

Taking the first steps in shaping an urban food agenda

Flevo Campus Live 8 december 2017

Almere is a unique place for food production and –supply, and the training of future food professionals, as it is located in the Amsterdam metropolitan area and surrounded by large-scale agricultural areas and horticultural projects. The relatively young city positions itself as a city where innovative ideas and projects are tested, to have impact not only in the Almere, but also the surrounding regions. To help organize the food agenda in Almere, Flevo Campus organizes the Flevo Campus Live and a [Think Tank](#).

On the 8th of December 2017, 100 ambitious students, young professionals and experts in urban food supply gathered in Almere's city hall to discuss the possibilities of improved food supply and -organization in the Amsterdam-Almere metropolitan area.

Janno Lanjouw - historian, journalist with a fascination for food and host of the day - opened the day by stressing the importance of today's discussion and brainstorm on food. "Food in the 21st century city is one of the most important topics that we can talk about. For the first time in the history of human race, the majority of people live in cities. Most people in cities do not produce their own food, which leads us to the urgent question: how are we going to feed all these people?"

The room was filled with students and young professional from different fields of expertise and with different backgrounds. There were people from Canada, Malaysia and Germany; people studying at Wageningen University & Research, Radboud University and Aeres University of Applied Sciences; studying International Food and Water Management, Foodtechnology and International Food business.

Experts on stage

To get a better idea of what the goal and impact of today's event was, **Joep Houterman** – board member of the Aeres group –, **René Peeters** – alderman of Almere – and **Sigrid Wertheim-Heck** – professor Food and Healthy Living at Aeres University of Applied Sciences Almere – were invited on stage to paint the picture of what Flevo Campus' role in the organization of the urban food policy would be and why a policy is so important.

Renee Peters spoke about the relatively young city of Almere growing rapidly. "The Flevo Campus plays a vital part in finding a way to provide all these inhabitants with food. 'Why do we need a policy?' Well, because of our special position. We believe we can be an example for Europe and the world in how to deal with food logistics: how to deal with food in the city. That is why we need the young people. It is your world and your future children's world."

Joep Houterman talked about the role of Aeres University of Applied Sciences and education institutes in general in the realisation of the Flevo Campus and the link with the Floriade. "Feeding the city is very close to our heart and close to our faculty. We believe that we will exhilarate knowledge through cooperation between institutions and people."

Sigrid Wertheim-Heck discussed different point of views in food organization and crucial elements in food policy. "Citizens deal with food everyday. We all have different needs and different backgrounds



when it comes to food and the consumption of it. At the same time 'the city never sleeps'. Where does the food we consume come from and how does it enter our place? This is an interesting complexity based on three main angles: food, city and citizen. It is about urban planning and food suppliers; it is about young people with bright minds who are eager to shape the future. This makes this day a perfect starting point."

"Today has been a successful day if many ideas are collected. Even if they are conflicting, that is OK. We expect new insight. Try to think about practicality as well. WE envision the future, but what is the practicality of my idea? What are the steps we need to take? How do we accomplish it?"

With these motivational words, participants were divided into six groups. Together with an expert, each group approached the subject of food organization from a different perspective: cities in the countryside, countryside in cities, cities defining people, people defining cities, people as consumers and people as producers. In the form of a brainstorm workshop the groups all came up with ideas and collected the best ones in the form of a newspaper headline.

Six different perspectives

The workshop sessions resulted in many inspiring and innovative ideas and headlines.

1. Cities in the countryside

'How can we ensure that a city is better connected to its hinterland, and that surrounding businesses can offer a larger portion of their production to the city directly?' This question stimulated the participants in this workshop to think out of the box and come up with innovative solutions. They came up with ideas such as: every citizen should have a garden in their backyard, having citizens pay for the food they throw away and creating an application which would track local food.

The group combined these ideas into one platform of all actors, which are in the chain of providing your food. The mayor of Almere is connected to a lot of these actors and was therefore voted as the role model in this concept, which resulted in the headline: **Mayor of Almere only eats Flevo Food!**

"We were talking about developing an app to give consumers and developers a platform to interact with each other. This way we can provide details on where to find certain types of food. In addition, we thought of having outlets in supermarkets for local food or food that is almost thrown away."

Quinten Hersilia – International Food Business Aeres University of Applied Sciences in Dronen

2. Countryside in cities

Urban food production projects are becoming popular. Questions such as: 'How can urban food production be stimulated and which solutions are available?' were discussed in this workshop. The participants in this workshop came up with a variety of solutions: growing exotic crops locally to give people with different nationalities a sense of belonging and stimulating local food production and consumption; or using 'ugly food' – fruits and vegetables which 'cannot' be sold in supermarkets. They presented their slogan: **Ditch your backyard and rush to the roof.** An idea based on the concept of using rooftops as areas to grow fruit and vegetables on.

"During the workshop we were asked to think about setting up a company to help solve a the problem. We also had to consider ways to maintain ourselves as a company. My group came up with a company who would provide citizens with information on how to use their rooftops as areas to produce food on. Advise them about what crops to grow, irrigation systems and how to collect the soil. The ideas presented on stage also inspired me. I have been living in Almere for over eighteen years and I think this day will form a base for a more innovative Almere. I feel the city is open to change and innovative ideas."

Mirthe Sjoerds – Student molecular life sciences at Wageningen UR and living in Almere

3. Cities defining people

How do infrastructure and urban design affect the residents' diets? How can we make sure that the cities in the future are set up in such a way that they contribute to a healthier society? Maybe you could use the water instead of using roads, reinvent e-commerce with locals or make healthy, local food available while traveling.

This last idea was selected as the idea with most potential. Placing vending machines with complete local dishes at NS stations, was their solution to bring local food to the people instead of the other way around. The headline they came up with was: **Use your OV-card for shopping local food.**

"The group I was in, came up with developing an application which provides more transparency about the products you buy in the supermarket. With an environmental footprint we want to show people what the impact of producing and distributing the product was on the environment in relation to the nutrients in it. Lettuce for example does not give you a very satisfied feeling, but costs a lot of water to produce. So maybe consuming bacon is better?"

In my studies I primarily focus on logistics and modulation. It was great to look at urban food organization and consumption in a practical sense. I found out about what is produced in Flevoland, how this food reaches the city and what the link is with Amsterdam. The subject has become more tangible."

Daphne de Bruin – Business and Consumer Sciences at Wageningen University & Research

4. People defining cities

We are currently dealing with an obesity epidemic. In our everyday lives we are constantly encouraged to consume unhealthy food through marketing efforts. In this workshop participants discussed the role of the local government in relation to its citizens' health.

The participants thought of some of the following ideas: no tax on fruits and vegetables, increasing tax and prices of junkfood and providing cities with free advertising space for healthy products. These ideas combined resulted in the headline: **'50% more healthy foods are sold in Almere, due to free advertising space for healthy food'.**

"Today has got me thinking. Especially in regards to the idea of creating fair and equal prices, which we discussed during the workshop and which was brought up by Dr. Wayne Roberts as well. I thought the



idea of paying for your own health insurance if you decide to smoke - so facing the consequences for what you consume - was really interesting."

Xenia Minnaert – student Biology, Food and Health at Aeres University of Applied Sciences

5. People as consumers

The world around us constantly tempts us to eat unhealthy foods. Food is a private matter and it is our own responsibility to make healthy decision in regards to food. How can we make the citizen aware of health risks and help them improve their eating habits? Providing better signing in supermarkets, teaching kids how to cook and creating 'food temptation free zones', were just some ideas the participants came up with. All this brainstorming resulted in the following slogan: **Eat the change you want to see.**

"There were lots of really interesting ideas that we came up with during the workshop. It was really nice to interact with people from different backgrounds. We discussed the role of education; the role of taxation; how the healthy option should really be the easiest option. We also talked about behavioural change and how the environment you grow up in, influences your decisions in regards to food. The main thing that I will take back from this event is having made contact with different people. Collaboration between different fields is really important."

Dinah Hoffman - master in Communication, Health and Life sciences at Wageningen UR, bachelor Gastronomic sciences in Italy.

6. People as producers

With a growing world population and less agricultural land available, it becomes more important to think about innovative techniques to supply people with food. The questions that needed to be answered during this workshop were: 'How can we ensure an innovative food climate where testing and implementation of innovations and new techniques is facilitated?'

Ideas such as using meat to produce energy, using protein from grass for human consumption, organising dinners to introduce citizens to healthier alternatives and smart technologies keeping track of your food consumption and waste patterns, were discussed.

Eventually, this group presented the headline: **50% less insurance costs in Almere with a 'personal food plan'**. An idea to get people involved in food production, to stimulate people to eat together and to give the city of Almere a better insight in the consumption patterns of their citizens.

"We thought of a way to incorporate the technology we use in our daily lives to help reduce the amount of food we waste. Smart technologies can help track the food we purchase and how much we actually consume. If you threw away a lot of cabbage the last time you bought the crop, an app could maybe remind you of that before your next purchase. By doing this, it will raise awareness for your food wasting habits."

Prices should tell the truth





After all the pitches, Canadian food policy analyst and food activist, dr. Wayne Roberts was invited to the stage to discuss the ideas and his perspectives on food policy. "People who produce food and sell food don't know anything about health and people who know everything about health, don't know anything about food. That is where policy comes in between."

Dr. Wayne Roberts explained that only in the last 30 years we have been given the option to consume unhealthy food. He referred to the top 10 largest food producers and –distributors as 'the big food' and shared an interesting thought on how to deal with the problem of unhealthy food. "The big food" controls what we eat through advertising and pricing. They are part of the system, so they have to be part of the solution as well. In my eyes one of the solutions is correcting prices: when you correct prices, the prices will tell the truth."

"When we want to think about a solution, we have to think about where they fit in the world. This is what we call the concept of adjacent possibility. Most ideas presented here today fit this concept."

Dealing with a surplus

Before everybody headed back home, participants were invited to enjoy a healthy and local lunch prepared by Nadia Zerouali. Attendees could enjoy a nice cheese sandwich, but also flatbread with Labneh and Taboula. Completely in line with today's theme, one of the main ingredients in this last dish was replaced by cabbage, due to a surplus of the crop in the area Almere.

Think thank

Students, young professionals and experts contributed to a successful event. They took the first steps in providing the council of Almere with the creation of an urban food agenda. From January 2018 onwards, the ideas generated during this event, will be included in the Think Tank sessions organised by the Flevo Campus. During these sessions, the plans for the urban food agenda will be taken to the next level.

Flevo Campus invites all participants and other people with an interest or expertise in food, health and agriculture to join this Think Tank and help contribute to the food organization in the Amsterdam-Almere metropolitan area. For more information check the [Flevo Campus website](#).

