

'Farming for the Food bank': producing fresh vegetables for the Food Bank Groningen

by: Hiltje van der Wal, municipality of Groningen



Background: why Farming for the food bank was established

Due to the corona crisis, the project 'Farming for the Food Bank' gained momentum. Organic arable farmer Gert Noordhoff from Bellingwolde – in the East of Groningen - decided together with Jos Meijers from social enterprise Toentje and Sjoerd Pool from educational institution Terra to grow vegetables for the food bank in the city of Groningen. (A food bank is a non-profit, charitable organization that distributes food to those who have difficulty purchasing enough food to avoid hunger.)

Gert Noordhoff already delivered a thousand cabbages to the food bank in the city of Groningen in 2020. The City Food Bank, to which some 850 families from the city of Groningen are affiliated, is particularly short of fresh vegetables. Post-secondary vocational education institute Terra MBO became involved, because they noticed opportunities for practical lessons. The reason why the people involved are pushing ahead is that the food bank sees the number of clients increase due to the corona crisis.

White cabbage in strip cultivation

Since last year, Noordhoff has been growing white cabbages. He started on a small strip of 1.300 m². The crop fits in well with the strip cropping he is experimenting with. A new crop provides crop variation. "We can grow it well on the clay," he explains. This year the farmer cultivated 1 hectare of white cabbage and pointed cabbage, part of which was donated to the food bank.



Crop field in Groningen

Not only on Noordhoff's land, but also on the 125-hectare Suikerterrein (grounds of the former sugar factory) in Groningen City, cabbages were planted for the first time in June 2020, on 2 hectares of land used by Terra MBO Groningen. Noordhoff assisted Jos Meijers and Sjoerd Pool. For example, he calculated how much fertilizer had to be spread on the land. Noordhoff: "There is also work on the land with arable crops such as field beans, spring barley and old grain varieties. Cabbage is a more complicated crop. It requires more labour. You have to have your head in the game continuously, otherwise things will go wrong."

Help from volunteers

The volunteers from the Toentje foundation helped with the cultivation because the Terra students were not available due to the corona crisis. For Meijers, growing cabbage is a nice addition to his production garden in Groningen's Oosterpark neighbourhood. He says: "We would like to grow more for the food bank. In the Oosterpark it is mainly leaf vegetables. We grow them because of their high turnover rate. We also grow peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers in foil greenhouses there."



Next steps

Noordhoff delivered 0.25 acres of cabbage to the food bank. He hopes that more fellow entrepreneurs will join the initiative. He is still in consultation with Toentje about a possible reimbursement of expenses. “We are looking for a balance between idealism and entrepreneurship. Labour is not paid. But the planting costs are pretty high. We are looking into whether there is a budget for this.” The farmer has already called a few farmers to make them enthusiastic. “A lot is already happening. There are farmers who bring crates of carrots and onions or a pallet of potatoes to the food bank. We can put agriculture in a different light this way.”



foto: Huisman Media

Do you want to learn more?

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