

Project sustainability Burgum

Matters to take into account in the process of starting a food forest in Burgum



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Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theoretical outline	2
3. Benefits of a food forest for Burgum	3
4. Results - Steps to the creation of a food forest.....	4
R1: What stages can be identified that the Energzy Group has to go through?.....	4
R2: What are the main problems similar initiatives have gone through?	6
R3: What is needed to make a food forest in Burgum sustainable for the future?	10
Conclusions per research question	11
R1: What stages can be identified that the Energzy Group has to go through?.....	11
R2: What are the main problems similar initiatives have gone through?	12
R3: What is needed to make a food forest in Burgum sustainable for the future?	14
Advice per research question.....	15
Advice to the Energzy Group Burgum	15
R1: What stages can be identified that the Energzy Group has to go through?.....	15
R2: What are the main problems similar initiatives have gone through?	15
R3: What is needed to make a food forest in Burgum sustainable for the future?	16
Advice to the municipality of Tytjerksteradiel	16
Bibliografie	17
Appendix.....	18
1. Minutes from the interview with Rene Davans, co-founder of Plukn Groningen.....	18
2. Minutes from the interview with Anita Boer From de Doarpstún Akkrum	23
3. Minutes from the interview with Irma Abelskamp from Stichting Frijlan.	26
4. Minutes from the interview with Madeleine Duran, co-founder of Food Forest Glimmen	28
5. Minutes from the interview with Simon bijlsma from the Friese Milieu Federatie.....	33

Preface

We want to thank the Enerzjy Group Burgum for allowing us to work on this project. Giving us the freedom to choose any project we thought suitable for Burgum and guiding us where needed. We also want to thank the different initiatives that were interviewed for this project. These initiatives were enthusiastic to tell their story and provided the students with a lot of useful information, based on which the research questions are answered. We want to thank René Davans from Plukn Groningen, Irma Abelskamp from Stichting Permacultuur Friesland, Anita Boer from Doarpstún Akkrum, Madeleine Duran from food forest Glimmen, Simon Bijlsma from de Friese Milieu Federatie and Theo Claassen from De Warren Natuurlijk Groen for their valuable contribution to this project.

1. Introduction

As part of the minor Sustainable Society at NHL-Stenden, four students are tied to a contractor to help execute a project that has a relation to making society more sustainable. These students help the contractor explore the means and possibilities at hand to execute a project of their choice. In this case, the students are paired with the Energzy Group Burgum. The Energzy Group is citizen-led cooperation that has the aim to make Burgum an energy-neutral community by 2030. To get there, they have given the students the assignment to find a project that can create awareness and involve the local community of Burgum to help create a better and more sustainable living environment in Burgum.

In the project plan leading up to this paper, the students have done extensive research on possible projects to execute in Burgum. Part of this research was a demographic analysis, a stakeholder analysis, a best practice analysis, and an inventory of critical requirements a project in Burgum should full fill. From this research and the conversations between the students and the contractor, it became clear there were two potential options to explore in this paper. These options were an energy box, helping individual households become more sustainable and save on their energy expenses. The other option was the planning and execution of a food forest. Both the students as well as the contractor had a strong preference for the food forest. This has therefore become the focus of this paper.

Together with the contractor three research questions have been identified. The answers to the research questions mainly stem from interviews we had with similar initiatives. The following research questions are answered in this paper.

1. What stages can be identified that the Energzy Group must go through to make the Food Forest happen?
2. What are the main problems similar initiatives have gone through, and how can they be resolved in Burgum?
3. What is needed to make a Food Forest in Burgum sustainable for the future?

During this project, we got into contact with the citizen-led initiative *De Warren, Natuurlijk Groen*. This initiative has already done a lot of exploration on this exact topic within the community of Tytjerksteradiel, of which Burgum is part. Their expertise on the matter has been taken into account in this paper as well. They are a potential executor of this project. To get a broader overview of the current situation, we have been in contact with the Friese Milieufederatie and the municipality of Tytjerksteradiel, as both these parties are also stakeholders in this potential food forest.

Firstly, the three research questions are answered. After this, conclusions are drawn from these answers, and advice is given on how a next phase can be reached in the journey towards a food forest in Burgum.

2. Theoretical outline

Problem analysis

Currently, there is no food forest or anything similar in Burgum. As the research leading up to this paper has shown that a food forest is desired in Burgum. There are several benefits to a food forest, listed below. The creation of a food forest in Burgum will not solve an urgent problem, but make society and the community more sustainable, aware, and social towards the future. The creation of a food forest fits within the trend of rising demands for organic food and the climate challenges we face. It is also a way to take citizens more seriously and make them part of the political processes and decision-making.

Method

The main method of research is conducting interviews. Multiple organizations are asked about their experiences with a food forest. These interviews will be recorded (if possible and in agreement with the person interviewed) typed out, translated to English, and the information will be used in the report. Next to that, some literature research will be done.

Goal

This paper means to be a guideline towards the creation of a food forest. Through this paper, the Energzy Group and possibly De Warren Natuurlijk Groen have an overview of the matters they need to take into account while starting a food forest. By having this overview, they don't have to invent the wheel over and over again. Lessons can be taken from other initiatives to prevent failures along the way.

Theoretical framework

In the theoretical framework, different theories and concepts are explained. In one of the research questions, sustainability is mentioned. What is meant by sustainability?

When people hear the term sustainability they usually think about renewable energy sources, reducing carbon emissions, protecting the environment and keeping it all in balance. In short, sustainability is a term that describes; "to protect our natural environment, human and ecological health while driving innovation and not compromising our way of life" (Cambeis, n.d.).

Research questions

The following research questions are answered in this paper. The questions are broadly formulated but are specified towards what can be learned from similar initiatives.

1. What stages can be identified that the Energzy Group has to go through to make the Food Forest happen?
2. What are the main problems similar initiatives have gone through, and how can they be resolved in Burgum?
3. What is needed to make a Food Forest in Burgum sustainable for the future?

3. Benefits of a food forest for Burgum

Why is it beneficial for Burgum to have a food forest?

Numerous benefits are derived from a food forest on an environmental level as well as an economic and social level. The presence of green spaces has been shown to increase the economic value of an area. Some green spaces have been found to increase tourism. Food forests do not only provide us with services but they can produce products that can be useful to us. Food is the most obvious of these products (Mackey T. , n.d.).

Why do EGB and de Warren want this so badly?

Both the Energzy Group and De Warren Natuurlijk Groen are citizen-led initiatives relating to sustainability within Burgum. Although their reasons for existence, means, and goals are different, both these groups want to work on a food forest in Burgum. Both the ecological and social roles of a food forest play a role within both these organizations. The fact that two citizens initiatives independently from each other come up with a similar idea shows that there is support from the local community for a food forest in the proximity of Burgum.

What does the local population have to gain?

Next to the strengthened biodiversity and reduction of pollution, it can also be used to build a stronger community and to educate people with real-life experiences. Students can learn how the ecosystem works also within a smaller scale. The creation of a food forest can help to make communities more sustainable, healthier, and more enjoyable to live in (Mackey T. , n.d.).

What is the impact on ecology and biodiversity?

A global issue is a reduction in biodiversity. Improving biodiversity is often focused on natural habitats instead of on improving the biodiversity in urban environments. Even though urban areas have a higher density of animal populations, compared to more rural areas they have lower biodiversity. More and more research is showing that it is possible to have high levels of biodiversity in urban areas. With a food forest, the biodiversity will increase. Diversity within the food forest plays an important role because it can lead to great productivity and biodiversity grows which makes the whole system more stable and resilient towards a disturbance. Other benefits of diversity are pest control, improved growing conditions, and nutrient access. No chemical fertilizers or pesticides are needed which means the food and the environment are healthier. Once a food forest is created it basically maintains itself (Mackey T. , n.d.).

4. Results - Steps to the creation of a food forest

R1: What stages can be identified that the Enerzjy Group has to go through?

How to find a suitable location?

In the creation of a food forest, the first and most essential step is to find a location where all the plans can be executed. This is one of the questions we asked similar initiatives we visited.

One of the interviews was held with René Davans, co-founder of Plukn Groningen. Plukn is an experimental food forest in being in Groningen of about 2000 m². Plukn is located in Westpark, one of the four city parks of Groningen. It took quite some effort to be able to use the location they are using now. The Plukn foundation was founded in 2016 and ever since they have been looking for a suitable location to execute their plans. The preference of the foundation was to have a piece of land closely located to the city, however, the municipality was very clear that this was no option due to the lack of space. Plukn, therefore, extended their search to a maximum of twelve kilometres outside of Groningen. There was some interest from different communities, but for different reasons, this didn't succeed. After these disappointments, the founders decided to put their focus on their living situation for the time being and put Plukn on the second plan. Two of the founders wanted to live in a Tiny House, and after some research, they became affiliated with the Tiny House project on Westpark. When they visited the place where the tiny houses would arise, they found out that large parts of the park were unused at that time. They got into contact with other exploits of the park, and through them, they got into contact with the right persons from the municipality, e.g. the person responsible for maintenance of the area around the park. By that time they already had worked out plans. The fact that the plans were there and that the plans perfectly coincided with the goals the municipality had with the park made that the whole process accelerated from there. Plukn is an experimental food forest and publicly accessible. The idea is that visitors and volunteers can profit from the eventual harvests as well. Right now, Plukn is functioning on a non-commercial basis. They can use the ground for an indefinite amount of time from the municipality and they currently do not pay rent. Once they do start commercially exploiting the ground, Plukn will have to start paying rent accordingly. At this point, it's purely experimental and all profits in the forms of harvest go to the local community or are reinvested in the food forest.

For the food forest in Akkrum, the challenges were more or less similar to those Plukn had to deal with. They have asked the help of the Frisian Milieufederation to write a project plan. This party helped out with the administrative preparations like setting up a foundation, generating societal support et cetera. For the food forest in Akkrum, the municipality was the go-to party to find a location. The municipality was enthusiastic about the plans but proved difficult to find a suitable location. The organization put a lot of effort into talking with schools, the community, and other organizations to create broad support. The preferred spot they had in mind didn't prove to be an option, so in cooperation with the municipality, they got offered a different spot. The Dorpstún Akkrum leases the ground from the municipality for five years. The hopes are that when the food forest has progressed enough in five years that they will be able to use the ground for a longer time. For both Plukn as the dorpstún in Akkrum, the plans they already had helped them succeed in starting this project. There were no parties explicitly against the projects with founded reasons. It helped both Plukn and Akkrum that they had some worked out plans to offer the municipality when they got in contact.

For Stichting Permacultuur Friesland, it was a bit of a process to find a suitable location. They looked for 3 years to find a suitable location. At first, they started at de Potmarge but later on, it was decided that this was not allowed anymore. Irma went back to the municipality and the ground that they use now was given away so they asked if they could use it and they could. Right now they can use the ground until 2025. They hope that in 2025 the food forest is looking good and the municipality will decide to let the food forest be as it is.

The organization behind the food forest in Glimmen decided to purchase the ground themselves. They feared that a lease construction or using municipality ground would be a risk. Often, initiatives using municipality ground have to move after several years. The founders decided not to take any risk, and since they were in the lucky position to acquire the ground themselves they now own the place. The place they use is too beautiful to leave after a couple of years.

In Burgum itself, the citizen-led initiative the Warren, Natuurlijk Groen is active. This group already has worked out plans for a food forest at The Warren. The Warren is an area close to Burgum with an important ecological function. The initiative wants to create a food forest here, in combination with nature-inclusive agriculture. This area can have a great social and communal function, depending on the destination. The ground is municipal ground. The ground was originally bought for building houses, but the municipal council has decided twice in the last decade that that idea is not desirable and will have negative consequences for surrounding villages. De Warren has offered their ideas to the municipal council in the form of a citizen initiative. The council has received it positively but not made a formal judgment on it. The decision lays with the college of aldermen and the mayor, but from their side, there has been little to no contact. This area could form the perfect location for the desired food forest in Burgum, but municipal cooperation is essential. If this does not turn out may be doing something similar to Glimmen is an option. Seeing if there is any ground available from for example a farmer who wants to sell the ground for a reasonable price. This way you do not have to deal with the municipality because the ground will be yours.

What actors play a role?

After the location is established there can be different actors that can play an important role in your food forest.

In the case of Plukn, relatively few actors came and come into play. The founders of the foundation have all the biological knowledge in-house to create this food forest. In the quest for a suitable location, some external advisers have helped out, but all on a friendly basis. The key-actor in the entire quest has been different municipalities. Due to the set-up of the food forest (experimental, community-based, non-commercial), it was simply impossible to acquire ground. The ground is too expensive if there is no commercial plan behind it. The foundation did not own ground and according to the municipality of Groningen, there was no communal ground available. When it became clear that there was communal ground available, the willingness of the municipality to cooperate was essential in making Plukn happen. The fact that the plans of Plukn fit perfectly within the idea of the municipality with the park played a large role. Right now, Plukn is part of the Westpark Cooperation and is, through this organ, in contact with the communities directly surrounding the park and Plukn. Other actors that play a role are of course the visitors, donors, and the local community. Finally, there is the Regio Groningen-Assen, voluntary cooperation between the provinces Groningen and

Drenthe and several municipalities, including Groningen. Through funding, they have played a role in the start of Plukn as well.

Akkrum got help from a professional organization helping them out in the preparation, mainly in the bureaucratic part of it. The Friese Milieufederatie played an important role here. The organization behind the food forest got in contact with schools, the local community, and local political parties. The contacts with these actors were very important to lay the groundwork for broad societal support. Since the project in Akkrum is quite small and therefore probably not profitable, the municipality played an important part as well. The municipality agreed to lease the ground to the organization and made this dorpsstuin possible. During the process, the organization got help from an expert with a background in permaculture. This person took a critical look at the design of the plans, the geographic location, and the quality of the ground. This person is still involved. People from the municipal house help out as well in applying for subsidies. Nowadays there are several volunteers involved to help maintain the food forest. There were already enthusiastic people, but the volunteering really only started when the food forest started to take shape and all plans were finalized. This is something to keep in mind when starting a food forest.

In the case of Stichting Permacultuur Friesland, only a few actors played a role. 2 gardeners supplied them with green waste and the municipality supplied them with a lot of leaves. Next to that, there was one intern who did most of the digging. The most important actor that played a role was the municipality that finally permitted them to use the ground they are using right now.

Many actors come and came into play with the food forest in Glimmen. The founders emphasized how important it is to build a network around the food forest. Although the founders have a lot of the required knowledge in-house, they work together with schools (educational purpose), the IVN, Landschapsbeheer, the beekeepers association, suppliers, local stores and companies, and of course the municipality. There is an extensive exchange of knowledge and in Glimmen multiple aspects of the food forest come into play. The founders want to give space for the educational, social, ecological, and economic value of the project.

R2: What are the main problems similar initiatives have gone through?

What challenges will come up along the way?

For Plukn, the biggest challenge was finding the location. The challenge here was predominantly in dealing with the different municipalities. For example, the space Plukn is located now was simply not known to be available by the municipality. If Plukn had not come up with the location themselves, they would have never been able to use it. You need to find the right people that are willing to go a long way within the local bureaucracy. For most of the employees at municipalities it is very clear that whenever something will result in extra work or is not contained within the task description of the civil servant in question, it will most likely not happen. For the Enerzjy Group, it could be helpful to get into contact with the municipality of Groningen to ask how the bureaucratic procedure went. There can certainly be lessons drawn here. Also, Plukn put in years of work at another location when the respective municipality decided to alter the plans due to complaints from the local community. There is no guarantee that the process to get a location is linear. There will be setbacks, and they will be devastating for the moral, but then again other times it can go very quickly. Another challenge is the finances. Plukn explicitly wants to be experimental and not be forced by commercial interests.

They are therefore reliant on subsidies and self-generated money, as well as volunteer forces. Both founders have been working on Plukn for years now without ever getting paid. This takes a lot of dedication.

The biggest challenge the organization behind the dorpstún in Akkrum faced was the slow bureaucracy. For most of the process, the organization consisted of one person, it sometimes was hard to keep motivated. There were a lot of procedural steps the organization had to go through. The Friese Milieufederatie helped out a great deal here. Since the organization consisted of one person, it took time before the plans were being taken seriously by the stakeholders involved. The (lack of) manpower proved a bit of a problem sometimes. Many people were very enthusiastic and supported the project, but they really only wanted to get involved when the plans were finalized and the ground was acquired. Since the procedure took so long, people lose faith that the project would go through. The finances were challenging as well. The organization sees this food forest as a utility with multiple functions. At some point, the food forest should generate enough money to pay for the costs, but currently, it is reliant on subsidies and grants. It will however stay a volunteering job and a non-commercial project.

For Stichting Permacultuur Friesland, there was the problem of finding a suitable location. They found a location but later on they heard from the municipality they could not use this place. After that, they luckily found the location they are at now. Once they had a location there was a disbalance. They work from the permaculture perspective so it is really important to listen to the ground you are working with. You need to look differently at the ground than you are used to. It is important to take into account the whole ecosystem because it is not just profiting from the food it produces. So they had some problems with for example the neighbours who said they had to get rid of a certain plant called Distels. They decided not to, listened to what the ground needed, and in the end, it turned out fine. Now they have a nice food forest, with newly planted plants and trees and they are hoping that in a few years they will have more products to harvest to eventually sell some of it and make somewhat of a profit. Right now they are putting more money in than what they are getting out of it.

Food forest Glimmen is in the unlucky situation that the municipality, they are in, recently merged with a much bigger municipality. They had good contact with the aldermen and other people at the municipality about their plans. After the merger, however, they had to acquire new contacts and basically go through the entire bureaucratic process again. The process for starting something like a food forest is different in every municipality. The challenge is in reaching the aldermen level. Going through the civil servant level is simply not enough, as there are a lot of obstacles in current laws, and without the vision and acceptance of the alderman, not much is possible. Clear agreements with the municipality are essential. You need to be extremely focused and up-to-date on all the judicial development to make a chance of success in the bureaucracy. Keeping the initiative is essential because as soon as things will depend on the civil servants and municipal bureaucracy, it will most likely be a no.

A lesson from all the food forests that were interviewed from this report is that good contact with the municipality is essential. Whether the municipality is the owner of the ground or only the party that needs to grant the permit. At some point, they will come into play and have to give their acceptance of the ideas. This is the biggest challenge in Burgum right now. Worked-out plans are

waiting to be implemented. The discussion is currently if a food forest on the grounds preferred by the citizen's initiative The Warren is the best destination. This discussion has been going for over a decade. Bureaucracy is the killer of many dreams, is what one of the founders of food forest Glimmen told us. To prevent this from happening in Burgum, in the advisory part we focus directly on the municipality of Tytjerksteradiel as well, besides the advice we have for our contractor.

What kind of financial and organizational structures should be implemented?

To create a food forest, quite an investment both in time and financial means is needed. Plukn chose to be an experimental, non-commercial food forest. No money is being made (right now) with the exploitation of the food forest. The members of the foundation work on this project as extended hobbies and therefore receive no compensation for their work. Within the foundation, there is no structure in terms of people, as currently the foundation is run by two members. To be able to pay for the investments, the Plukn-team does a lot of volunteering work. They have a small clothing brand, they do catering activities, events with the Plukn story, festivals, and cooking workshops. Besides that, they sell certificates and people can give donations. In the starting phase, Plukn had six Duroc pigs to make the ground suitable for planting. These pigs were slaughtered and sold in meat packages. This brings in money for the foundation as well. Plukn aims for subsidies and grants as well and recently received the RGA (Regio Groningen and Assen) fund. Currently, however, Plukn generates no money on its own, since it is still in its starting phase and it is explicitly experimental and non-commercial. The focus is therefore not (yet) on making money out of it. However, there are plans and ideas to do small-scale commercial activities in the future.

For Akkrum, at a certain point, the food forest should make enough money to cover its costs. This can be done by selling part of the harvest. However, the main idea is that the volunteers and the people that help can mainly profit from the harvest. Cooperation with the local food bank is an idea as well. Since the food forest has a lot of benefits already, it does not necessarily have to generate a lot of money. The forest can be used for educational purposes and as a spot of relaxation. There is a strong idealistic aspect to it. A food forest should be a utility like a library, and therefore not necessarily make a profit. There is no clear-cut organizational structure, as the organization is small and volunteer-run.

For Stichting Permacultuur Friesland, their food forest does not make any profit. At the moment they are investing in it in the hopes that later on, they might be able to sell some of the food and make a bit of money. In the past, they did sell some tea herbs and made some profit. At this moment they play quite. In the end, when the harvests are bigger they want to sell more and earn some money but that is not their end goal. For the Stichting Permacultuur Friesland the main goal is not to make a profit. They have a small community of people who live there and they will eat the food that is produced by the food forest. They live according to a permaculture lifestyle which means they take into account sustainability and give back to the world. So part of the food is for the people living there. The other food that is for example hanging too high in a tree to reach by them they leave there so that is food for the birds. The fruits that fall to the ground they leave on the ground for the small animals to eat. That way they have their sustainable food source but also give back to nature.

The food forest in Glimmen is run by a foundation. The three board members of this foundation have a lot of knowledge on organizational, nature-historical, and financial matters. There is a fair focus on the economical aspect of the project, as the two founders basically work full-time on it now and need

to pay for their expenses as well. The economic model revolves around three options. The first option is for private individuals. They can pay a fixed amount of money per year to become a friend of the food forest. The second option is for companies. They can become a partner of the food forest. The third option is for food forest starters. People who are planning to start a forest, like the Enerjy Group can buy this package and get information on how to get started. They will get a guided tour and hear all the ins and outs of starting a food forest. Every target group pays a fixed amount of money per year and receives several incentives in return. This can be tours, tastings, food forest bags with harvested products, workshops et cetera. However, the food forest is still in the starting phase and these packages need to be worked out further, they are not final.

What advice do similar initiatives have to offer?

According to Irma from Stichting Permacultuur Friesland, it is important when starting a food forest that you accept the feedback that you get from nature, from the soil. A nice example of this is that they had trouble with Distels. Their neighbours were complaining about them and said they had to remove them. Stichting Permacultuur Friesland left them and after 4 years the Distels disappeared and at that time the trees started to flourish. People are trying to strive for a certain image, but the actual question is whether this fits within the bigger picture. In the end, it is about the restoration of nature using permaculture (personal communication, May 18).

Rene from Plukn offered a few pieces of advice to start initiatives. Do not hesitate to look at other initiatives and copy successful elements. There is no need to invent the wheel over and over again. Also with the bureaucratic procedures, it can be very helpful to talk with someone that has already been through a procedure like that, especially on the level of municipalities. Connect the civil servants and make them learn what the bureaucratic procedure looked like in another municipality. Another piece of advice is to make concrete what you are talking about already in the early phases of a project. Do not lose yourself in umbrella terms. Especially in ideal organizations, this tends to happen a lot. You can work together for years without any problem before you find out you have a very different idea when you're talking about a certain term. Prevent policy language and be open and honest with each other about the goals and means you have.

The organization behind the food forest in Akkrum stresses the importance of being part of a bigger project. They have been helped and form part of the Friese Milieufederatie. This can be very helpful when for example applying for subsidies. The project plan they wrote is available through the Milieufederatie for others to learn from as well. The second piece of advice is to generate broad support from the local community and organizations. You need to get the local population and the village on your side. This makes it a lot harder for the municipality to reject a solid plan.

Madeleine from the food forest in Glimmen is clear in her advice. Good cooperation and agreements with the municipality are essential for a project like a food forest to succeed. You need the guarantee that you can use ground for a longer period, that is why the founders decided to purchase the ground. It is best to get the ideas known on the aldermen level, as that is where the vision and the solutions need to come from. At the civil servant level, not much comes through. Next to that, it is important to build a network around your project. Be in good contact with the direct neighbourhood, suppliers, schools etcetera. You want your project to be there for the long-term, so you need to plan accordingly, also in economic terms.

The Friese milieu federatie emphasized the importance of thinking through your plans before you start. What do I want with this forest? What is the goal? Do you want a forest where you can easily harvest the food then you have to think about that and maybe put in your plans that you want paths to through the forest? Another thing is looking at the ground. What do you want with this forest? What do you want to get out of it? But is this also feasible if you look at the ground? Keep in mind what sort of plants you plant. You do not want to plant invasive species because later on, you will probably have to deal with a plague. The design aspects are very important when starting a food forest. The Friese milieu federatie also has designed a toolkit for people to lend to help them get to focus on what is important when starting a food forest. The toolkit can help create order in the chaotic process. The design of the food forest is not a certain shape that is pre-determined there are so many factors that play an important role. Keep that in mind. They also started something called the werkplaats voedselbossen Noord Nederland. This werkplaats is a group of around 30 people. These people are all involved in food forests in their own way. They have meetings five times a year and here people can share their ideas and ask for help and or advice. From those five meetings, two are excursions to for example a plant nursery to get inspired for new ideas. This is open for people to join who are interested in (starting) a food forest or have questions or need help.

R3: What is needed to make a food forest in Burgum sustainable for the future?

What knowledge is necessary to start a food forest?

In the case of Plukn, the founders had a solid background in biology and therefore had all the knowledge in-house to get a food forest started. However, since this food forest is an experimental one, the founders have pleasure in going beyond what is known or proven. This means that sometimes you have to take a loss as well. It is mostly just doing. Motivation is more important than knowledge, as the time investment is rather heavy while any information can be found in books or online. There is extensive research on what kind of plants go together well and will stimulate each other.

For the food forest in Glimmen, most of the knowledge that is necessary to get started was present within the organization. One of the founders had an organizational background, another one the natural-historical knowledge, and the third one the financial knowledge. However, now that they got started, there is a lot of knowledge exchange with all the stakeholders involved. A food forest is inherently experimental, so it is a lot of trying and failing. A lot of motivation and time are needed to get started. In Glimmen, the planning spans seven years for now, and that is all still the starting phase. You need at least two people that are willing to jump deep into the adventure. With just one person you can easily burn yourself out.

How to maintain a food forest in the future?

In the ideal situation, a food forest becomes self-sustaining after several years. However, small maintenance and weeding will of course be necessary, as well as supervision. The Permaculture Research Institute of Australia has created a graph to show how labor-intensive the maintenance of a food forest is. Although this differs per climate and quality of ground, it makes very clear that the most labor-intensive part is setting up the food forest itself. After 20 years, the food forest is more or less self-sustaining as shown in figure 1.

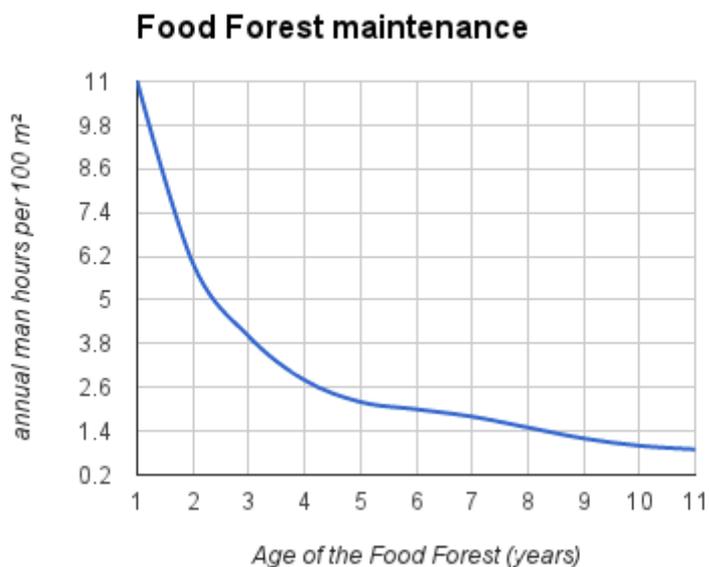


Figure 1 Figure showing the work hours for a food forest over the years (Cambeis, n.d.).

To maintain a food forest in the future it is essential to have a clear grip on the economic situation. A food forest is a long-term project, so it should be desirable for people to step in when the initial founders pull out of the project. Some trees can live up to a hundred years, so it is important to think ahead of time. This means that when people work on it full time, the economic model provides for at least a basic income. Next to that, it is of course important that there are clear agreements with the ground-owners and the municipality about the length of the term that the ground can be used for this specific purpose.

Conclusions per research question

In the conclusion, the main answers to the research questions are outlined and advice to both the contractor and other stakeholders is included.

R1: What stages can be identified that the Energzy Group has to go through?

How to find a suitable location?

Due to the mostly idealistic nature and goals that are mostly associated with food forests, it can be quite a challenge to find a suitable location to get started.

Getting a food forest started is a time-consuming experience. It can take years of preparation before you know whether or not you will succeed in finding a location and getting all the resources together. Time and motivation are very important. Especially in the starting phase, you need to be with at least two motivated people to pull off a project like this.

Most food forests are experimental, small scale, and offer more than simply production. The ecological function, social possibilities, and benefits for the local community are very hard to put into financial numbers. Most food forests are economically not viable, considering the prices of ground in the Netherlands. Most locations, therefore, have a construction where they use municipal lands for a

fair sum or no rent at all. The municipality often owns land that is not used and could be a great place for a food forest to arise. A food forest is a long-term investment. It can take years and years before the forest gets in shape and some plants and trees can grow for decades. Clear agreements with the municipality about the time a piece of land can be used are essential.

Even if the land where the food forest will arise is not municipal, the municipality will still come into play when it comes to permits. A good relation, clear communication, and agreements are essential.

Generating local support for the plans can help convince the municipality of the necessity of the plans as well. Invest in a promotional strategy to get the people aware of the plans and offer possibilities for people to join the project. The more people you get behind you, the harder it will get for the municipality to directly reject the plans.

However, the sad conclusion with regards to the municipality of Tytjerksteradiel is that when it comes to the Warren, the municipality seems unwilling or unable to communicate and make a decision about what should be done with the area. This can pose quite a challenge to the Enerzjy Group as well, as their plans are in the same range and the same people within the municipality are responsible.

What actors will play a role?

A food forest is not an isolated initiative. Especially when the social and communal role is highlighted, many different actors come into play.

The most essential actor for all the food forests is the municipality, as mentioned already. The municipality could be the owner of the ground and is in charge of all the legalities and permits. Good communication is essential.

In the starting phase, it can be very helpful to have an organization like the milieufederatie that can look at the existing plans. They are a great supporter of the food forest and have extensive knowledge on how to get started. You need societal support and good communication with the direct local community as well. On different aspects you can ask for help, depending on the in-house knowledge. Most food forests are places open for experimenting, and you see this on the organizational side as well. It is fine to experiment, adjust and keep learning, but it is a time-consuming business. Most people who want to work in a food forest rather have someone else do that part.

A food forest can be a place where knowledge is exchanged. Building a network of partners can make the food forest a dynamic place and will generate brand recognition as well. Think about suppliers, schools, local shops and companies, beekeepers associations, nature organizations, the municipality, political organizations, and the local community.

R2: What are the main problems similar initiatives have gone through?

What challenges will come up along the way?

The biggest challenge is in finding the location and making your way through the bureaucracy. The process is not linear. You can spend years on a location before it bursts, and then within little to no time, you can have a different, suitable location. The bureaucracy can take a lot of time. People

within the municipal bureaucracy need to be willing to go to some lengths to make the project happen as well. Bureaucracy is the killer of many dreams.

Part of the challenge is getting everything right on the judicial side. You need proper contact with the municipality, preferably on the aldermen level. Every municipality has a different process, and it seems that the larger the municipality, the bigger the challenge is to get to the right contacts.

Another challenge is in working with the ground you get. It is important to listen to the ground and look at it differently than you are used to. With a food forest, it is not just profiting from the food it produces. Different grounds provide different challenges and opportunities.

You need at least two thoroughly motivated people to get started. Many people will show interest and be enthusiastic, but most probably only step on board when the train starts rolling. When the food forest is not there yet outsiders are not likely to want to participate in helping to start the food forest. Once the forest is there then people are more inclined to help out. Lastly, the financial side is challenging. If you want to keep it non-commercial and experimental, this means that sometimes there might not be that much money. You need to keep finding new ideas to attract sponsors, donors, and other ways to keep money flowing in.

What kind of organization of financial structure should be implemented?

Most of the initiatives we visited and interviewed are run by a foundation. The foundation often consists of two to four people. Mostly the founding members. Most of the initiatives are in the starting phase and therefore currently make no money. Investments are made through creative initiatives like a clothing line, festival work, donations, or certificates. Some food forests may be eligible for subsidies and grants. Most food forests run partly on volunteers so a strict organizational structure is in most cases not necessary.

The food forest in Glimmen offers package deals to earn money. There is a package for “friends” of the food forest. A package for companies and partners, and a package for people who are planning to start a food forest themselves. These packages are not thoroughly worked out yet and still subject to change, but they offer for example guided tours, information, part of the harvest, or sponsoring opportunities.

An important aspect of choosing an organizational and financial structure is planning for the future. The food forest is a long-term investment and the return should be so as well. Especially the people who run the project need to be able to find successors at some point, and therefore a bit of an economic incentive is desired.

What advice do other food forests have to offer?

When you start a food forest, you need to accept the feedback you get from nature. You need to work with the ground and the possibilities you have. Accept that not everything will go exactly according to plan. This is part of the experimental nature of a food forest.

This paper gives an insight into how other food forests got started. This is one of the pieces of advice we got from the food forests themselves as well. Don't keep trying to invent the wheel over and over again. There is no shame in copying successful work from other food forests. It can especially in bureaucratic procedures be helpful to talk to people who have already been through the same or a similar process.

Next to that, be concrete in the terms you use. In the starting phase especially, people will easily use vague language which clouds what exactly you are working on. You can work together for years before you find out you attach a totally different meaning to a certain term. Be open and honest in your communication and prevent policy language.

It can be helpful to be part of a bigger project or partnership. An organization like the milieufederatie has helped many food forests already and can be helpful when problems or challenges arise. There is a lot of knowledge in organizations like this and they are very willing to share this knowledge. The Friese milieu federatie also has designed a toolkit for people to lend to help them get to focus on what is important when starting a food forest. The toolkit can help create order in the chaotic process.

Lastly, good and clear cooperation and communication with the municipality are very important. Make sure to be very aware of the developments going on to stay in the lead when talking to the municipality. When it gets to the point you are dependent on information from the municipality, much will get lost. When possible, try to arrange meetings on the aldermen level. This is where the vision and agreements need to come from.

R3: What is needed to make a food forest in Burgum sustainable for the future?

What knowledge is necessary to start a food forest?

There is no clear cut answer to the question what knowledge is necessary to get started on a food forest. With all the initiatives we visited, there was some knowledge present about ecological matters. However, the motivation to just do and keep trying will be more important. There is a lot of knowledge that can be imported and organizations that will want to help out. This is part of the experimental nature of a food forest.

What has become very clear over the course of this project is that getting a food forest started on your own is a very challenging task. A food forest is the kind of project that can easily burn you out, as the work will never be done. It is therefore important to have at least two dedicated and motivated people when getting started. Setting clear boundaries is very important. It is a lot of trying and failing, and you need to be prepared for that.

How to maintain a food forest towards the future?

A food forest is a long term investment. The longer you work on it, the less hours you need to put into it to maintain it. Especially in the starting phase you need dedicated and invested people to make it work. A grip on the economic situation is important as well. The first number of years is only investing and there will hardly be any return. You need to take into account whether this is feasible and from what money you will make the investments. An economic incentive can be important to find successors in due time.

With all the decisions that need to be made, keep your eye on the future and not only on the short term. It can be tempting to just get started and simply see what comes next when it comes, but we strongly advice against that.

Advice per research question

From the conclusions above, we have given advice for the contractor per research question. Since it has become clear that the role of the municipality is essential we have distilled advice towards the municipality of Tytjerksteradiel as well.

Advice to the Enerzjy Group Burgum

R1: What stages can be identified that the Enerzjy Group has to go through?

How to find a suitable location?

Our advice to the Enerzjy Group would get into contact with the municipality, offer the plans for several possible locations and see what is possible from there on. Invest in the relationship with the municipal council and the mayor and aldermen. Their cooperation is necessary to get the project started. Work out the plans and generate societal support before getting into contact with the municipality. Perhaps the Enerzjy Group and De Warren Natuurlijk Groen can help each other out. Get into contact with the citizens' initiative De Warren Natuurlijk Groen. Maybe you can learn from each other and especially sharing the experiences in the communication with the municipality can be helpful.

What actors play a role?

Create a network around your initiative. Invest in local support and brand recognition. Do not hesitate to ask an organization like milieufederatie for help or a critical look. Their experience and knowledge are huge. Don't invent the wheel over and over again. The Milieufederatie has created a toolbox with basic information with things like general plant species that they would recommend to plant in a food forest but also what kind of soil these plants need or if they need a lot of sunlight or more shade etc. This can especially be helpful for people or organizations who want to start a food forest but do not really know where to start yet. You can lend this toolbox from the Friese Milieufederatie. The Friese Milieufederatie also said during their interview that if the Enerzjy group Burgum is interested to be a part of a werkplaats called the voedselbossen Noord Nederland they can contact Simon and he will put them on the sending list.

Initially, we hoped to focus on the role of the local community in the creation of a food forest as well, but in the conversations with other initiatives, it became clear that the local community mostly only gets actively involved when the food forest is really getting started. It is however essential to get support from the local community in finding a location. This is one of the pieces of advice we offer to the contractor in this paper.

R2: What are the main problems similar initiatives have gone through?

What organizational or financial structure should be implemented?

We advise the Enerzjy Group to contact food forest Glimmen for the package for food forest starters. This package is especially meant for people like the Enerzjy Group. This could be a helpful partnership in getting the food forest started.

R3: What is needed to make a food forest in Burgum sustainable for the future?

What knowledge is necessary to start a food forest?

We advise finding at least two dedicated and motivated people to get started. The time investment is heavy and a project like this can easily burn one out. The motivation and willingness to invest a proper amount of time into this project are more important than knowledge.

How to maintain a food forest in the future?

In the decision-making, keep your eye on the future. Don't be tempted to just get started. Always be aware that you're dealing with a project that will hopefully outlive you. This includes agreements about the usage of the ground for preferably an indefinite amount of time, and taking into account that at some point someone will have to succeed you.

Advice to the municipality of Tytjerksteradiel

In comparison with the other initiatives we visited, the contact from initiatives like the Energzy Group, but De Warren Natuurlijk Groen alike, with the municipality of Tytjerksteradiel seems to be difficult. There is for example hardly any communication from the municipality towards the citizens' initiative of de Warren Natuurlijk Groen. We advise the municipality to invest in clear communication and look into the municipal policy regarding citizens' initiatives. These initiatives can be very valuable to the local community and should be taken seriously.

Extra research is necessary to find out what the role of the municipality of Tytjerksteradiel currently is and to find out where exactly it should be improved. With this paper, however, we want to call upon the municipality to pay attention to all the positive stories we heard from similar initiatives in other municipalities. Without exception, the local community profits and also in ecological terms initiatives like for example a food forest contributes to a more pleasant living environment. The authors of this paper are confident that a food forest in Burgum will have similar positive contributions.

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Appendix

1. Minutes from the interview with Rene Davans, co-founder of Plukn Groningen.

The interview was originally held in Dutch, but for this report it was translated to English.

W: Wiebe, interviewer. R: René, interviewee.

Groningen, 17-05

W: I would like to interview you in relation to my studies. I'm currently part of the minor Sustainable Society where we take a critical look at society's problems to see how we can sustainably solve these. Part of this minor is that we as students are tied to a contractor. I am tied to a sustainable initiative in Burgum. This initiative, called Energy Group Burgum wants to make Burgum a more sustainable, green, and aware place to live in. In past weeks, we've done a lot of research into possible activities in Burgum. From the conversations, we had with both the people of Burgum and the contractor it became clear that they would like to get started on a food forest. The task we got assigned is to talk to similar projects to see what the people in Burgum can learn from them. I have couple of questions I would like to ask you.

W: Can you tell me what Plukn entails exactly and in what stage it is in currently?

R: Plukn was founded about five years ago. The idea came up while thinking about what we wanted to do with our lives. Both our backgrounds (Helena, partner of Rene and co-founder of Plukn) involve nature, but we don't want to go to the research side. In our quest, we stumbled across documentaries about food systems and sustainability. There is so much going on in this regard. Through this, we stumbled upon permaculture and food forests. We kept searching and the more we learned, the more we got convinced this was something we wanted to do something with. This is how Plukn came to being. How can we build a business model that feels right? We want to be an experimental garden, in the broadest sense of the word. People can not only taste but experience where their food comes from. We have made a plant list of 500 plants. If you think about making a living out of this, it's not profitable. Too many different plants, inefficient if you only look at the output. That is why we want to be experimental. Do new things. Our mission is to make consumers aware of the food system. That's why Westpark (location of Plukn) is perfect. It is public. Many people go there. They don't come specifically for the food forest but just for relaxation. It's a low threshold to get to know the system. When the forest gets in shape, we want to put a lot of information banners up. People will ask themselves during their walk, what is this? What is going on? Right now, it's a lot of talking to the people that pass by. At a later stage, there will be more written information. People read and get in-depth if they like. We try to plant seeds in the people. Spark curiosity.

W: So the focus is really on creating awareness?

R: create awareness about the system. We see a future in this. Food forests can be part and addition to the current system. Not just food forests, but quite a number. We think that is realistic. There is a couple of conditions for this. Consumers need to be more aware and willing to eat other things than they are used to from the supermarket. Not the regular supply, monoculture. Products may differ, people need to be open to that. Also technical, how can we make them profitable? There are experiments in NL, also on a larger scale. Focus on stripes gardening. Not 400 but 20 or 40 kinds of

plants. More efficient. We call our project a romantic food forest. It needs to look good and fun to generate interest.

R: To get a project like this reliable for a farmer it needs to be on a larger scale than what we are currently doing. We do little stripes gardening to show the people that this is also an option. In total 2000 m². One stripe with nuts and Chestnuts, there will be more fruits, heesters, and trees. Creates a nice contrast. A romantic view on one side versus the structure you will probably need to make it economically feasible. We have stripes of 30 meters, but this can also be 300. The diversity is just a little less.

W: How long have you guys been working on this?

R: The foundation was founded in 2016. We have long been looking for a suitable place. We wanted to keep it close to Groningen. This was hardly possible, no space, the price of ground was way too high. We made a circle around the city of approximately 12 km. We wrote a letter to all municipalities with our ideas. Zuidhorn and Tynaarlo were interested. We have been busy with Zuidhorn for one and a half years. There were plans for an ecological new area of houses. The municipality was enthusiastic about city farming and an ecological village within this project. In the end, the whole project was cancelled. The municipality wanted building ground with little to no rules attached. Different groups could do different things, life sustainable building. More freedom as initiative, to not get stuck within the bureaucracy. The neighbourhood was not happy, feared hippy community, and a loss of value on their houses. Started a procedure and collected signatures to stop this project. We already did a lot of investigation and research, but ultimately the mayor and alderman cancelled the project. This cost us nearly three years. We were getting quite desperate and had a bit of fear that we would not make it anymore. We started with the five of us, at this point, there were only two people left. We had a rough time.

R: At this point, we were living in an apartment in the city centre for way too long already. Hardly any space. We decided to firstly focus on our living conditions. We had the dream to live in a tiny house for a long time already. We had our eye on Tiny Houses Westpark. Plukn was second place for now. The original idea was to combine a living place with Plukn. We checked the Tiny Houses in Ten Boer but made us not happy. Meerstad, same. Then we ended up in Westpark. Never heard of the place, but surprisingly close to the city centre. We went on a walk and discovered a lot of unused space. The weird thing was that we already had a lot of conversations with the municipality, and they always said there was no space in the municipality of Groningen. This was not in the picture with the municipality. We come into contact with Tuin in de Stad, also part of Westpark. They were enthusiastic, helped us find the right people to contact and within a week we had a conversation with the man responsible for the maintenance of the area. This is when it all accelerated. It really is about finding the right people to contact. This was the beginning of 2019. Basically, all conversations we had before that were a waste of time.

W: So having a solid plan before you contact the municipality pays off?

R: We had a great business proposal. There was enthusiasm but no space. No own ground, no communal ground. We could not invest to buy ground. We were lucky with the construction we have now. We use municipal grounds, but since we keep it open to everyone we have a usage contract for an undefined time. If it was a fixed number of years, it would just not be worth the investment. They

understood this and we were fine with it. A forest is not finished in five years. We were told that our plans would enrich the park and therefore they were okay with it. There are some initiatives in the park that build a fence around their little activity. Sad, not what a park should look like. Westpark will remain a park for the future. There is plenty of building space in the direct neighbourhood. Westpark is slightly dirty ground so it will remain a green barrier close to the city. If Plukn could fit within that picture we could use the ground for an undefined time.

W: In this process, did the local population have a say as well?

R: It was mostly the municipality that we had contact with. At the same time, however, we founded the community foundation Westpark. We wanted to coordinate a bit more and have some more say in the decisions around Westpark. The municipality is on some more distance now. In this organization, the community council of Vinkhuizen, De Held, and Hoogkerk were represented. The neighbouring communities knew about our plans and we knew about the wishes of the communities. Before the whole Tiny House story began, there has been research done by HaskoningDHV on the potential of Westpark and the wishes of the local communities. Plukn fit in this story almost perfectly; we did not foresee any problems here. The municipality of course already took this research into account as well. We got a go quite easily. It is quite hard to commercialize what we do now. We both work and do this on the side, so it is volunteering work.

W: What is the organizational structure behind Plukn? Does Plukn make money or need money?

R: Currently Plukn needs money. It's a foundation, Helena and I form the foundation. The forest is public. Anyone can take from the harvest. This means we can't fully commercialize it. Now with the start, it is obviously a lot of investments without any money coming in. We do for example a clothing line, catering work, events, and workshops with the Plukn story. Cooking classes, festivals. That always made money to pay for the investments. Then corona came and this all kind of stopped. We were busy anyway so not sure if we would have been able to keep this up otherwise. A lot of these things we did before we had found a place. This was very good for the brand image of Plukn as well. From the revenue, we planted a lot. We also receive donations and give out certificates. We received RGA subsidy. Regio Groningen en Assen, this organization sponsors sustainable initiatives, and we won one of the rounds they did. From our side, it is mainly investing. The municipality gives us the ground on a usage basis. We don't have to pay rent so I don't expect them to give us much more. Maybe we will do some commercial activities in the future, then we need to renegotiate with the municipality. Think about workshops, courses, and a project with local catering industries. We have a lot of plans and ideas. But when we get there we need to renew our contract, until then, usage loan, no expenses for the ground.

W: You guys do everything on your own? Are there any other actors that play a role? What knowledge is necessary to start a food forest?

R: The world of finances is endless. We found someone who could facilitate us. We had some conversations but in the end, we didn't really need the help. This also will cost money if you proceed. Then RGA came along. We just wanted to try it ourselves first and otherwise find external help. We put a lot of time and energy into this. But this is only the finances, the ideas and business proposals are really from our own hands. This is something you learn along the way. This changes over and over again. It is very dependent on the location you have in mind. Our initial plan was way different. When

you plan to buy ground you just have to look at it commercially. This is way too expensive to experiment with. The way we have it now feels way better. It is an extended hobby. There is nothing we need to do to get the finances together. Everything we do is because we want to do it like this. That gives a lot of satisfaction. If at some point we decide to make this a company, there is no way back to the way we do it now. Do we really want that? Is that a step forward? It gives extra pressure and stress. It probably has its upsides as well, but right now we can still go everywhere. All options are open. Up until now, we all came up with it ourselves and executed it ourselves as well.

R: It is a lot of trial and error. Try again, fail again. How does a business proposal work, what is an entrepreneurial plan? Compare a lot of existing plans. It was still the five of us, and the knowledge we had was complementary to each other. Together you can get quite far. Every now and then we had some friendly entrepreneurs take a look at it. This was all on a friendly basis. Use the network you have to get tips and tricks.

R: How does this work in Burgum?

W: Some people founded a cooperation. They want to make Burgum a more aware, sustainable place to live in. They are ahead of the municipality. They asked for our help to find the ways in. How to execute the plan we have. Right now we try to help them find a place to execute the food forest they have in mind.

R: every initiative tries to invent the wheel all over again. We noticed that with the Tiny Houses as well. Contact persons who are working on this should get into contact with Burgum. They can learn from each other. Or a project manager from Burgum could have a chat with a project manager in Groningen. It can give trust if colleague-government employees can explain to one another how to get things going within the municipal bureaucracy. When there is a plan, you can see on a bureaucratic level how another municipality dealt with it. If you can make the connection between two municipalities and their corresponding bureaucracy, you can make steps. Usually, people want to help, but new things create rumors and it can be hard to get to the right people. If something is not within the standard tasks, it is often cancelled very soon. The employee needs to have a solid motivation to do something with a project to keep ongoing. Contacts in other municipalities can give trust to just do it, or maybe approach the topic in a different way than you would expect.

W: Is there an organization where food forests join forces?

R: There is stichting voedselbossen Nederland. Founder by Wouter van Ek, a true pioneer. He founded the oldest food forest in the Netherlands. Close to Ketelbroek, Nijmegen. Out of nothing he created a food forest, in a couple of years. It's 9 years old as we speak, however for a food forest this is still the baby phase. Forest systems need a lot of time. He (Wouter) is also involved with municipalities, Milieufederatie, provinces. He was part of the green deal. He has launched initiatives to start on professional production forests. This started last year with 25 acres.

R: In the north we have de Werkplaats. This is also tied to Milieufederatie. At least Groningen participates, maybe Drenthe and Friesland as well. Something like food forests North. Search and you will find. I managed to get some free trees at breeder Bachelhof. He pointed us at the Werkplaats. Gardeners, new initiatives, interested people. Sharing experiences. A lot of things pass by. We never

really got to work with it, but we would like to be a part of it as well. It all a bit on hold now, but it is on our list. Next round we will join.

W: How important is the quality of the ground for the food forest?

R: it certainly matters. Where we are the ground is a little contaminated? It plays a role. It is not too bad here, there are still plenty of plants that grow. The contamination is minimal, but slightly above the signalling value set by the GGD. If you're really strict, we are not even allowed to live here. The tiny houses are an exception. We researched on the ground and had meetings with GGD. There are some small issues, the level of mineral oils is too high. However since it is so marginal above the security limit, taking into account that production is not the main purpose of the forest, there is no harm. As long as what we produce is not the main intake for people, this is fine. However, if you would professionally grow fruits here, and people eat a kilo a day. There is the change that at some point the contamination in one's body becomes too high. But here this is not an issue. The contamination on one piece is not the same as 50 meters further. For single-year crops, the risk is a little higher than trees for example. Fruits contain less risk than cabbage etc. In our system, it hardly plays a role, but if you really produce professionally, it could pose a risk.

R: Apart from that, you gotta work with what you get. There a lot of clay over here. Dirt rests from sugar beets. You need to take this into account with whatever you plan to plant. The ground is closed. There is hardly any water coming through. What you plant is depending on the ground you have. You can make anything better, but it may take quite a while. We have sandy clay here, not that bad. You can improve this in a couple of years. Get the hummus amount and the water circulation going. It takes a lot of effort to get the ground in the right shape. Not all plants will be suitable. A lot of experimenting. You'll find out what works and what doesn't. This is where the experimental food forest comes in again. Be stubborn, just do and see what works.

W: does the food forest clean the ground in any way?

R: it is possible. Not really the plants but merely the micro-organisms. Plant do something but really depends on the kind of plant. Oil for example is carbon compounds, it can be altered molecularly and does not harm anymore, but on this ground, there are also heavy metals. They are already the smallest particle that exists and can therefore not be made any smaller. You can't change lead for example. Plants could take it on and immobilize it. It is no longer free and therefore harmful, but it is caught up in the plant. You can't eat the plant anymore though. It stays in the plant. Sometimes the plant makes a functional group out of it, meaning that it changes in such a way that people can't digest it anymore and it is therefore no longer harmful. You can find a lot of heermoes here, this means that water circulation is bad. It grows on intoxicated grounds as well. Heermoes does bioaccumulation, it absorbs the metals. You should then harvest the field horsetail and destroy them altogether, multiple years in a row. You really need to get properly rid of it. You can't compost it. It really is a professional business to get rid of stuff like that. You can clean the ground, but it is patient work. Lots of work and time. It may cost years and years. At least ten.

R: With heavy contamination, it is never profitable to clean the ground in this way. It is more useful to get rid of the dirty ground altogether and put the clean ground in its place. This often goes wrong though, there is some shady business in ground transactions. This is however the quick way. But since this is not always done with regards to the environment, this is really just transferring the

problem. But of course, it is no longer your problem. Natural sanitation is best, but it is time-consuming. And time is money, thus making cleaning the ground in a natural way a very expensive challenge.

R: If you make sure the ground is good. Microorganisms clean the ground. Diverse trees and plants work together to get some air in the ground as well. A lot will grow and you can see the progress. It would be nice to do new measurements in twenty years or so to see what has changed in the values. These measurements are pricy, but it is nice to see the results of your work in the long run.

R: Do they have a certain piece of land in mind in Burgum?

W: There was a piece of land the organization had in mind, but I'm not exactly certain what the status of this land is. It could have been ground where houses were supposed to be built. The municipality has not yet been clear about feasibility. We want to talk to the municipality about this land and other possible options.

R: Building grounds are pricy, I can imagine the municipality is not very enthusiastic about that. It could be 100x more expensive than agricultural grounds. If there were plans to build houses, this means that this money has been budgeted already. It could be a financial hurdle to give the ground a different destination then. One square meter of building grounds could be 200 euro's vis 6 euros per square meter for agricultural ground. This makes quite a difference. Could pose a problem. Maybe the organization can at the ground the municipality has. Look at lease prices. I believe this is like 800 euro's a year. A foundation should be able to cover that. We have been looking into that as well, although it is not that common anymore in the northern Netherlands. It happens a bit in agriculture though.

W: What would be your advice to these people? What to watch out for, the biggest challenge to face?

R: Make it concrete as soon as possible what you are talking about. Do not lose yourself in idealistic idea's and do not underestimate the time sacrifice a project like this asks. Do not lose yourself in container words that could mean anything. Be specific about what you want with something. You can be working with people for years before you find you have totally different ideas in mind with a certain term. For example sustainability, what do you mean by that? Prevent ambiguous language, because everyone will insert its explanation to terms like that. Make it concrete so people can attach their own opinions and thoughts to it. Prevent policy language. As long as you keep it vague, you will distance the most motivated people and that's just sad. Don't leave making things concrete for the end phase of a project, especially in groups it is important to be on the same line. Be honest and open in your communication.

W: We will send you a copy of our final report. Also, we hope to be able to invite you to the final presentation. You are more than welcome to join us here.

R: Thanks a lot, we look forward to it! If you may have any questions feel free to ask them.

2. Minutes from the interview with Anita Boer From de Doarpstún Akkrum

I: Isabel, interviewer

A: Anita, interviewee

Date, place: Teams, 21-05-2021

I: I would like to interview you with regards to my studies. We are part of the minor Sustainable society, where we take a critical look at societies' problems and try to discover how they can be solved sustainably. In groups, we have been tied to a project and contractor, We have been tied to the organization Energzy Group Burgum that aims to make Burgum more green, sustainable, and aware and wants to involve the local community in doing so.

I: In the past period, we have done a lot of research to find out what kind of project would be suitable for Burgum, taking the abovementioned goals into account. We have found out that a food forest could be a suitable project.

I: Our assignment is basically to find out how other food forests are doing and see what our project can learn from the way they handle challenges. We hope that you can help us with your experiences.

I: Could you tell us about your food forest? What is the current state of affairs? What are the mission and goals you have with the food forest?

A: It is not exactly a food forest. It is too small to be really called a food forest. It is not more than half an acre. Most of the space are plants, fruit trees, fruit plants but then a bit wilder. About a third of it is actually garden-like. All on a permaculture basis. We started three years ago. It was very hard to find a suitable space from the municipality, although they were very enthusiastic. We have spent about a year writing a project report with help of the Frysian Milieufederatie. We first needed to create a foundation, create societal support, and things like that. There are many steps you need to go through. Ask other organizations how they feel about the project, connect with schools, etc. We were also dealing with the direct community. If they were against it the plan was off. It's quite a process to contact all these parties and deal with them. Quite some steps to take. Since March, we really had the ground available to us.

I: How long have you guys been working on this project?

A: I started myself in 2018. At first on my own, later with someone else. This person sadly quit the project already. I met two other people and we started working on the project plan more structurally. We had a lot of contact with the Frysian Milieufederatie and the municipality. In the summer we created the foundation and in autumn we heard that the municipality was positive. We are the tenant of the ground. This is quite a bureaucratic process, all kinds of forms come into play. Finally, in March everything was okay and we could start.

I: That sounds like quite a lengthy process.

A: Maybe we could have done it in less time. It depends how fanatically you work on it. Since I started on my own it took some time before you can actually do something. You are not really being taken seriously and you also can't start a foundation on your own. Many people were very positive and wanted to help once the food forest is there but was not willing to help out in the process to get it there.

I: Have there been external parties involved? People with specific knowledge perhaps?

A: For the design, we asked help from someone with a background in permaculture. We looked at the design, the geographic location, and the type of ground. Whether or not we firstly needed to

improve the ground before we could get to work. If we come across things we still ask this person for help.

I: How did you find a suitable location? Why did you choose this location and how is the quality of the ground?

A: We first had our eyes on a different spot at the other end of the school, but someone else already had planned there so that did not go through. I first contacted the local interest group with the idea but they were not very enthusiastic. Finally, someone from this group saw this part of the land and became enthusiastic after all. It is a very pretty space, right next to the school. The school can use the ground as well. Because it is next to the school, there is a pathway through it. Parents bring and pick up their children. Day-care is here as well. There were already some fruit trees. It a very nice isolated place.

I: What kind of challenges did you come across during the process? How did you deal with these challenges?

A: Everything takes up so much time. As long as people don't really see it, they are fine with the idea but don't really believe in it. Because it all took so long people had the idea that it was not gonna happen anymore. Finally, now that it's there and it's getting some shape you see people getting more and more enthusiastic about it. You need to keep your head up because it is a dreadful and lengthy process.

I: Is the local community involved?

A: Yes, when it came out that the municipality was positive we asked people from the municipal house and they are now helping us with subsidy applications and things like that. We have about ten volunteers now. There are still new people joining our forces. Some people are more present and motivated than others.

I: Did you actively engage people or did people mostly reach out to you when they heard about the project?

A: We actively engaged schools in the community. In the beginning, I actively engaged people. We should do this more. At this point, we mostly work together with the municipal house.

I: Will the food forest be here for a set time? Are there any conditions set?

A: We are tenants of the ground for five years now. The idea is that it will be prolonged after five years. If it all fails it ends after five years. In the original contract, it says that we need to make the ground back in its original state. However, I think that if we have planted a couple of hundred trees by then I don't think they are going to tear them all down again.

I: What is the financial structure? Where does the money come from to maintain the food forest and plant new things? Is the food forest currently making money or is it merely an investment at this point?

A: It generates no money at this point. I feel about it as a utility. It has educational purposes as well. As a library, people can use it in the same way. It is a cure against loneliness as well. It makes people move more and improves biodiversity. It has a lot of positive impacts. It is next to the school so you can use it as an outside classroom as well. We have started with a couple of subsidies and we have one application pending. At a certain point, the idea is that we can generate enough money ourselves to maintain it. It is however voluntarily and won't be commercialized.

I: So, selling the harvest is not in your plans?

A: Yes, when there is harvest left. The idea is that the people that help can use the harvest as well. What we have left we could sell and invest that money back into the garden. We are also looking into possibilities to work together with the food bank.

I: What advice would you give to people who are planning to start a food forest?

A: We are part of a project from the Frysian Milieufederatie. We carry out this message. We have written a project plan that others can use as well. You need to get the local population and village on your side.

A: In my opinion, every village should have something like this. There is the Frisian citizen movement who also stated that every village should have a piece of land to grow their own food.

3. Minutes from the interview with Irma Abelskamp from Stichting Frijlan.

This interview was originally held in Dutch, but for this report, it was translated to English.

I: Isabel, interviewer. Irma, interviewee.

Video call, 18-05-2021

I: I would like to interview you with regards to my study program. We are part of the minor sustainable society and in groups of four, we are tied to a project. We are tied to a project in Burgum called Enerzjy Group Burgum, which wants to make Burgum more sustainable and inform people and create awareness to do so.

I: We have researched to find out what project could be suitable for Burgum to make Burgum greener and more sustainable and get the local community involved. We have chosen to focus on a food forest. We would like to ask a couple of questions about your experience in creating and maintaining a food forest.

I: Can you tell us about your food forest? How are things going right now? What is your mission? What is the goal you want to reach with this food forest?

F: We started on former corn land. At the moment we started there was a lot of water on the land. Some parts were pretty much dead. We have started based on the permaculture method. First, we prepared the ground for a year, see what happens. After five months we started to outline and in the meantime, a small group of people already started planting things. In the first year, peach herb started coming up and distels in the second year. Also water plants we had never seen before. The problem was there were no living organisms in the ground. You need to stimulate this by adding organic material. A lot of leaves were put on the ground. All to get organic material in the ground. It is important to give the ground time to repair before you start planting. First, you add plants, then the trees you really want. In this case, these were fruit trees. The trees you don't necessarily want you can keep in there and get the trees you want in between there so they have some shadow and support. Now we started planting again.

F: it is important to see what the ground needs. Based on this you start working. The thought behind permaculture is to repair and revive the ground.

I: How long have you been working on the food forest?

F: We started in January 2012.

I: In the process of getting the food forest started, have external parties been involved? People with specific knowledge?

F: 2 gardeners have supplied us with the green waste and the municipality supplied us with a lot of leaves. One intern did most of the digging. Besides that, there were no external parties involved.

I: How did you find a suitable place for the food forest? Why did you choose this location? How is the quality of the ground?

F: we have been looking for a suitable spot for three years. We started on the Potmarge (across Van Hall) finally it was decided by the management that this was not allowed. We went back to the municipality. It turned out the ground we are now was given away by the municipality to another party. We asked if we could make use of the ground and we were allowed to do so. Maybe this was because there was no purpose for the ground and we could give it a good purpose.

I: What kind of challenges did you run into in the process and how were these challenges solved?

F: There is always a disbalance. You need to listen to the ground you are working with. You really need to learn to look at the ground differently than you are used to. A food forest is more than profiting from the fruits it produces. You need to take the entire ecosystem into account.

I: What is the involvement of the local community?

F: In 2018 we started foundation Frijlan. The local community is now also responsible for the Oerfloed. The volunteers we have now work both on Frijlan as well as the Oerfloed. Next to that, many people are visiting.

I: Is there a set time for how long you can use the ground? What are the conditions?

F: We could initially use the ground for five years. In 2014/2015 the municipality wanted the ground back. We have been in conversation for over a year, where should we go? Finally one of our members held a presentation to the municipality. A food forest is quite hard to just move to another place. We got an okay to use the ground until 2025 now.

F: We do our best to make this project as nice as possible so the chance we have to move in 2025 becomes smaller. We are being threatened though. There is a research station that needs to build and we are in the research area.

I: What is the financial structure? Where do you get the money to plant everything, maintenance, etc.? Is the food forest making any money?

F: At this moment it does not really make a profit in terms of harvest. At this moment it is really investing only. We sold tea herbs for some time, which made some profit. We also sometimes sell small portions of the harvest. Right now we just planted a lot of new plants so it takes a while before we can harvest those. At this moment we play quite. It is not really our idea to make big money out of it. The idea is though that when harvests are bigger, we plan to sell more to gain some more money.

I: what advice would you give to people who want to start a food forest?

F: Take the time for your observation? You observe using all senses. Look at the history and what has happened to the ground. Accept the feedback you get. Whatever you do, the ground will give a reaction from the ground itself. You need to know what the effect of certain measures is. If there are plagues, you need to critically look at what the ground and ecosystem are missing.

F: The distels were a big problem, also with the neighbours. We decided to just leave the distels, as they leave eventually. We had problems with distels for four years, and then all of a sudden they were gone. This is also when the trees started to flourish.

F: Accept the feedback you get. The distels are a nice example of this. Accept that they are there. It is a valuable plant for insects and birds. You try to strive for a certain image, but the question is whether this fits within the bigger picture. The end goal of permaculture is the restoration of the ground.

4. Minutes from the interview with Madeleine Duran, co-founder of Food Forest Glimmen

This interview was originally held in Dutch but for the sake of this report translated to English.

W: Wiebe, interviewer. M: Madeleine Duran, interviewee Glimmen, 07-06-21

W: I am a student at NHL-Stenden in Leeuwarden. Currently I am part of the minor Sustainable Society, where we take a critical look at societal problems and try to find a durable and sustainable solution for them. Part of the minor is being tied to a contractor. We are tied to a citizen-led initiative in Burgum, who want to make Burgum a more sustainable place to live in. They want to involve the local community as much as possible. We did a lot of research and the conclusion was that they really want to start working on a food forest. What we do is to visit multiple food forests to see what they look like, how they started and what the challenges are. In short, that is why I am here and why I would like to have an interview with you.

M: That's fine! Let's stop our walk for a bit and I'll explain a bit about the place we are standing right now. This here is the Drentse A. There is a lot of water here, part of the area is flooded. The A28 is in sight and we are under the access route to airport Groningen Eelde. Terrain is 3 ha big, it used to be an arboriculture. Marlies and I bought the ground ourselves. We started as particular initiative. But this is such a beautiful space. We wanted others to enjoy the space as well. Overtime the ideas grew and we started a foundation.

W: The ground belongs to you? There was no government involved?

M: Yes, it's ours. We feared that with a lease construction at some point there would be new ideas in a couple of years and we would have to leave again. By buying ourselves we keep full control. We were lucky to have that possibility.

W: That is cool, also the first time I hear this. It is mostly lease of governmental grounds.

M: We did our own research on this, working on governmental grounds is vulnerable. Most initiatives have to move every few years. This place is so incredibly beautiful. We don't want to leave in a few years.

W: Also considering the investments I guess?

M: absolutely.

W: When did you start on the food forest?

M: We bought it in 2017 and started preparing. April 2018 the foundation was founded and that's when we really started.

W: It is open for public?

M: When the fence is open, people are welcome. We are open a certain amount of time during the week. Not every day. Also since we will be working and producing here, we don't want to be open all the time. We want a proper economic model to make this sustainable for the coming generations.

Not just lovely and nice and good and ecological but not making any money on it.

W: What does the economic model look like?

M: We are still in the investment phase. But when most investments have been done, we want a building for example. An educational centre. Also for exploitation purposes. It will be a circular building, together with volunteers. Unique building techniques. We want to rent this space out to companies for strategy sessions and stuff like that. Production space, tours, courses. Multifunctional building.

Our economic model is currently three kinds of target groups. 1. Particulars. Can become a friend. 2. Companies can become partners. 3. Food Forest starts can be member as food forest starter. Every target group pays a set amount of money per year. In return there is a number of incentives. Like a course, tasting, food forest bag with products etc. Dependant on what they pay yearly and what the desires are.

W: How does it work with the food forest starters?

M: People who want to start a food forest themselves. For example the people from Burgum could fit in this frame excellently. We can give them a lot of information and a paid tour and things like that. Advice and the possibility for questions. This would be about 100 euro's.

W: These packages are related to the harvest? Or is part of the harvest included in this?

M: In certain packages there will be a food forest bag or a guided tour to harvest and things like that are ideas that we have, but that is not crystal clear yet.

M: Here is the nature zone. The Drentse A is here. Everything used to be flat since it was an arboriculture. We want to bring the original landscape elements back. It needs to be more water and bog ground. We did culture historical and archaeological research and we want to bring some more historical elements back.

M: We want to make it a food forest with a landscape like outlook. People need to be able to walk here. Enjoy themselves. We want to build a viewing tower. We are close to water winning area. We want to make people aware of this as well. We try to get as many biotopes as possible together. Here is boggy and low, there is high and dry. You can see traces of certain animals on the trees. This particular tree was destroyed by a beaver. Here is our Japanese persicaria. We harvest this and make it into juice. One of our core things is invasive exotic species. We want to show that you can do all kind of nice things with those plants as well. If you can't beat it, eat it. There is a kingfishers nest behind this area. We have closed it off for now to give the birds some rest while breeding.

M: Here we made a wall with wood. The Terra green college helped us with this. We also created wheelchair accessible pathways. The terrain has agricultural destiny, some pieces were already hardened. We have chosen to harden the main pathways. For harvests easier as well. We have bees. We work together with the beekeepers association. There are cherries here.

W: So you work together with a lot of different partners? Are these all local partners?

M: Mostly yes. Here we found the mother trees from the former arboriculture. We try to use as many plants that are already here. What do we have and what will work here. Work with nature instead of against it. There is some weed as well. We mostly just leave it be, unless it's really in the way. Hogweeds are horrible for people but amazing for insects. We work together with other food forests as well. In the proximity. Community garden Haren, local stores, bakery. Bakery uses our nettle powder. We have a pilot with shitakes right now. It's a lot of experimenting. We work together with a cook. We organise tastings on our open days. We want to have the people taste whatever you can do with all the products we grow here.

W: Have you had all knowledge in-house to get everything up and running?

M: Due to all the partners we work with, we exchange a lot of knowledge. We get inspired by other food forests as well. We work together with IVN and Landschapsbeheer as well. For example the beekeeper has lot of knowledge that we did not have. People bring and take knowledge. You learn from each other.

M: This is our exotic fruit garden. Apples, khaki, apricots, nashi pear. It grows wonderfully here. It is a very hot piece of land, south side. Much sun. There are almond trees here as well. There are walnut trees at the entrance. We try to create different zones with different edible species. This here is our salad garden. Try and taste!

W: tastes wonderfully. Bit like rucola. Nomnom.

M: This is tastier and healthier than lettuce from a bag. It has bit more bitterness. Good for the heart. We will get moerbijen here. The leafs are edible as well. This is the linden tree part. There were 350 trees, but we left a couple here. There will be acacia trees as well. Different pioneering species. You can see the different hills here. There is a flower garden and picnic table in the middle. There are some plants already but mostly grass. We just started this so grass is the first things to come up. But when the other plants will grow, there will be less and less space and food for the grass to grow.

W: How long does that take?

M: Couple of years. It is a matter of patience. Most things we plants won't be harvested anytime soon. However, we have a crazy amount of stinging nettles. That's basically a superfood. We try to make a range of products from that as well. It has many beneficial aspects. You can do a lot with it. We know harvested a lot of leafs, and later we will harvest more seeds.

M: There is edoe on the sides. You can eat the roots.

M: Here will be a pool. Mostly for the amphibians. For frogs etc. and water plants.

W: How many years will it take to get everything up and running?

M: We made a seven year plan, but things have slowed down a bit due to corona. There are less people available etc.

M: This is the place where the building should come. There will be a barn, showers, toilets, and kitchen. Group area, terrace. Multifunctional building. We plan to make a viewing hill as well, so you can look out over the terrain and the water areas. We now have permits for the building but for the other developments we need to apply and go through the whole process again. There is a boathouse that we want to change into a birdwatch place.

W: How is the municipality responding to ideas like this?

M: Municipality Haren was in favour of our plans. Then rearrangements of the municipality happened. We have to build up our relation from the ground up again. This really plays on aldermen-level, and it is quite hard to get into contact with people like that. We're not quite there yet, so we start on the building, because we do have a permit for that part. And from there on we work step by step.

M: Here are our dry greenhouses. We dry all kinds of leaves for tea here.

W: What an amazing area!

M: The entrance space is part of the forest as well. Different kinds of trees along the parking spaces.

M: Inaudible, explanation about the set-up of the terrain. Designed by her sister, the other founder.

W: You mentioned the contact with the municipality. Has that been the biggest challenge?

M: The permits have been the biggest challenge, yes. Especially when you have different elements. There have been buildings on the area for eighty years, but they are not registered. So you can't have commercial activities in there. Also, many plans develop over time, while in the beginning you need to get the permit application ready. It would be nice if you could easier alter your application. There is a lot of input from people. We have a waiting list of over 100 volunteers. Due to Covid-19 we work with smaller groups now. It attracts many people. We have two open days that already are fully booked. While we are actually still in the starting phase. We have mostly been busy with selling stuff and getting the main elements ready. We want to have a multidisciplinary team that takes both the ecological, nature-historically, social elements into account. In rules, not much is possible. If you alter plans you need to go through the entire process again. This is all on civil servant level, while the vision needs to come from the aldermen-level. You want a yes, but instead of no, unless.

W: Do you have contact about stuff like this with other food forests as well?

M: Yes, but you notice that procedures go differently in every municipality. We decided, the building is the most difficult, so let's get started with that. You need to be very aware and up to date on what the rules and developments are. Be proper speaking partners, but this can be difficult when you are very busy in your head with the forest itself. You need to be sharp, see the spaces. Take advice into account. You actually need to be more into it than the civil servants you talk to. Keep the initiative. Once it is in the hand of bureaucracy, it is most likely going to be a no. Pretty much everyone likes the plans, but in reality nothing is possible. It is like applying to a job where you need be under 20 with 10 year experience. Impossibilities like that.

Madeleine offers a tea from a mixture from different herbs and spices.

W: You mentioned the open days are fully booked already. So it really attracts people already, or is there a promotional strategy behind it?

M: It really attracts a lot of people, however, we do send out press statements when there are new developments etc. We have done inspirational courses here as well. That generates publicity. It really lives among the community. People also really want to come out of their houses due to covid-19. More enthusiasm in the region than normally.

W: You talked about advisors a bit, what kind of partners got involved?

M: On different areas. We have three board members. Marlies is architect and the third member is former urban ecologist Groningen. We have a financial advisor, former director of Rabobank. We also have a child psychologist involved whose focus is more on the social side. IVN. Landschapsbeheer. People who drop by, volunteers. We get knowledge from a lot of parties, and we give knowledge as well.

W: I think we touched upon most of the questions I had. My final question would be, what would be your advice to starting food forests? What is the biggest challenge to face?

M: Clear agreements with the municipality are essential. You need to get the municipality behind you. This is best done at alderman level. Invest in clear communication with partners in the proximity. A network is necessary to keep the food forest functioning.

M: We are talking with the municipality about creating working spaces for people with distance to the labour market. We talk to the WIJ team about this. There are plenty of people in our volunteer pool that could coach these people and take them along. For the social function that we strive to this perfectly fits in there.

M: Good contacts with the municipality, partners like IVN, landschapsbeheer, Nature and Environment Federation. Other food forests, Suppliers, companies in the neighbourhood. Contact the local community, get them on board. Make it clear what the effects on the neighbourhood will be. They can give input in terms of ideas. It is important to have at least two people that keep the project running. It is something very intensive. You need to have someone that knows how to organize. You need designing skills, planting skills etc. We did a yearlong course with Wouter van Ek to teach ourselves the basics. We work together with two people with knowledge on wild harvesting. The network in the close proximity is very important.

M: Also, what fits my preferences. What fits the location. What would work in Burgum, what would work with the terrain you have available? What is the history of the ground? Fit the history of the architecture in your plans. Province and municipality can help out here as well. Get the local community involved. What fits the group? Experimental, social, ecological? We have decided to have a good focus on producing as well. Not fully, but enough to make two minimum wages out of it. Inspiration and education may be of more importance to us. We both have background in elderly care, that's one of the reasons we want to make everything as wheelchair friendly as possible. Keep looking and evaluating your work as well. Don't rush, let nature decide the pace. Decide what you want to do with the public as well.

The economical foundation is very important as well. The time investment is full time. Make sure it makes enough money for two people to live off. But also look into the future, the economical basis needs to be futureproof. After us, there need to be others to take over, and they need to pay their living costs as well. Some trees here live up to a hundred. We want to reach the hundred years. This is not a short term project, we are really talking long-term here.

W: It is incredibly inspiring to see all the aspects that come into play at a food forest like this. I live close to a food forest myself in Groningen. It is a different way than the conventional way of dealing with food. Especially taking the social aspect into account gives the whole process an extra element.

M: Exactly! It really becomes a community project. People come here for contacts, volunteering, social aspect is very important. It is healthy, you are outside. There is this 72 year old lad that carries stuff you and I could not carry. Incredibly healthy.

W: How did it play out with the local community? Did you need to a lot of convincing?

M: Most people were enthusiastic. Big houses and land, they worried for their peace. Worried for a lot of cars and public etc. But yeah this nature, different species of animals and plants. We want to keep it peaceful and quiet so that was not a dealbreaker. For the open days we made timeslots of 35 people, not even for covid-19 but mostly to keep a bit of peace on the area.

When the building is here, we can rent it out for strategy sessions. Or employees with stress problems. They can help us out a couple of days on costs of the company. Stress relief is sickness relief. And sickness is expensive. We can do teambuilding activities. Instead of paintballing you can work and harvest together. Cook together. That is teambuilding as well. More aware. More awareness about food and nature.

M: I will put you on the list so you can stay up to date on the developments. Hope you liked the environment and the information.

W: Thanks a lot, this is actually only the second food forest I could visit due to covid-19, so it is incredible to really experience something like this. Big fan.

M: That is nice to hear, and that while we are only in the starting phase. Although a lot has happened. You can see the forms developing a bit. I am going to close it off here though.

W: I won't keep you off your work any longer. Thanks a lot for your time and information. I wish I could invite you to our final presentation, but due to covid-19 that is not possible. However, I can send you our final report if you would be interested.

M: We would be very interested in that. Thanks a lot.

5. Minutes from the interview with Simon Bijlsma from the Friese Milieu Federatie

This interview was originally held in Dutch but for the sake of this report translated to English.

I: Isabel, interviewer.

S: Simon Bijlsma, interviewee

Leeuwarden, 10-06-2021

I am following the minor Sustainable society and we are, in groups of 4, working together with an organization. In our case that is the Enerzjy Group Burgum. This cooperation wants to make Burgum more sustainable and wants to involve the community in this.

We looked at what kind of project would be suitable to make Burgum more sustainable and how to involve the locals. We chose a food forest.

The people of the Enerzjy group Burgum asked us why don't look at other initiatives that already started or are starting a food forest and see what Burgum can learn from their experiences.

I: Could you start by telling more about what you do at the Friese Milieu federatie?

I can talk about that for a long time. I am not going to do that. The name already says it. It is a federatie, Friese Milieu Federatie. There are around 40 organizations affiliated with us. That differs from really big ones like It Fryske Gea or Natuurmonumenten and the Wadden vereniging to smaller ones that are more active on a municipal level. The subjects are also really diverse. There are different associations and organizations affiliated that only focus on nature, others focus on education, and others with more gray subjects, with waste and planning. So that is very diverse.

We are an organization of around 9 a 10 FTE.

We work on three head themes:

-Climate

-Biodiversity

-Quality of living

What I do there is working on different subjects. On one hand that is food (that is the reason why you are talking to me now about food forests). We do a lot surrounding short chains. Basically, every sustainability aspect surrounding food. So that is the protein transition, short chains so eating foods from your own close environment and combating food waste. Next to that, I work a lot on biodiversity and especially the biodiversity in villages so with village communities. It turns out there are a lot of ideas about how you can create more biodiversity in your own village and we help them with that. Also with biodiversity, we work together with farmers. The theme is agroforestry. That is the official branch of food forests. We help farmers to look into that so that eventually they can get to good earning models so they can incorporate it in their business operations.

I: I saw on your website that you stimulate innovative food concepts with less impact on the environment like food forests. Do you do this yourself? (does the Milieu Federatie do this?) Do you have experience with this?

S: No, we do not have the experience with the starting of food forests. I would like to but we do not. What we do is facilitate it. We noticed that there was more and more question in the Friese society about what is a food forest. This question came partly from individuals but also from clubs in villages who wanted to work on it but also from farmers. Then we said okay if the question is growing we want to facilitate it. This way not everyone has to reinvent the wheel. That is also what I heard you

say in the beginning like there is already a lot of knowledge and there are already lots of people working on this, please learn from the mistakes that those starters already made.

What we did, you can google it and you will find a lot of information on this, we created a werkplaats. This werkplaats is called voedselbossen Noord Nederland. This is a sort of community of practice you could call it. That is a group of about 30 people. Sometimes people quit but there are also new people joining. So it is growing. It is a group with people that are all working with food forests in their own way. Like I said that can be individuals, married couples sometimes people from a foundation. What is also very different is the phase they are in, in their own food forest trajectory. I get almost weekly approaches about food forests. Some of these people will join the werkplaats voedselbossen Noord Nederland. Covid19 aside there are usually five meetings per year with the werkplaats. With three of these, we are a guest at one of the members of the werkplaats. There you can look around, see how they planted the food forest, how they made the plans and you can ask questions. Often spatial planning problems with the municipality play a role. We talk about that and we eat together. Everybody cooks something and brings it with them. Because of this a very close group has formed. All nice people who have a lot of experience with food forests. The other two meetings we go on an excursion. For example to a nursery. That is nowadays usually arranged by the members themselves. We used to do it in the past but now members do it more and more themselves. That is an important source to get information and experience.

I: Do organizations contact you? Do you stimulate this in a way? Do you contact organizations?

S: No, we made it clearly visible we have this werkplaats so people really know where to find us. We also have publicized it a lot. Something else we did is asking people from the werkplaats what species they thought could not be left out in a food forest for this climate? They created a list of around 80 species. From this, we made a toolkit. People who were recently graduated from Minvera (artists) designed and made this toolkit. We lend this toolkit to people. Now with Covid we also have cards. There are 55 species in the toolkit. So when you are a beginner it shows what are nice/handy species to plant in a food forest, but also what is important for the ground, or do I need to place this species in full sunlight etcetera. All very practical information. This has also been published. There is a lot of interest in. All parties come to us.

I: So you basically already have a whole plan to start a food forest then?

S: Yes, it is not really a whole plan, but what we hear back from people who lent it, that a lot of people who are starting with a food forest do not know where to start. (They do not see the trees through the forest anymore). There is so much information. The toolkit helps them to create order in the chaos. Then you can start looking at what do I like, what kind of eatable plants do I want. This toolkit is a good first step. The design of a food forest is not a set design, it depends on things like the soil type, the situation of the sun, there are so many factors to keep in mind. Also your own wishes. That is why communication and exchange in the werkplaats are so important for people. They can sketch and go this is my idea. What kind of ideas do you have for this design we are working on? That works really well. Within the werkplaats some professionals who work on assignment to design things. So when people say it is all too difficult then they can hire a designer for a certain amount. A designer will then map everything and comes with an idea for them.

I: Are you able to give a go for a plan for a food forest? Or is this dependent on the municipality?

S: This depends on the situation. This week I also received a question from people who have 1.3 hectares and who want to create a food forest. Well if these are just herbs and stuff then that will not be a problem, but the moment you want to plant walnut trees and that is on an open landscape and in the plans of the municipality is stated that you cannot plant trees because the open landscape cannot be affected then you will get in trouble if you do that. In such a situation you will have to consult with the municipality to see what is allowed and what is not. If it is not possible according to the spatial planning plans, there is still the option to consult with the municipality about whether the plans can be adjusted. But if you have a private garden and you want create a food forest there you can that without a doubt.

I: Because that is basically your own garden

S: Exactly yes. It depends on the destination. A lot of time there is a residential destination on a parcel. The question I got now was an agricultural destination. Then it is important to look very carefully at what the rules are and see what is possible and what is not. Then it is always useful to get in touch with the municipality. Sometimes people also contact the municipality because people want to start a food forest on municipal land. In my village, we are going to start a kind of food forest on the ground that is owned by Staatsbosbeheer. Everything has to be negotiated of course. Some municipalities really like that. For example, a neighbourhood that is on the border of a park and that the locals will develop a kind of food forest edge that is publicly accessible and usable by the entire city or village. Municipalities are very happy with this and agree to it.

I: Do you work together with The Warren?

S: Was that the area where they first wanted to build houses?

I: Yes they wanted to build there, but that plan did not go through and now it is agricultural ground.

S: There has been contact between the Friese Milieu Federatie and the Warren and I think they helped each other to stop those plans to build on that ground. That did a colleague of mine Arnoud de Vries. He is more into spatial planning cases. The municipality decided eventually that the plans for the building would not happen. So it would be really nice if there could come a sort of food forest.

I: Yes it is now agricultural ground so they cannot just change that.

S: No, how that exactly works I am not sure of. You have to play it by the rules and keep using it agriculturally. There are all product categories for these things. If you do not comply with this, you run the risk that it will lose its agricultural destination.

The municipality will also lose a lot of profit because building ground is a lot more expensive than the agricultural ground.

I: Yes, especially if a food forest would happen there.

S: I am just thinking out loud now but it could also be a really nice gift from the municipality to the community in Burgum. If it becomes a publicly accessible food forest where everyone can harvest.

I: Yes, the locals also want this so that would be great.

S: Yes, what you also have to keep in mind is in a lot of other areas are plans for the strengthening of the meadow birds. Planting trees and protecting meadow birds are somewhat at odds. Meadow birds like distant views because of predators. For example, Buizerds and crows can breed in those trees. So if you are going to plant trees in a good meadow bird area, it can harm the meadow bird protection. Those are things, but I assume that they will take that into account anyway.

I: Do you have any advice/tips for people who want to start a food forest?

S: It is very important to think beforehand what do I want with the forest? What is the goal of the forest? For example, if you want a forest where it is easy to harvest then you have to think about that when you are planting the forest. For example, the food forest from Wouter van Eck, which is the oldest food forest of the Netherlands to me that is almost a tropical rainforest. That is not very inviting to go harvest there. You have to think about that by for example make paths in the forest. You also have to see what fits on the ground. Next to what you want you should look into if that is fitting or not. Keep in mind the old species, which were there originally. Try not to plant any invasive plants because then you probably will get a plague. Beforehand they have to know what is the goal of the food forest. That determines how the forest is going to look like. Sometimes there is talking about maybe we should go back to a food forest edge, because (and you know this as well) at the edge of the forest you get the most sunlight so that is the place where you will get the most yield. So you could also consider creating a more open food forest, so that way you plant the high trees in high edges. These are all design aspects. What I think is important as well is that a form of agriculture can have a great added value for biodiversity and this can also be interesting for the municipality. The fruits can be picked by people, but if people do not pick everything. I do not do that either. I have a grape plant and maybe half of the grapes we eat ourselves and the rest I leave for the birds to eat.

I: So basically the idea of permaculture?

S: Yes, and the migratory birds know that really well. The birds will eat the leftover grapes. A food forest can also be really attractive for the rarer birds or for example a hiding place for hedgehogs or insects. In the design phase, you can also choose to make a pool. The variation in species is very important. Then you have less of a monoculture. Possible plagues have less chance because you have more biodiversity of plants. Before you start the design phase I would advise you to think very carefully about this. Once it has been set up and stuff starts to grow, you do not really want to have to do any major interventions. There is so much to say. What you can also take into account is say people want to harvest and sell some to raise money for the foundation. Then you can also see which products are interesting to sell via, for example, a delicatessen shop in Burgum. For example, if you now look at the walnuts, almost all walnuts that are consumed now come from Turkey, while it is fine to plant walnut trees here, even close to the coast where salinization occurs. There are walnut trees that do great there. Also the availability of water they could look at, exposure to the sun. All tips to keep in mind.

I: I want to thank you very much for your time and you get the greetings from Petra

S: Which Petra?

I: Petra Esser from NHL Stenden.

S: How nice! Give her greetings back! She was also part of the board.

I want to wish you good luck and if the Enerzjy group wants to be part of the werkplaats voedselbossen Noord Nederland then they can contact me and I will put them on the mailing list.

I: Great thank you! I will let them know.