hoping to make our first investment in this new structure in the second half of this year. As far as members go, the final implementation of

the amendments to the articles of association and the issue of participations have priority. Internally, the focus will be making Horticoop Technical Services and Lensli autonomous and further strengthening these companies. The transition is in full swing at Lensli, and things are moving at Horticoop Technical Services. This involves scaling down central services that were previously provided by Horticoop, like marketing, ICT and human resources. Making these Horticoop companies autonomous should give them more freedom and responsibility to manage themselves and grow, while giving Horticoop room to focus on its investments and its relationship with its members.'

What do you believe is the biggest opportunity for 'the new Horticoop'?

Steven: 'We can prove our worth as an investor by having the most knowledge when it comes to the greenhouse industry and, with that, the best understanding of the sector. Helping to develop innovations in the market, both in newly formed companies and in the more established ones, is something we should be able to do better than anyone else. By having the members, because we are established globally, because we have been in this industry for almost 120 years. Capitalising on that unique position is the biggest opportunity for Horticoop.'

Hend: 'Yes, indeed! With our knowledge and the experience we have accumulated, both in the organisation and among our member base, we can invest to strengthen our own company portfolio and the development of greenhouse horticulture as a whole. And the best part is that our members stand to benefit directly from the returns because we are issuing participations!'

[View the animation video here about investment cooperative Horticoop!](#)

[Click here](#)



Notes to the 2021 figures

CFO Hend van Ravestein gives general notes to the 2021 financial closing.

A detailed overview of the annual figures is given further on in the annual report.

Results

The year 2021 closed with a net profit (after tax) of € 3.0 million. Net profit in 2020 amounted to €3.6 million. Last year, there were some special, one-off transactions – related to the sale of properties and operations – that positively influenced the 2020 result. The EBITDA over 2021 totalled €9.9 million. EBITDA in 2020 amounted to €12.5 million.

Revenue development

Horticoop's consolidated net turnover rose to € 142.6 million in 2021, compared to €141.4 million in 2020.

Growth in turnover

The increase in turnover was due in part to higher sales at Lensli and Lumiforte, and an increase in turnover at Horticoop's foreign companies. Turnover at Lensli's substrate companies was around 12% higher than in 2020. Increased sales volumes and higher selling prices both boosted turnover. In addition, Lensli's tree nursery business grew strongly as a proportion of the whole. The coating business at Lumiforte (formerly Smartcoat) expanded further in 2021 with an increase in sales of 18%. Redusystems and Sudlac, in particular, contributed to this growth. Overall revenue development at Horticoop's foreign companies in Denmark, Germany, France, the United States and Ecuador was positive. Growth in Denmark was strong in general, with outliers in the biology and LED lighting branches. Strong overall growth was noticeable in Germany and exceptional growth in LED was evident in the United States.

Stable turnover

Turnover in technical and retail operations in the Welkoop shops remained largely the same as it was in 2020. The retail outlet in De Lier was closed in February, while a new shop was opened in Naaldwijk in March 2021. Thanks in part to the effects of Covid-19 measures, the shops can look back on an excellent year.

Declining sales

Turnover was lost on the back of the sale of florist wholesaler, Alflora, and Agrozone operations. Turnover of Lumiforte's line marking products for sports fields also came under pressure in the wake of Covid-19 measures.

Disinvestments of operations

The minority interests in Vitelia Agrocultuur B.V. and Vital Farms B.V. were sold. The divestment and termination of these operations is in line with Horticoop's strategy to focus on activities aimed at developing modern horticultural technology and light and climate products, and producing high-quality substrates.

Balance sheet

The balance sheet total rose in 2021 to €87.9 million, up from €86.5 million in 2020. Equity at the end of 2021 increased to €52.0 million. The solvency ratio – equity as a percentage of total assets – amounted to 59%. The financial balance sheet ratios are sound and, with that, they offer a good and solid basis for Horticoop's investment targets.

The successes of Horticoop companies

Looking back on 2021, it was clearly a successful year. Not only when it comes to preparing for major strategic change, but also when you consider the successes achieved at the companies that fall under Horticoop. Lensli ended the year with turnover well above budget, it took major steps in product development with the expansion of soft fruit and its tree nursery operations, and drafted a sustainability strategy. Horticoop Technical Services, too, can look back on a year full of changes.

These changes mainly concern its corporate culture: a transition from working with turnover in mind, towards profit-oriented business practices. And then Smartcoat, which laid the foundations for a new market approach in 2021, will now be operating as Lumiforte. There, too, it has been a hive of activity since Horticoop got control of the last remaining shares at the end of 2020. Lumiforte posted significant growth compared to the previous year. An excellent result, particularly given the challenges in the commodities market. Our foreign companies have also done very well in general, by moving with the changing needs of the market and responding decisively to developments in areas such as LED lighting. In short: the results for both Horticoop and the Horticoop companies have been good!



Hend van Ravestein



The Horticoop companies

By transitioning from a buyers' cooperative to an investment cooperative, Horticoop is offering a platform for cooperation and investment. We look for solutions to the problems of tomorrow, with one goal in mind: working on a healthy future for horticulture. It goes without saying that we cannot do it on our own; it is a joint effort. Together with our members and with the Horticoop companies. These partners help Horticoop to connect knowledge, opportunities and developments to cultivation, issues and customers. Everything that's needed to create the ideal conditions for that common goal – a healthy future. In other words, efforts from, for and by horticulture!

Horticoop's portfolio consists of various companies, which all contribute in their different ways to sustainable horticulture. The various areas of expertise produce a wide range of knowledge within the cooperative, from which its members can reap the benefits. And who better to explain this than the Horticoop companies themselves? We spoke to the directors of the companies and asked them the same four questions. What does your company do? How do you distinguish yourself from others? What do most people not know about your company that they should know? And finally: what do you believe is the biggest opportunity for the new Horticoop? The result is a handy overview with fun facts worth knowing. And above all: a colourful portfolio bursting with opportunities for the new Horticoop and therefore for our members! And one thing's for sure: there's no shortage of enthusiasm to make Horticoop the breeding ground for investments in horticulture!



Lensli

Facilitating growth with sustainable substrates

The product

Lensli develops and produces high-quality substrates for professional horticulture at home and abroad.

That is what this substrate specialist does for all sectors and crops in this market: from flowering and green pot plants to orchids, fruit and vegetable cultivation, bedding, seed and cuttings, and tree nurseries.

The distinguishing factor

At Lensli, the emphasis is on quality and continuity. That means not only delivering quality, but also being consistent in the process. As a result, Lensli's customers can count on getting the same substrate properties for every crop. Close collaboration with customers, facilitating growth based on best practices plus more than 115 years of experience ensure that this substrate specialist, together with the growers, can get the best growth results from substrates each and every day.

The surprise

The Lensli team is tireless! They have tremendous drive and passion to offer precisely the substrate composition that a crop needs to be successful.

The team consists of specialist sparring partners who go for the highest possible standards and constantly look for innovations and improvements to make the products even better.

The biggest opportunity for the new Horticoop, according to Lensli

The attraction to start-ups in new sectors and markets who – thanks to Horticoop – have a huge knowledge bank and hundreds of sparring partners at their fingertips. The combination of existing knowledge and new developments is priceless for start-ups, for Horticoop and ultimately for the entire horticulture industry.



Lumiforte

Smart coatings with surprising applications

The product

Lumiforte offers highly intelligent coatings for horticulture. By using these coatings, which can be used for all sorts of crops thanks to their composition, growers can regulate the light and heat in their greenhouses, for example.

The distinguishing factor

There's a world of intelligence behind coatings. Did you know, for instance, that you can influence the length of a rose stem using coatings? With more than 50 years of history and knowledge behind it, Lumiforte can safely say it's an international leader in its sector. This coatings specialist is constantly coming up with new innovations, and that makes it a global market leader.

The surprise

Around 90% of the coatings are used in the horticulture industry. But what many people don't know is that you'll come across Lumiforte coatings through its partners under its own label (Selectline) as well as under private labels, in ArenA and De Kuip for instance. Not on the roof, but on the pitch! These high-quality coatings are excellent for sports fields line markings. It's also worth mentioning that Lumiforte is busy developing coatings that are capable of cooling business premises by 6 to 8 degrees.

The biggest opportunity for the new Horticoop, according to Lumiforte

Sharing knowledge in combination with networking. Simply by sharing knowledge you can multiply it. Knowledge sharing is essential to stay relevant!



Horticoop Technical Services

Higher returns through installation technology

The product

Horticoop Technical Services combines and installs all kinds of water, electricity, light and climate technology for the horticulture of tomorrow. This covers a wide range of products and services: from service and maintenance, to constructing new building projects and replacing or improving existing systems. Their speciality? Using that technology for a more sustainable and efficient business with higher yields.

The distinguishing factor

Whereas other companies have an international profile, Horticoop Technical Services mainly focuses on the Netherlands and Germany.

The surprise

Many companies are dealers for only one climate control system manufacturer. Horticoop Technical Services, on the other hand, is a leading dealer of two of the biggest brands of climate computers: it is able to fully computerise greenhouse climates using Hoogendoorn as well as Ridder technology.

The biggest opportunity for the new Horticoop, according to Horticoop Technical Services

Collaboration is the operative word. By joining forces, we can create win-win situations that allow all those concerned to grow!



Gärtnereinkauf Münchingen

The traditional German approach

The product

The Gärtnereinkauf Münchingen (GEM) trading company is based in the southern German state of Baden-Württemberg. GEM mainly supplies pot plant companies and garden centres. They are standing by to serve their customers with an extensive range of potting soil, fertilisers, pots and other products, including technical products. Their range includes retail products for resale to consumers.

The distinguishing factor

GEM's head office is in Korntal-Münchingen, near Stuttgart, and they have a second branch in Meckenbeuren on Lake Constance. GEM's fine-mesh distribution network covers almost all of southern Germany and serves customers as far away as Switzerland and Austria. Its strong local representation, with its own warehouse and logistic resources, makes GEM a reliable and flexible partner.

The surprise

GEM may be a somewhat traditional wholesaler, but surprisingly enough this suits its customers' requirements down to the ground. Trust is essential and, precisely because of its traditional approach, the company is very well aware of this. GEM is loyal to its customers and its customers are loyal to GEM. A promise kept based on knowledge, flexibility and efficient logistics. Partly because of this, GEM has grown considerably in recent years.

The biggest opportunity for the new Horticoop, according to Gärtnereinkauf Münchingen

By drawing strength from collaboration that is perfectly in line with customer needs and developments, the ambition to secure a healthy future for horticulture can be achieved!



Holimco

Two cultures in one company

The product

Holimco is based in the French village of Villevêque close to Angers. It specialises in horticultural items and technology. The company supplies French ornamental plant and vegetable growers with all they need for profitable cultivation.

The distinguishing factor

Holimco is unique, not only because of its logistics systems and service department, but also because of the Dutch and French cultures that come together in one company. The combination of Dutch progressiveness and French courtesy makes Holimco a true authority in the French horticulture industry. That position is reinforced by the team's high level of service and an inexhaustible drive to gain new knowledge and find solutions to tomorrow's problems.

The surprise

Holimco will soon be 70 years old and so it has a lot of experience and an excellent reputation in the French horticulture industry. As a national distributor, it uses its experience to help make the sector in France more sustainable. The company's ambition is to continue to grow and so it is open to new innovations and strategic changes in the organisation.

The biggest opportunity for the new Horticoop, according to Holimco

The new Horticoop will reinforce the connection between Dutch growers and the Horticoop companies, and by doing so expand its knowledge. That offers new perspectives for the future of the sector. Holimco can use the knowledge of the other companies operating under the Horticoop flag and, by doing so, reinforce its position in France.



Hort Americas

Specialist and knowledge centre rolled into one

The product

Hort Americas started as a wholesaler and has turned out to be a specialist in horticultural products, lighting and urban and vertical farming. Based in Bedford in the United States, the company has a unique position in the Horticoop family. Broad knowledge of hydroponics in vegetable cultivation, vertical cultivation, substrates, fertilisers and LED grow lights is a valuable addition to the portfolio.

The distinguishing factor

Most of the companies that Hort Americas considers to be competitors are international companies that enter the American market from Europe or Canada. Hort Americas is one of the few companies operating from the United States, so it understands the local market better than anyone else.

The surprise

Not many people know that Hort Americas is also a knowledge centre. Based on its unstoppable urge to share expertise, Hort Americas' website is full of background articles and interesting facts. And that's not all: they have a YouTube channel where they regularly share knowledge, they have published books, and they hold seminars and even certified training courses – given by Hort Americas' technical service manager who has a degree in plant physiology – that you can sign up for.

The biggest opportunity for the new Horticoop, according to Hort Americas

Horticoop's new organisational structure encourages investment, which in turn means that knowledge can be gathered. That's not only of interest to the Dutch market. In the United States too, developments are being followed with interest.



Horticoop Scandinavia

An indispensable link in the Danish horticulture chain

The product

Horticoop Scandinavia is a one-stop-shop in Hinnerup, Denmark. All the products that a grower needs in their production processes are sold here, from LED lighting to packaging materials. Their most important customers? Pot plant growers in Denmark. But growers beyond Denmark's borders also know where to find Horticoop Scandinavia. Sweden, Norway and Finland have a major share in the market.

The distinguishing factor

Horticoop Scandinavia is convinced that both the manufacturers and growers must stand to benefit. Unless it can offer additional advantages, Horticoop Scandinavia is an unnecessary link in the chain. What are those additional benefits? For the manufacturer, they are the sales activities on the Scandinavian market that are taken care of completely. The mostly foreign producers rely on the good relationships that Horticoop Scandinavia has with its customers. They don't have to come up with a sales plan for this market. For growers, for instance, it means delivery within 24 hours and providing assistance and advice.

The surprise

With a staff complement of eleven people, it's a small and very close-knit company. Not only as colleagues among themselves, but with their customers too. This is evident from the extremely high level of service that the Horticoop Scandinavia team provides. Not only do they know the products that they sell down to the smallest detail, they are also proactive when it comes to giving advice. Send them a production plan, for instance, and they will come up with a schedule for when substrates, packaging and attributes are needed, and what those substrates, packaging and attributes are. Which is great for the grower, because that way they never get it wrong!

The biggest opportunity for the new Horticoop, according to Horticoop Scandinavia

The Netherlands has the opportunity to become the driving force behind innovations. That is good news for Denmark – where the horticulture industry is smaller in scale, making it less progressive – so it can piggy-back on the knowledge generated in the Netherlands. So it's a win-win situation!



Lensli makes the lives of growers easier

Have fun growing

Since the spring of 2022, a new director has been at the helm at Lensli Substrates, the substrate specialist for the professional horticulture. As managing director, Gert Blaauw has relevant experience in food, retail and fruit and vegetables, and he uses his knowledge and enthusiasm to ensure that substrate producers can expand going forward. He tells us about the developments that he is seeing in the sector, and the importance of working together.



Gert Blaauw

What insight have your first months at Lensli given you?

‘When they asked me when I was taken on how I would like to contribute to Lensli’s more than 115-year history, I mentioned continuity, cooperation and sustainable innovation. An excellent foundation for this is in place, because there is such enthusiasm for working on a healthy and successful future together with one another and with customers. I have ended up in a top-class expertise centre! The world of substrates is fascinating, and the Lensli team consists of true substrate specialists. With their roots in the world of growers and their long track record, they really do know their business. They are in a position to advise any growers on the raw materials best suited to their specific crop and they never miss an opportunity to find new compositions if need be. Now that I have been here for a few months, I am really impressed by this enormous wealth of knowledge.’

What opportunities do you see for Lensli?

‘There are so many factors that affect cultivation. It’s amazing to see that you can influence growth with water, light, nutrients and the right substrate materials. Alongside natural factors and external influences, all growers have their own philosophy about the most ideal growing conditions. This means that growers cultivating identical crops can all have their own ideal substrate composition. This precision work, and all the innovations that go with it, are evolving even more. It is crucial that the quality remains constant, so that perfect conditions can be created in every respect. This is how we make growers’ lives easier. We

also do so by finding out what their challenges are and sharing ideas about solutions together with them. Recently, a grower asked us for advice about his boxwood plants. They were having trouble developing the root system. The solution turned out to be a mix of wood fibre and stone dust. That collaboration, acting as sparring partners: we’re going to be focusing on it more. We have to, because by sharing knowledge we can complement each other. Also in terms of sustainability, for example.’

“
‘I firmly believe that
entrepreneurship will win
the day.’

You mentioned sustainability as an opportunity. What are you doing about sustainability and how are you going to pursue this at Lensli?

‘Sustainability is indeed high on the agenda. In fact, it is one of Lensli’s core values. For example, we are working on alternatives that have little or no peat content. For many years, peat has been one of the main components of substrates. We feel the urgency of looking for renewable substrate materials and have found a like-minded partner in the Den Ouden Group. A productive collaboration, as it turned out: together we went in search of raw materials made up of bio-based circular flows. This resulted in our Basis BioMix; a innovation when it comes to substrates. We are also working hard on product development, looking at green residual streams from landscape management and used substrate. We have also introduced a sustainability classification for our substrates, which comprises four sustainability classes. This gives customers insight into the type and origin of organic raw materials and fertilisers in the substrates used. We are even one of the few organisations who can calculate the full footprint of the substrate. That way, sustainability is a factor in our product development, and we’re also looking at other areas to see where we can improve. Take our location in Cuijk, for instance. It operates entirely on green power thanks to the solar panels we have installed on the roof of the factory. I’m a firm believer in sustainability, and so I’m proud that we are an official chain

partner of the Horti Footprint Chain Program. The circular chain comprising reuse and recycling, which we create based on this programme together with the entire cultivation chain, has a positive impact on the sector's environmental footprint. At Lensli, the proportion of circular raw materials in our overall production stands at 30%, the basis on which we will continue to build in the years to come. I can highly recommend that everyone look into the Horti Footprint Chain Program. The footprint calculation you make for your business gives you very valuable insights into your business practices.'

How do you see the future of the sector?

'Cultivation under glass is facing challenges because of perceptions about gas, but also because of product availability. But it is my firm conviction that entrepreneurship will win the day. Growers will eventually try to produce their products in the most efficient way possible, keeping costs under control as much as possible – which is quite complicated when you take commodity prices and petrol prices into consideration. I think there are still improvements to be made in that respect. So the task for us is to examine how we can keep the costs in the chain as low as possible. I've noticed a shift that in my view is also necessary: from "the customer pays, so the customer decides" to an increase in collaboration in the chain. Obviously, consumers are getting more and more assertive and demanding. But if all of us in the chain make sure that we keep the costs as low as possible and give each other enough space to make a profit, then we can get through this difficult phase together!'

What do you believe is the importance of working together internally at Horticoop?

'The transition to an investment cooperative will allow Horticoop to shift its focus from existing operations to innovations and new sectors and markets. This makes it an ideal haven for start-ups: if you are starting out as an entrepreneur with a bright idea for a technological development in greenhouse horticulture and you can choose between Horticoop or any other investor, then that choice is an obvious one to me. Horticoop is a pool of people who know what they're talking about when it comes to greenhouse horticulture – and they have all the right contacts too. In short, it's a fantastic sounding board with 400 members who all have a stake in innovations and are keen to work on pilot projects. Because even though it may not help them personally in their business operations, it will in any event help the cooperative of which they are members. And that is the essence of collaboration, as a cooperative is meant to be: bringing together people who share the same ideas, to create things that you would otherwise not be able to achieve on your own.'

Gevers Planten on Lensli

From wheelbarrow to machine



Alex Gevers

As far as Alex Gevers of Gevers Plants in Asten-Heusden is concerned, Lensli has always supplied his family business with potting soil. 'When I was a little boy at the nursery, Lensli's potting soil vans would come by. At that time they were still called "Lentse Potgrond". In fact, I grew up with them and together we have seen horticulture change. Whereas I used to help my father fill the potting machine with a wheelbarrow and shovel, we now have a big bale feeder for that. Lensli delivers compressed potting soil, which we then loosen so that we can process it. That is a real step forward: not only does it mean less manual labour, but the compactness of compressed potting soil also makes it more sustainable, because it saves on transport costs and storage space. We bought the machine together with

Lensli last year, which epitomises our cooperation. They share ideas, we share ideas, and that's how you come up with more efficient ways to process potting soil. Potting soil is the basis of cultivation and we are not prepared to economise on quality. We know that Lensli's quality is consistent and that they are progressive. Martijn den Brok, our contact person, regularly walks in with new ideas, comes to take samples and to bounce ideas off us about short- and long-term solutions. He is practically part of our team and that makes it a very pleasant collaboration. There's a very good reason why Gevers Planten has had the same potting soil supplier for 58 years!'



Lumiforte, the ‘Pentagon’ of horticulture



Guido Janssen

Lumiforte struck a new path in 2021. With smart innovations, expansion and a change of name, the supplier of highly intelligent coatings is setting a different course, one marked by progress and development. Because only through constant innovation can you keep your place as a global market leader. We look back and to the future at that changed course with Guido Janssen, who started as CEO of Lumiforte in April 2021, with a clear vision in mind.

What was the high point of 2021?

‘We had the best year ever in the history of this company in terms of sales and profits, despite the challenges posed by the scarcity of raw materials. Achieving such a result, while the entire supply chain was turned upside down partly due to Covid-19, is an exceptional achievement, and I am tremendously proud of it! Not only that, 2021 marks the beginning of a major transformation. We prepared for a new company name, which was launched on 1 January 2022.’

Why the name change?

‘It’s part of the new strategic path we have embarked on. Previously, the company consisted of several divisions, including Mardenko, Sudlac and Smartcoat. In short, it was a fragmented setup that lacked clarity. One of my first assignments was to improve the company’s positioning. A new, all-encompassing name contributes to a strong brand. “Lumi” stands for light, “forte” for strength and power, and so Lumiforte is a name that reflects what we stand for. We are busy working on our brand image by streamlining the communications at home and abroad. It’s no mean feat, but it is essential if we are to achieve our growth target.’

What is that growth target?

‘Our aim is to double our turnover in five years’ time. That is a major ambition, which we can achieve by investing in the outskirts of the world, such as Central and South America and Asia. We are now operating in more than 70 countries, and we are committed to a strategy that will see us having branches worldwide. There are opportunities for us in these regions. Not only when it comes to applying coatings, but also through the transfer of knowledge. It’s amazing what the right coating does for a crop, and we can develop and share that knowledge with others. We are investing in research and development, and attracting new international talent in the various disciplines. We’re also working together with chain partners by complementing our operations and doing everything we can to maximise the returns per square metre for the growers. Because, ultimately that’s what it’s all about: ensuring that growers can produce their products in optimal conditions!’



What do you see as the most important development for the sector?

‘Horticulture has tremendous potential. There’s a good reason why investment organisations are entering this world. Why? Because 10 billion mouths will have to be fed in the future, all of whom want to carry on eating fruit and vegetables. Besides that, supermarkets demand a constant supply that agriculture cannot sustain, so there has been a shift to horticulture, which will guarantee that there is a regular flow. The shift is being amplified by climate change, an aspect that weighs heavily in our considerations. Take the floods that we had to contend with last year in Western Europe. This is making greenhouses more and more popular. With a global growth in greenhouse construction of 5 to 7%, it is clear that we are in a sector that will continue to grow substantially in the coming years. And we’re growing in proportion to that. It’s great, but it also brings with it a certain responsibility, one that we will not shy away from.’

In April, you were awarded the ‘Responsible Care Trophy 2021’ for the environmental category. How will you be developing your sustainability policy going forward?

‘That’s correct, Lumiforte’s efforts in Échirolles to reduce the impact on the environment have been noticed! The chairman of the chemical industry association, France Chimie Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, handed over the award. This is an achievement we can be proud of, particularly when you consider that we as a medium-sized company made our mark among many major industries. It underscores our sustainability aspirations. Just like our growth target, we have also set ambitious goals for

sustainability. In the next two years, our aim is to reduce our wastewater and waste each by 50%, and to cap our carbon emissions at 70 tons. In short: going green is the motto. We’re doing this together with various research institutes, such as the University of Wageningen, but also with our suppliers. Because, ultimately, our production process is only one part of the chain and our suppliers are also essential in our efforts to be more sustainable. So we are looking closely at what we can do differently and better together. The price hasn’t been the main driving force for a long time now. It goes without saying that we all want to produce as effectively as possible and also banks base their business risk analysis – and with that their interest rates, for example – on your sustainability policy. But the impact on the environment is becoming the guiding principle, in our business too. When it comes to our international expansions, we examine the most sustainable solutions very closely. Our coatings consist of 70% water, so there are opportunities: you can transport concentrates and mix them with water on site, to reduce transport charges, or decide to produce coatings locally. Sustainability can be the deciding factor in this.’

What innovations for Lumiforte do you have in mind?

‘We’re making huge strides! I sometimes jokingly say we’re the Pentagon of horticulture. We have already taken a big step forward by using GIS, the geographical information system: using satellite images we can see exactly where there are greenhouses on the planet and whether they have been coated. Using artificial intelligence, we can then compare this information with previous images to identify changes. We match this data

with our customer relationship management system and, by doing so, we create a wealth of information, because every greenhouse that doesn't have a coating is a potential customer. Incidentally, this doesn't mean that we approach all of them, but it does mean that we understand where our opportunities lie. We carried out tests in five countries and it worked well. Our aim is to use this method worldwide from 2022 onwards. We're assuming that by doing so we will immediately achieve part of our growth. By the way, using GIS may also be an interesting development for our chain partners. We intend to seek even more collaboration with them in the future. Of course, we could sell this information, but isn't it much more interesting to share insights with each other and enrich each other in that way?!

You seek out collaborations. What is Horticoop's role in this?

'It's an important one! The timing to carry on as an investment cooperative is perfect! Right now, just as the sector is about to grow substantially, we can be the flywheel for start-ups and scale-ups.'

The reciprocity of the new Horticoop is also essential. Because, at the end of the day, we all have the same goal, and that is to generate the best yield for the grower. There is so much knowledge and skill in horticulture, which we can use to create the optimum conditions for each crop. I firmly believe that – through cooperation – we all stand to benefit from it. But we must have the courage to share knowledge with one another, because only then can you multiply!'

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'It's amazing what the right coating does for a crop.'



Harry Wubben Flowers on Lumiforte

Creative growers and specialists



Harry Wubben from Nootdorp cultivates chrysanthemums on 60,000 m2. To guarantee the quality of his flowers even in the summer months, he has been applying the Lumiforte coating, ReduFuse IR at around week 16, and he has been doing so for many years. 'This coating breaks up the sunlight. It reduces the light and takes off its sharp edges. Our pink and green chrysanthemums, in particular, make the most of this. The pink variant retains its colour better and the green one could even get burnt were it not for the coating. Last year we started combining this coating with a second layer. Adding the ReduHeat coating around 4 to 5 weeks later reflects the light and keeps the heat out. First and foremost, it's good for the chrysanthemums, but don't underestimate how happy the employees are with it! Having less bright light makes it is

much more pleasant in the greenhouses. And what's also great is that we can apply these coatings ourselves using a converted roof washer with a spray boom. And that means that we are flexible. If it's raining or overcast, we postpone it for a few days. Combining the two coatings is a new application, and in my view a good example of how growers and specialists can come up with new solutions together. I suggested applying a second coat and Lumiforte looked into it. The thicknesses, the sequencing, those kinds of things. We arrived at this result by testing this application together. A combination of growers and specialists like this, who together dare to think out of the box and can involve the right partners: that is what Horticoop stands for as far as I am concerned. And that makes me very happy!'

Hort Americas, the American vision



Horticoop not only operates in the Dutch market; the investment cooperative has also gained a foothold internationally. Such as in Bedford, Texas, in the United States, where Hort Americas has been operating in since 2009 as a wholesaler specialising in horticultural products such as LED grow lighting, hydroponic substrates and fertilisers. Hort Americas is also considered to be leading the way in vertical farming, greenhouse vegetable cultivation and agricultural trends. High time to delve into the vision of this company on the other side of the world. Horticoop's CEO, Steven van Nieuwenhuijzen, talks to Chris Higgins, general manager of Hort Americas. He talks about the differences between the Dutch and American markets, misconceptions about international companies and the importance of sharing knowledge.



Steven: 'Horticoop's membership consists mainly of Dutch entrepreneurs. You focus on the American market. What differences have you noticed, Chris?'

Chris: 'There are quite a few! I regularly remind people that it's a country the size of a continent. We are talking about a huge geographic area. If you consider the States, Canada and Mexico to be one market you have to remember just how many different climates and cultures you're dealing with and representing. Not only that, there are different cost structures and different consumer habits, and legislation that is difficult to fathom. A simple example of this is a difference that is often underestimated: standard units of measurement. You'd be surprised how often that goes wrong in practice. Contrary to popular belief, you can't simply teach an American the metric system. That's a huge cultural barrier that you have to overcome.'

Steven: 'The Dutch horticultural world is almost saturated. We have passed the phase of being a growth market, and are looking at opportunities outside the Netherlands, or even outside Europe. America is often referred to as a potential growth market, but is that right? I can imagine that there are misconceptions about the American market. What do you think are the common pitfalls that foreign entrepreneurs who venture into the American market fall into?'

Chris: 'That's a good question! North American investors follow trends in the Dutch market because of their years of experience and reputation of being leaders in knowledge when it comes to horticulture. That right there is the biggest pitfall: you cannot simply copy concepts or solutions. A successful formula in Europe is not necessarily a successful formula in the States. You have to take into account the climate, access to experienced labour, the corporate culture and expected rates of return for the investors. There is no denying that the Netherlands is a forerunner, particularly in the technical field. But we are at a crossroads: the Netherlands has the high-tech market in its grip while much of the rest of the world is operating very successfully in the low- and medium-tech sectors. This has prompted us at Hort Americas to ask questions like "Are high-tech greenhouses really that profitable in all markets?". My advice to North American investors is to always investigate the opportunities using low- and medium-tech solutions. I think there are still profits to be made there. This does not preclude American investors from using Dutch techniques and knowledge. They may still decide to use high-tech solutions or to combine technologies in keeping with the resources and facilities that are available to them. Hort Americas' main concern is that the companies are profitable, that they are in a position to secure their business operations for the next ten to twenty years. If they are not successful, then neither will Hort Americas be successful. Our advice is to share ideas with growers and help them to secure a financially sound future. That is the key to a healthy future for our sector.'

Steven: 'What innovations could horticulture focus more on as far as you're concerned?'

Chris: 'It would be great if we could find a solution for hot, humid climates. The current technology is advanced: dry climates, hot or cold, are no problem for us and haven't been for a long time. But as soon as humidity is involved, it becomes problematic. As it stands now, we don't have the technology for this. There's a big gap in the market for this. If we can solve the issues, and figure out how to grow crops in hot, humid climates at acceptable cost, we can meet the world's growing demand for food. This would include improving seeds, integrated pest management strategies and climate control equipment that can be used in these conditions and geographical areas. I believe that solutions to food issues are to be found in this kind of technology.'

Steven: 'By that I think you are referring to being able to produce food locally? How does that relate to the global food movement?'

Chris: 'This is an interesting issue that I think about a lot. Looking at population trends, especially the growing global population and how it is spreading across the Earth, it confirms my idea that we as an industry need to improve when it comes to growing crops in hot, humid climates. The amount of fresh produce grown in Central America, for instance, is limited to the parts (normally at higher elevations) where it grows naturally. Also, if the past two years have taught us anything, it is that globalisation also has a downside. If we want our food system to be resilient, we cannot allow a pandemic to slow down the movement of products. As far as I'm concerned, we should put much more energy and effort into local production processes to serve the growing population. A caveat to this is that "producing locally" is a flexible concept. What we call "local" here in the States would probably mean getting it from Spain if you're thinking of it from a Dutch perspective.'

Steven: 'There's a role for sustainability resonating in this. It's a term that is often used, but one that is difficult to define precisely. The traditional approach to sustainability is that the three Ps, people, planet and profit, are in balance. That may be worthy thing to aspire too, but you could question how realistic it is. What is your definition of sustainability?'

Chris: 'I haven't quite decided. Harvard uses the definition that you can be profitable while having a limited impact on the environment or society. In our sector, we put more emphasis on the environment than on the social components, but even then there are different degrees. From a business point of view, as an entrepreneur you have to answer to your bank, shareholders and employees, for example. In practice, "profit" weighs more heavily: without profit there is no financing, no salary increases for employees and, because of that, no good employees in the long run. So in practice profit is often more important than people and the planet. If I then take off my commercial hat and examine the issue from a social perspective, I can arrive at very different sustainable choices. The question of how to organise production processes in such a way that they benefit the local community by at the very least creating good jobs, becomes a priority. Or, from an environmental perspective: how can we generate the same production without depleting

the planet's natural resources? Take our State of Texas as an example. We have a hot and humid climate for half of the year. We are building greenhouses here that use air conditioning. You may very well ask yourself if having air-conditioned glass greenhouses in Texas is sustainable? You could also consider running a delivery truck from California. Which is the most sustainable? I can't answer that question right now. But the key is to keep looking at what is least harmful to the environment, best supports the community and allows the company to operate at a profit. In other words, which has the smallest footprint?'

Steven: 'A tricky issue. I have noticed that many entrepreneurs are looking for a good way to implement sustainability in their business. What's your take on that?'

Chris: 'If we want to be sustainable, then we need to look at the geographic location where we are building a farm, the natural and human resources that are available to us there, and make individual decisions about how we are sustainable in that region. In my view, at the moment, sometimes the opposite happens. We take a product, place it in an environment and then manipulate it to define sustainability for the sake of sales. This is where there is room for improvement as far as I am concerned. I'm following a lot of trends with great interest. Organic farming is one of them: I want to know how we can implement organic fertilisers and processes into the greenhouse industry. Some are doing it, but not many have been successful. What do we need to do to make them successful? I'm interested in vertical farming, but it's in its infancy. I'm convinced that it is a movement that will pass the test of time, but it won't be the same thing at all in ten years' time.'

Steven: 'Horticoop is setting its sights on an investment climate that will primarily benefit Horticoop's companies in the Netherlands. Yet I think it is also an interesting development for Hort Americas. What is your position on this?'

Chris: 'The developments that are taking place in the Dutch market are an inspiration for Hort Americas. Not to transfer them literally, but to translate them into opportunities and ways that work for the Mexican, Canadian or American markets, where Hort Americas can play a role. At the end of the day,

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'The Netherlands has the high-tech market in its grip, much of the rest of the world is operating very successfully in the low- and medium-tech sector.'

we all work in the horticulture industry and benefit from innovations, regardless of whether they are initiated in Europe or America. So I will follow the investments and developments in the Netherlands with great interest!'

Steven: 'Hort Americas opened its doors in 2009. What are you most proud of after all this time?'

Chris: 'The shortest answer: that we are still here! That may sound a bit harsh, but it hasn't been an easy road for Hort Americas. The company as it is now looks nothing like the original plan. One thing is certain: the Hort Americas team has proven to be flexible! Uncertain times due to changes at home, but also a fluctuating market, changes in suppliers and political and economic challenges, called for a lot of adaptability. We can now celebrate some successes, but it has been a bumpy road. It has taken perseverance. Hort Americas' dedication to make a positive impact on the industry and communities in which we operate, despite setbacks, and to find a way to weather storms together, makes me very proud of the team!'



Chris with colleagues Nathan, Maria and Brian



Tom Zwijsen

Horticoop Technical Services is transforming too

Horticoop's transition is bringing changes in its wake that are also noticeable at Horticoop Technical Services. As part of the investment cooperative, this specialist in technical systems for the horticulture industry is charting the same course. Indeed, that course is the basis of a transformation that Horticoop Technical Services itself is undertaking. So these are interesting times, full of opportunities, that managing director, Tom Zwijsen, is keen to tell us about.

What effect is Horticoop's transition having on you?

'For us, Horticoop's transition means we'll become independent. Ultimately, Horticoop Technical Services will become a private limited company and we'll be setting up our own departments like Personnel & Organisation, ICT and Finance. As it stands now, Horticoop is managing those aspects of the business. Needless to say, this will have a major impact on business operations and it calls for a different strategy. It means that within Horticoop Technical Services we are shifting our focus from being results oriented to profitability. In terms of efficiency, for example, profits can still be made. One of the ways we are doing this is by implementing a new ERP system.

The user friendliness and digital features that this system offers are an enormous improvement to our administrative processes. Not only that, as a Horticoop business unit, Horticoop Technical Services benefits from the growth that is accelerated by investments in other companies. Without the transition, that growth would take a lot longer. We should know more about the details of this expansion this year, but the mere prospect of this growth is exciting and is prompting Horticoop Technical Services to review its business processes.'

Does the transition also require something of the Horticoop Technical Services staff?

'Yes, we are working on changing our DNA, the basis of which is efficiency. It amazes me sometimes how many distractions get fired at you in a day. Think about it: from answering a simple phone call to quickly helping a colleague, we are subjected to all kinds of small "in-between" chores throughout the day. It's human nature to respond to these kinds of stimulus, and they can often be dealt with quickly. But what it means is that you have to start concentrating on what you were doing all over again. Many of our people work hard, but they can and

must be more efficient. To me, it's interesting to find out how we can handle this differently. This starts with being able to hold people accountable for their responsibilities, tasks and authority. When all is said and done, we need to change our approach, and that takes time. It goes hand in hand with the behaviour of people in an organisation, and that's where the challenge comes into play: people want change, but they don't want to be changed. It's my job to make people recognise the benefits of change, so that intrinsic motivation becomes the driving force and together we can all make the transformation happen.'

Are there other projects on the agenda for 2022?

'Yes, for sure. We're dividing our attention across several major projects. With the disappearance of the wholesale business a few years ago, we're no longer so high profile. One of the reasons for this is because the wholesale outlets and the Horticoop lorries, for example, have disappeared from the streets. We may be less visible, but Horticoop Technical Services is alive and kicking, and we're not shy about that! So it's up to us to put Horticoop Technical Services back on the map. That visibility may – or should I say – must come back. The intended expansion through investments in other companies will contribute to this, but there is also work to be done in other respects. For instance, we are reviewing our communications and breathing new life into the website. That said, one should never underestimate visibility in the local surroundings. We are taking a critical look at the various ways in which you may bump into Horticoop Technical Services when you go from door to door. This boils down to visual aspects like flags, staff uniforms and logos on company cars. Horticoop Technical Service is a reliable and stable partner, and we should promote this more, at every possible level.'

What directions for development do you envisage for Horticoop Technical Services?

'Developments in sensors and robotisation are riding the wave at the moment. There are so many opportunities in that

respect! Horticoop Technical Services is an expert in servicing and maintenance, in projects and in the installation technology trade, and we do this together with our core suppliers. We don't have our own research and development department; Horticoop Technical Services is not equipped for that. Let's say Horticoop starts investing in sensors, then it won't be put into Horticoop Technical Services' hands, but it will always remain a part of Horticoop's operations. It is for precisely this reason that Horticoop's transition to an investment cooperative is of interest to us. With the new course we have struck, we can link our knowledge to the aspirations of start-ups and scale-ups that do focus on sensor technology.'

What is the importance of collaboration in working on developments?

'Collaboration is the operative word. The main thing in this is reciprocity. This has sometimes been lacking in the past, but it has been brought back thanks to the new direction that Horticoop has embarked on. We're asking our members for more involvement; we're asking for their input. What will they need in the future? Which issues are relevant to them? Say, for instance, ten different members tell us that they need a certain type of sensor on a tap fitting, Horticoop can explore the options. Horticoop then goes in search of a start-up that can develop a sensor that monitors what your tap fitting is doing. Where possible, members help with that development, by testing it in practice and giving us feedback. Once the sensor is fully developed, Horticoop offers the start-up access to the market, so that it immediately has a group of customers: the Horticoop members. After that, other horticultural entrepreneurs can also buy the sensor. This is what makes Horticoop an interesting investment partner for these companies. The members then profit once again if the start-up then starts turning a profit. They get a dividend on this and the profit that Horticoop makes from the investment is well spent. Because the cooperative in turn invests in products that benefit its members. So at the end of the day everyone benefits from this win-win cooperative: the members, the horticulture industry and Horticoop. Collaboration is the magic word for the sector's future, and that's what I want to carry on doing at Horticoop.'

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'People want change, but they don't want to be changed.'

Marjoland on Horticoop Technical Services

Collaboration in practice

Daniël van den Nouweland, managing director at Marjoland – one of the largest rose growers in the Netherlands – talks about its collaboration with Horticoop Technical Services: ‘When the time came to replace the automated cultivation system at one of our gardens, we looked for the most practical solution together with Horticoop Technical Services. The aim: to replace the existing waterside system while keeping the existing infrastructure. We managed! Using a smart solution given to us by Horticoop Technical Services, we can water the indoor and outdoor beds separately. Several drain weighing scales under the cultivation gutters ensure that we can accurately measure the return water and reduce the risk of emissions and over-watering. We also took increasing the oxygen content and vitalising the water supply into account. The next project is in the planning. The climate control system in our greenhouses is ready for an upgrade. Horticoop Technical Services also helps us to think about things, so that we can coordinate all the sensors for moisture regulation, window settings, temperature settings and automatic lighting even more accurately. Projects manager Ben Hoogendoorn, our fixed point of contact, is a huge support in this. His quick response time and enthusiasm to contribute to solutions make him an excellent sparring partner!’

Daniël van den Nouweland





Damage limitation or investing in the future?

Royal Lemkes on developments in the sector

From rising production costs to the growing demand for sustainability: the horticulture industry is on the move. Trade partner Royal Lemkes is keeping abreast of the latest developments like no other. Huib Kranendonk, commercial director, talks about the opportunities and challenges he sees.



Huib Kranendonk

What does Royal Lemkes do exactly?

'Royal Lemkes is a 140-year-old family business with a green heart and a great mission: to use plants to create a good life, a thriving business and a more beautiful world. As a middle man, we supply plants from over six hundred suppliers to about fifteen major retailers in Europe. IKEA, Praxis and various supermarkets come to mind. We help them to think about their logistics, how to maintain their standards and about their range of products, of course.'

To be able to advise retailers on their product range, you need to know about the consumer buying patterns. How do you research that?

'Obviously we keep an eye on trends and use publicly available sources, like Floridata. But we also analyse the sales data that our customers give us. Based on that, we can see what the trends in the market are. If, for example, we see the losses rising in a certain product category, then we know that there is not much interest in that product. On the other hand, if a product is systematically sold for the full price, we can conclude that demand is high. That said, we can only read general trends from these sources. Translating them into a customer-specific product range requires customised work, of course.'

What trends are you detecting at the moment?

'A huge number of plants were sold in the last two years, throughout the lockdowns. People rediscovered gardening, and realised how wonderful it is to have plants in the home. The demand for green houseplants, in particular, went up. The consumer has learned that a lot of variation is possible: in colour tones, sizes, leaf patterns, and so on. Recently we've noticed that this product category has settled down a bit. We're seeing that various colours are trending again. Houseplants with purple leaves or colourful flowers, for example. Apart from that, growing your own vegetables is popular. Sales in vegetable seedlings and fruit trees have grown tremendously.'

What do you believe are the biggest challenges for the sector?

‘There’s a lot going on in the market right now. For instance, there has been a huge drop in purchasing power, so consumers have less money for our products. As a result, sales were disappointing this spring, despite the fact that we expected the growth rates of recent years to continue. At the same time, production costs have risen a lot. These are uncertain times for many growers. Some growers are even deciding to skip a season. The costs for them are higher than the returns. Fortunately, growers generally sold so many plants in the past two years that they have built up a reserve that they can use to see them through this period. But it goes without saying that they would have preferred to invest that money in the future.’

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‘Retailers are aware that sustainability is no longer a distinguishing factor; it is a prerequisite.’

‘How does the rise in prices affect Lemkes’ relationships with retailers?’

‘Retailers aren’t stupid of course. They read the papers and they understand what is going on. But if, on the one hand, turnover slows down because there are plants in the shop that are not being sold and, on the other hand, costs are skyrocketing, at some point things are going to get shaky. This is also noticeable in the discussions we’re having: we are mainly talking about how to limit the damage in the short term, and not so much about long-term developments. But we’re trying not to lose sight of that aspect.’

Thinking of the long term: what role does sustainability play?

‘Sustainability is an important theme in the sector. Especially for Royal Lemkes. It is in our company’s genes and we have been leading the way for many years. But whereas in the past we were often told that retailers didn’t think sustainability was essential, nowadays they are actively asking about it. The retail sector is waking up. They are aware that sustainability is no longer a distinguishing factor; it is a prerequisite.’

What does Dutch horticulture have to offer in terms of sustainability?

‘A lot! So I think that we should do a better job of communicating our sustainability narrative. A while ago, I heard a politician in the Lower House say that the Netherlands doesn’t have glasshouse horticulture, but gas horticulture. That was a cheap shot, I thought to myself. People should realise how progressive growers are! Peat-free substrates and alternative energy sources are being used more and more, just as an example. There are also a lot of experiments being done with local production. These innovations require investments that come on top of all those price increases. And yet it’s still being done. Because the sector feels that it is important.’

So retailers are asking for more sustainable products. Is this something that consumers are looking for too?

‘More and more these days, consumers believe that sustainability is important, but often they don’t really know what is or is not sustainable. The average customer thinks that every plant he or she buys does something good for the world, for example by filtering CO₂ out of the air. But to be able to compensate for the CO₂ that one person breathes out, you’d have to have a huge number of plants in your lounge. Not only that, it takes energy to cultivate houseplants. To compensate for the CO₂ that is released from that, you’d have to keep that plant alive for an awfully long time. Much longer than plants survive in a lounge on average. While it is certainly possible to grow and sell sustainable houseplants, it is not the case that every plant is necessarily good for the environment. As far as that goes, consumers could be better informed about how to make sustainable choices. Maybe retailers, growers and Lemkes could work together on this.’

You mentioned experimenting with ‘local production in the horticulture industry’. What do you mean by that?

‘Local production is mainly about reducing transport movements. Why take plants from Sicily to the Netherlands and then send them back to France, when you can take them directly to France? And why should we export a product from here to England when it can be made in England? By the way, producing locally does not mean that we no longer work with Dutch suppliers. Because many of them are already based abroad, or are very keen to expand internationally. So there’s lots of opportunities in that respect. It’s also a good way to respond to economic developments. The fact that we have been successful in the Netherlands for so long is not only down to our knowledge and expertise, but also because we have had access to cheap energy for a long time. Now that gas is becoming more expensive, moving production to regions where it is warmer has become an interesting business case. I think that as a sector we’re in an excellent position to take advantage of this. Of course, it is preferable to produce in regions where we can sell the products, so that the number of transport movements doesn’t go up unnecessarily.’

On the one hand, there is a demand for sustainable production, on the other hand, inflation is rising. How do those developments affect each other?

‘They put pressure on each other, but they can also influence each other positively. Over the past two years, the emphasis has been on volume. Smaller pots and as much production as possible per square metre. Current developments mean that there is less demand and we can be more selective about what we bring to market. This means that we can focus on achieving new sustainability standards. I have to say, though, that the wallet shouts the loudest. We can make great, sustainable products, but there has to be demand for them.’

Where are the opportunities for the sector?

‘As far as I’m concerned, the future lies in exporting our knowledge. Taken together, the Dutch horticulture industry is a very innovative sector. Take the yield per square metre, for instance. Internationally, we’re playing in the Champions League. And we’re alone at the top! This is important, because it allows us to make a significant contribution to solving the

global food problem. So I believe that in a few years’ time, knowledge will be our most important export product.’

What role do you think is reserved for cooperatives?

‘I see a major role for cooperatives, because that is one of the reasons why our sector has grown so much. In the past, cooperation was mainly about setting the price and joint purchasing. I remember as a little boy going with my grandfather to pick lettuce early in the morning and then going with him on the tractor to the auction in Barendrecht. The cart was unloaded, we were given a delivery slip and drove back home. Every grower at that auction knew exactly how to grow the best head of lettuce on his soil. That’s what they were good at. Price setting, on the other hand, was an entirely different aspect of the sport, and that’s why growers started seeking each other out in cooperatives. But these days sales are streamlined and the opportunities and challenges lie elsewhere. Growers mainly need to share knowledge. So I think cooperatives need to reinvent themselves, if they haven’t done so already. That is why I think it’s a good thing that Horticoop has become an investment cooperative. By supporting each other, we can prepare for all conceivable market trends, while investing in the future.’



We would like to introduce to you...

The Supervisory Board

The Horticoop Supervisory Board comprises seven people. Who are they? And what has prompted them to take on this side job? We put three questions to them.



Joris Elstgeest (45), chairman

What do you do in your daily life?

'I am a pot plant grower, and owner of Elstgeest Potplanten. In addition, I am co-owner of LEAFS from Kenya; of Dutch Wasabi, a wasabi and ginger nursery; and of Ledgnd, an LED consultancy firm for the horticulture industry. Furthermore, I am a member of the board at Glastuinbouw Nederland.'

Why are you a member of the Horticoop Supervisory Board?

'When the cooperative sold the wholesale business, this presented a huge challenge that I was keen to get stuck into: how to create a meaningful future for Horticoop again. It was a huge challenge in terms of administration, not least because I feel responsible for the assets that have been built up by around four hundred members.'

What opportunities do you foresee for the new Horticoop?

'There are a lot of investment companies out there, but generally speaking their focus is purely on making a profit. And that is not to the grower's advantage. As far as that goes, Horticoop is not run of the mill: we focus on a sustainable future for the sector. I am very confident in the direction we have chosen.'



Rick Tesselaar (42), vice-chairman

What do you do in your daily life?

'I have a cut flower nursery: Tesselaar Alstroemeria in Luttelgeest.'

Why are you a member of the Horticoop Supervisory Board?

'As a member of Horticoop, I believe it is important that we continue to develop. By transforming from a buyers' cooperative into an investment cooperative, we can solve future problems in the horticulture industry together. I'm keen to do my bit.'

What opportunities do you foresee for the new Horticoop?

'We've got prospects for the future again. By involving the members more, we can face challenges together again. This gives horticulture in the Netherlands, and perhaps even worldwide, the chance to develop.'



Jan van der Harg Jr. (35), secretary

What do you do in your daily life?

'My daily work consists of growing red peppers and aubergines. I own Fa. Van der Harg C.V., a family business, De Linge Aubergine and De Linge Paprika.'

Why are you a member of the Horticoop Supervisory Board?

'I am keen to contribute to the development of our cooperative and for it to be directly or indirectly beneficial for our members.'

What opportunities do you foresee for the new Horticoop?

'As a cooperative, we have a different position in the marketplace. The fact is that we have the most expertise in the sector, because our members represent the sector. This means that we are in a position to offer a lot of added value to our affiliated companies that are under development.'



Ilone Ammerlaan (60), board member and supervisory director

What do you do in your daily life?

'Apart from being a board member and a supervisory director on the Supervisory Board, I am a shareholder of Plantise and chairman of Greenhouse Horticulture the Netherlands for the Oostland region.'

Why are you a member of the Horticoop Supervisory Board?

'I believe that the transformation to a win-win cooperative is a very good thing. Especially that feeling of "we're in it together": that's what I like the most. There are various ways that members can benefit from the new companies Horticoop invests in, and contribute jointly to their success.'

What opportunities do you foresee for the new Horticoop?

'Better ties between the Horticoop members, and with the Horticoop members. To use a grower's term: I see it as cross-pollination. Members can learn from each other, Horticoop can learn from the members, the members in turn can learn from the companies in the portfolio, and so on. This is where we touch the heart of the cooperative, its essence: doing something for and by the members.'



Chimwemwe de Gaay Fortman (51), external supervisory director

What do you do in your daily life?

'I am a member of the board at Oost NL, the development company for Eastern Netherlands. There I'm responsible for the Capital business unit, which handles venture capital and loans in the food, energy, tech and health sectors. I am also a board member of the eco.business Fund and chair of the investment committee of the Good Fashion Fund, a fund that invests in innovative solutions for sustainable clothing production.'

Why are you a member of the Horticoop Supervisory Board?

'I came across the horticulture industry in previous jobs, and enjoyed working with growers. I see it as a great challenge to strengthen Horticoop's strong roots and to revamp the cooperative, which has been around for over a hundred years.'

What opportunities do you foresee for the new Horticoop?

'I see the transformation into an investment cooperative as an opportunity to invest in new technologies and innovative companies together with our four hundred members. By doing so, we can help our members to create an even more sustainable greenhouse horticulture industry, with the aim of putting enough food, and healthy food, on the plates of future generations.'



Ton van Marrewijk (54), external supervisory director

What do you do in your daily life?

'I represent our family business, Van der Valk Systemen, which consists of Van der Valk Horti Systems and Van der Valk Solar Systems. We are suppliers of screen and vent-opening mechanisms for horticulture and of mounting racks for solar panels.'

Why are you a member of the Horticoop Supervisory Board?

'I'm a member because of my involvement in the horticulture industry. I'm also passionate about the cooperative business community. My most important tasks in the Supervisory Board are advising the management and supervising the enterprise.'

What opportunities do you foresee for the new Horticoop?

'Initiating opportunities for the sector! We are going to contribute to the further development of Horticoop and together we will seize opportunities for our members and the sector.'



Bob Schrauwen (54), external supervisory director

What do you do in your daily life?

'Together with an investment company, I invest in various companies that are hands-on when it comes to involvement.'

Why are you a member of the Horticoop Supervisory Board?

'I joined the Supervisory Board because I am very interested in the sector. For many years, my father did research on the cultivation of crops and improving their properties, together with the University of Wageningen, among others. Horticulture was par for the course around our kitchen table. I think it's great that Horticoop has gone from being a buyers' cooperative to being an investment cooperative, not in the least because it is an essential sector. Not only for the Netherlands, but for the whole world.'

What opportunities do you foresee for the new Horticoop?

'The sector is facing huge challenges. Take, for instance, automation and robotisation to meet staff shortages, or the sustainability issue, which means we have to take into account the consumption of energy and water. And then there's developments within society in a broader sense: we have to use technical developments to be more efficient, but we also have to make every effort to keep the sector in a positive light.'

Horticoop Scandinavia

Small company, great value



Although Dutch and Danish cultures are similar in many ways, there is a world of difference when it comes to the horticulture industry. Not so much in how they operate, but rather when it comes to the marketplace. Despite these differences in the horticultural market, there is good cooperation between the Dutch Horticoop and the colleagues at Horticoop Scandinavia in Hinnerup. This Danish wholesaler specialises in horticultural supplies and lighting: a small organisation that offers great added value for Scandinavian growers. Henrik Jørgensen, CEO of Horticoop Scandinavia, talks enthusiastically to Steven van Nieuwenhuijzen about the company.



Steven: 'The Dutch and the Danes have much in common, particularly when it comes to business. We are no-nonsense and frank, and we dare to make decisions when we recognise opportunities. Are there differences in the way the Danish and Dutch approach things?'

Henrik: 'Danes are indeed good at communicating with Dutch people. We have the same mindset and like having a sensible approach. I think the difference is not so much in the methods or the behaviour, but more in the role that the horticulture industry plays in the country. In the Netherlands, this sector occupies a prominent place in the economy, much more so than in Denmark. The horticulture industry in Denmark is not very big and less essential to the economy, which is why the Danish government attaches less importance to it. You can see it reflected in government spending, like the financial support during crises. Not only that, the industry in the Netherlands is much more extensive. There, you grow everything in greenhouses, from cut flowers to every conceivable type of vegetable. The Danish industry is smaller in scale, we limit ourselves to vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers, and sell them mainly in our own country. For the rest, we mainly grow pot plants. That was different 25 years ago. Then the roles were reversed. Back in the day, Denmark used to be very innovative. These days the Netherlands is a much bigger operator than Denmark. It can claim to be the author of many pioneering innovations for horticulture. And that is only set to increase with Horticoop's new investment structure.'

Steven: 'The Danish and Dutch horticulture industries have developed differently. Denmark is not so large scale and innovative. The Netherlands has grown. How do you explain this?'

Henrik: 'Against my expectations, the Danish industry has indeed shrunk in the last 30 to 35 years. There are several reasons for this. One of them is that small businesses could not survive, because they were not taken over by younger generations or larger organisations. On the face of it, that's not unique to this sector. That trend is evident in all industries. What did surprise me was that the larger companies did not grow even more. If you had asked me at the time how the sector would develop, I would have replied that production would at least remain the same or even grow. Instead, the large growers chose not to build more greenhouses. The trend in the Netherlands was completely different: you now have the role of forerunners in innovations.'

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'These days the Netherlands is a much bigger operator than Denmark. It can claim to be the author of many pioneering innovations for horticulture.'

Steven: 'Why do you suppose that is?'

Henrik: 'I think high labour costs are mainly to blame. Denmark mainly exports pot plants, which means we are competing with our neighbour, Germany, where labour costs are much lower. The same applies to the Netherlands, which exports globally. We have to contend with legislation that stipulates that the salaries of migrant workers have to be the same as permanent staff. Other countries have different legislation, allowing them to use cheaper labour. If I had to estimate, I think that for a 10-hectare farm with the same production, the costs would easily be one to one and a half million euro higher because of the labour costs.'

Steven: 'Where do you think this is heading in the next 10 years?'

Henrik: 'Despite the misery that Covid-19 inflicted, the last two years were the best years ever for horticulture in Denmark. And the same probably applies to other countries. As we leave this troubled time behind us, the next global challenge awaits us, one that will have a far greater impact: the energy crisis. This may be crystal ball gazing, but I think that Denmark will be less affected than the Netherlands, for instance. We have more alternative energy sources, whereas the Netherlands is heavily dependent on gas. It is difficult to predict what awaits us; I even find it hard to foresee what will happen this summer. Having said that, I'm an optimistic type and I'm assuming the glass will be half full! I expect that we will be able to get through this too and continue on this path, and I hope that people will start investing in new greenhouses in Denmark again.'

Steven: 'What should innovations in the horticulture industry concentrate on, do you think?'

Henrik: 'I see a starring role for big data and artificial intelligence. They are developments that horticulture stands to benefit from a lot. Our sector is not at the forefront of these innovations, although we can learn a lot from them. By collecting a lot of data, we can make predictions that can help the horticulture industry to move forward. Here I have in mind accurately monitoring and predicting the growth of a plant, for example. If that prompts us to adjust the temperature, light and oxygen a little bit every day because a plant is developing in a certain way, then we have very valuable knowledge in our hands. Or, for example, if you can use big data and artificial intelligence to predict where and when the next infestation will emerge.'

Steven: 'This also affects the sustainability issue. What is your vision of sustainability in general, and for the horticulture industry in particular?'

Henrik: 'We have to take care of our Earth. Virtually everyone has realised this. Yet I can see a lot of greenwashing going on. Not only in our industry, in all industries: companies pretending to be greener than they really are. Being sustainable means that you must not extract more from the Earth than you put back. Actually, nobody can claim to be sustainable, because transporting products alone means you're emitting carbon. But

what you can do is make sure that you operate as sustainably as possible. And that is and remains very important in our industry. Not only based on an intrinsic motivation to safeguard a future for the generations to come, but also because of demand from retailers and supermarkets. As Horticoop Scandinavia, it is the our duty to make sure that our customers meet that demand. We look for products that add value to the chain, so that we can be useful in the most sustainable way possible, and have a proactive attitude in this respect. We keep an eye on the demand and draw our customers' attention to new trends.'

Steven: 'People make the difference. That's the case in every organisation, but it's my experience that a very close-knit and passionate team works at Horticoop Scandinavia. How do you ensure that your team is so good at working as one entity?'

Henrik: 'I'm convinced that the best employees should also be shareholders in the company. You feel more involved as a shareholder; it feels like it's your company. That in turn means that you are prepared to fight harder for the company, and it reinforces your team spirit. When we started the company in 2004, there were five of us, of whom four were shareholders. The flat organisational structure, which is a feature at Horticoop Scandinavia, was also a deliberate decision. I don't attach too much importance to job titles. It may say "CEO" on my business card, but that doesn't mean I decide everything. I'm just as much one of the team as everyone else. We now have eleven members of staff, and everyone is free to act as they see fit. Our staff have gained the confidence to make the right decisions. And, yes, sometimes that goes wrong, but that's OK. Indeed, things should go wrong occasionally, otherwise you don't learn anything. It's proved to be very motivating; people appreciate it and take responsibility for their actions. You have direct control of your own work, and have the opportunity to make a difference.'

Steven: 'Does "small but great" apply to Horticoop Scandinavia?'

Henrik: 'Definitely when it comes to contact with our customers, but definitely not when it comes to sales. We are an extremely customer-oriented company. Most of us have been working here for many years and so we are familiar faces to our customers. I sometimes joke that we've only been around for 17 years, but between us we have more than 200

years of experience. During those years, we have built a good reputation as a trading partner that serves the horticulture industry in Scandinavia. In brief: everything a grower needs for his production is on the shelves at Horticoop Scandinavia. Our small, tight-knit team has definitely contributed to that. You don't have to be big to be successful; we can hold our own against bigger organisations. What's important is that you can add value. And we can! By working very efficiently – another similarity between Danes and Dutch in business! – which means we don't mess around. Our ERP system, for example, has been designed in such a way that everything is more or less computerised. That means that, relatively speaking, we have a higher than average turnover per employee. The horticulture industry is a sector with small margins, but you can still make a profit with small margins. You just have to be smarter!'

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'The horticulture industry is a sector with small margins, but you can still make a profit with small margins. You just have to be smarter!'





The Greenery Cooperative

The perspective of another horticulture cooperative

Having their say in this annual report: The Greenery, a fellow cooperative specialising in buying and selling fruit and vegetables. This cooperative contributes to the horticultural value chain as a marketing, sales and distribution company. So it's just like Horticoop: a cooperative in the horticulture industry, except it has a completely different approach. Horticoop talks to the CEO of The Greenery: Steven Martina.



Steven Martina

Steven, you are the CEO of The Greenery, a cooperative just like Horticoop. You supply and distribute fruit and vegetables. What is your mission?

'Our mission is to make fruit and vegetables accessible to everyone. By that we mean that fruit as well as vegetables should be available and affordable to consumers, and it should remain that way. Together with our more than 360 fruit and vegetable growers and chain partners, we supply sustainable, fresh and healthy fruit and vegetables to supermarkets, wholesalers, caterers and the processing industry. The people who work at The Greenery are passionate about fruit and vegetables, and enjoy working together. This is also our greatest asset: with unrivalled enthusiasm, we create productive collaborations that together ensure that the Netherlands is supplied with fresh fruit and vegetables. In the process, we are very transparent: every link in the chain gets a fair price.'

What do you believe makes a cooperative successful?

'For The Greenery, the emphasis is on maximising returns for growers by facilitating the sale of their products. We organise those aspects that are too big for individual organisations, but are necessary if they are to arm themselves for the future. What's more, just like Horticoop, The Greenery has various

holdings in its portfolio that are not directly related to sales, including a logistics branch. Developing the operations of those companies contributes to the profitability of the cooperative and, in turn, its members.'

You clearly have insight into the sector. Have you been in the business for a long time?

'Absolutely! I became involved with horticulture industry at the age of 12 through a holiday job with a soft fruit grower. When they let me go along with them to the auction, I couldn't take my eyes off the auction clock. I was converted! From that time forth, I never really left the business, apart from a brief foray in share trading. I recognise a dedication in market gardeners that I find very inspiring. They understand their business and have a passion that is contagious. I love being around them.'

We are living in troubled times thanks to developments on the world stage. What do you believe is having the biggest impact on horticulture?

'Energy! On the one hand because of rising energy prices. On the other hand because of the energy transition that has to take place so that we can switch to more sustainable production methods. Apart from that, we're also having to contend with shortages in the jobs market. A consequence of this is that we need to digitise, more so than ever before. Innovations in these areas will lead to more efficient processes and make us less dependent on people. That is why we are following developments in automation very closely.'

How do you apply innovations in the fields of digitisation and automation in practice at The Greenery?

'We've made huge strides in recent years. Now that we've sorted out the basics, we can focus on forecasting and supply chain management. This mainly concerns predicting customer needs and making sure we design our processes accordingly. What is the demand? When does that demand occur? And what are we producing? We then try to link these factors, digitally as much as possible. Another item on our agenda is the digital optimisation of our trade operations. What I'm talking about is designing the web shop to meet the growing needs of buyers, which is to have 24-hour access to our products and information about their origin and certification.'

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‘A healthy diet, less meat and more vegetables on your plate, is a clear trend.’

What role does sustainability play in the business practices at The Greenery?

‘Sustainability is a subject that is a major factor, for growers but also among consumers. More and more retailers are asking us questions about the origin and traceability of our products. This has its roots in changing consumer behaviour: people want to know where products come from, and what their impact on the environment is. It is up to us to meet their needs. We do so by promoting sustainability and setting a good example. So respect for people and nature is paramount when it comes to ensuring that we have sustainable and socially responsible cultivation. Incidentally, digitisation also plays a major part in this. Take, for example, the amount of carbon dioxide emitted while transporting goods. The aim is to use as little fuel as possible when getting products from a to b. New technical developments make it possible to track where vehicles are using an app. This not only allows us to schedule our equipment better, but also to ensure that staff are ready to load or unload, which in turn reduces the amount of time that vehicles stand idle at loading bays. That may seem like a small step, but small improvements taken together can make a big difference.’

You mentioned changing consumer behaviour. What opportunities can you see for the horticulture industry to take advantage of this?

‘A healthy diet, less meat and more vegetables on your plate, is a clear trend. Although this is being catered for, judging by the number of varied recipes for vegetarian dishes, there is still a great opportunity for the sector. One that is in keeping with The Greenery’s aim to help everyone in the Netherlands to have access to fresh fruit and vegetables. So

that opportunity is perfectly in line with our strengths. I also recognise opportunities to make more use of the expertise in the sector. The war in Ukraine has once again made it clear that it is important to be self-sufficient. The Netherlands is known for being extremely efficient when it comes to production, and to do so in a sustainable way as well. We have the knowledge, now it’s a case of making the best possible use of it.’

Are there any threats that the sector should be taking into account?

‘The increasing cost price is a concern for me personally. In the past, we were able to compensate for this rise by ramping up productivity, but lately we have barely been able to keep up. For the rest, it is a challenge to get financing – especially for new growers. Taking over a business, for example your parents’ company, is not easy due to the large size of the average horticultural company. In other words: business succession has become a stumbling block. Another trend that I see is that society is becoming more and more individualistic, while the issues we are facing are growing and becoming more complex. That is the precise reason why good cooperation is so important, because we need each other to move forward. The focus should be on this.’

You’ve mentioned the word ‘cooperation’ a few times.

Why do you think it’s so important?

‘The biggest advantage of a cooperative – which by definition is inherent in cooperation – is being able to operate on a larger scale, which makes it more effective. It ensures that necessary and costly investments, for example in the field of sustainability and further digitisation, can be shared. Apart from that, knowledge sharing is a great asset. There are growers who want more control and prefer to work on their own, which is why some joint ventures have fallen apart. But sooner or later most growers discover that cooperation is the key to first-class innovations. And that is what we need to stay relevant going forward.’

And the future, what does that look like? Fully automated collaboration?

‘Yes, indeed: digitisation and automation are important. And so is collaboration. They don’t clash. When all is said and done, no matter how many automated processes you implement in

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‘We need each other to move forward.’

your business, or how much digitisation you put in place, people make the difference. There will always be a need for the human touch in our sector. And that’s a very good thing, because it is precisely why I love this sector so much!’



Annual figures 2021

Consolidated income statement 2021

	2021	2020
	x €1.000	x €1.000
Net turnover	142.575	141.440
Changes to work in progress	1.372	(310)
Other operating income	510	4.685
Total operating income	144.457	145.815
Cost of raw materials and consumables	101.842	96.345
Staff expenses	18.242	21.047
Amortisation of intangible and tangible fixed assets	4.222	4.127
Other changes in value	-	957
Other operating expenses	14.432	15.913
Total operating expenses	138.738	138.389
	5.719	7.426
Interest expenses	272	316
Profit before tax	5.447	7.110
Taxes	(2.059)	(2.229)
Share of unconsolidated participating interests	204	(200)
Third-party share in the profits	(583)	(1.115)
Group result after tax	3.009	3.566

Consolidated balance sheet as of 31 December 2021

(proposed profit appropriation for accounting purposes)

Assets

	2021	2020
	x €1.000	x €1.000
Fixed assets		
Intangible fixed assets	13.088	14.841
Tangible fixed assets	23.844	25.282
Financial fixed assets	1.936	1.945
	38.868	42.068
Current assets		
Stocks	17.155	17.933
Receivables	14.470	14.550
Cash at bank and in hand	17.435	11.924
	49.060	44.407
Total assets	87.928	86.475

Liabilities

	2021	2020
	x €1.000	x €1.000
Equity		
Equity	52.030	48.818
Third-party share in equity	2.434	1.879
Group equity	54.464	50.697
Provisions	1.874	3.339
Long-term liabilities	7.960	10.307
Current liabilities	23.630	22.132
Total liabilities	87.928	86.475

Key figures

Turnover net
x € 1,000

2021	142,575	2021	3,009
2020	141,440	2020	3,566
2019	129,432	2019	-1,663
2018	186,022	2018	2,361
2017	181,401	2017	518

Profit after tax
x € 1,000

Equity
x € 1,000

2021	52,030	2021	59.2%
2020	48,818	2020	56.5%
2019	45,433	2019	61.5%
2018	47,082	2018	57.7%
2017	44,655	2017	46.7%

Solvency: Equity-to-asset
ratio

EBITDA
x € 1,000

2021	9,941	2021	11,466
2020	12,510	2020	12,221
2019	7,046	2019	7,736
2018	13,327	2018	8,765
2017	8,866	2017	8,131

Operating cash flow
x € 1,000

Number of members

2021	380	2021	288
2020	394	2020	350
2019	394	2019	348
2018	510	2018	374
2017	874	2017	436

Average number of employees

Annual report 2021





HORTICOOP
GROWING TOGETHER

Klappolder 150, 2665 LP Bleiswijk