

A CENTURY OF CHANGE

THE NETHERLANDS WILL BE THE HOST NATION OF NEXT YEAR'S FIG WORKING WEEK. HERE, FIG EXPLORES THE COUNTRY'S CONSOLIDATION OF LAND IN THE PAST 100 YEARS

In the early years of the 20th century, the circumstances surrounding horticulture and agriculture in the Netherlands were far from ideal. Property was highly fragmented. In 1916, the first land consolidation took place and was such a success that eight years later, the first legislation concerning land consolidation was put in effect. From the very start, surveyors played a vital role in guaranteeing the legal security of stakeholders and they continue to play that role to this day.

Pioneering on Ameland

The Netherlands' first land consolidation took place on the island of Ameland. Plots of land were tiny due to endless subdivision between numerous inheritors – in Ballumer Mieden, 119 owners shared 3,600 separate plots covering just 190ha. Farming efficiently on so many tiny plots was impossible. If you were mowing your own bit of grass, it was all too easy to trample on your neighbour's grass, because there were no roads or paths between the plots.

At the initiative of the Dutch Heathland Association and the dike reeve, surveyor HJ Klompe worked on a redistribution of

properties. He reduced the 3,600 plots to 219 for the same 119 owners, with each individual plot bordering a public road. Trampling on each other's grass was a thing of the past.

The great North Sea flood

The disastrous flood of 1 February 1953 left gaps in the dike and for several months, sea water flooded into the polders. This had dramatic consequences for the agricultural land. Many farms were swept away or were badly damaged, roads became impassable and the soil had salinised. It was indescribable misery for many farming families, who had lost nearest and dearest and also their farms and thus their source of income.

The Zeeland Province soon decided that reallocation would be the best way to make the countryside liveable and productive again. Special legislation was created for land reallocation on the islands of Tholen, Schouwen-Duiveland and parts of Zuid-Beveland. The Department of Land Drainage and Irrigation organised the planning of the area, constructing roads and ditches and making plots suitable for agriculture once more. Meanwhile, the Cadastre, Land Registry

and Mapping Agency (Kadaster) secured a fair and effective allocation of land ownership. It was an immense undertaking on which many Kadaster staff worked for years.

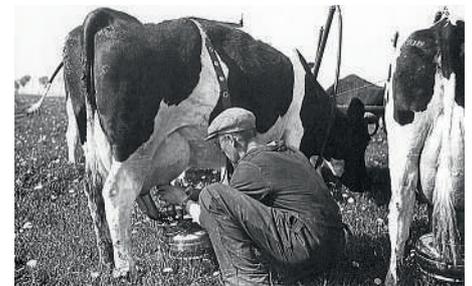
Mr Flakkee

The need for rural development and modernisation was the main driving force for land reorganisation in the rest of the Netherlands. On behalf of Kadaster, Hans Maljaars worked between 1981 and 2001 on land consolidation in Flakkee, earning him the nickname of Mr Flakkee. It was a vast project involving around 15,000ha. This arable farming area had too much water, too many roads and too many plots. The land consolidation not only solved these problems, but resulted in several hundred hectares being reserved for nature, plus a national highway.

Ad Kleiberg worked at Kadaster from 1966 to 2009. He spent 25 of those years on land consolidation in the Vijfheerenlanden, an extensive area of peat land with ribbon (or strip) farms and of great value to nature and wildlife. Kleiberg and Maljaars agreed on many things, but on one point their approach differed.

IN THE CASE OF ONE PARTICULAR OWNER, KLEIBERG ALWAYS PARKED HIS CAR FACING THE ROAD SO HE COULD "MAKE A QUICK AND EASY GETAWAY IF SHE GOT ANGRY"





In Ameland, 119 owners shared 3,600 separate plots covering just 190ha © Kadaster (Dutch Cadastre), Magazine Kijk Op, 2019



The great North Sea flood resulted in terrible damage to farmland © Kadaster (Dutch Cadastre), Magazine Kijk Op, 2019

“In fact, I never visited the people at home,” Maljaars recounts. “I always invited them to visit the consolidation office for a chat. If you go to talk with a farmer at his home and his neighbour sees it, then he very quickly feels that you’re favouring the other one. I always wanted to avoid that.”

Kleiberg, on the other hand, often went to the owners or the users of the land to see the situation on the ground. Sometimes he encountered people who made it very clear they didn’t agree with the plans. In the case of one particular owner, Kleiberg always parked his car facing the road so he could “make a quick and easy getaway if she got angry”.

Consolidation

Modernisation did not affect just agriculture. In the second half of the 19th century, the Netherlands gained a dense web of railways within a short period of time. The rails were laid straight through agricultural areas. This meant that until about 10 years

ago, farmers had to cross over unmanned level crossings to reach their land, with their tractors and their cows. This was even the case on the railway line between Woerden and Gouda – one of the busiest stretches.

However, these days when taking a train on this route, you will see uniform, green agricultural pastures on one side, the rougher natural landscape on the other. This is a result of the Driebruggen land reallocation project. As several farmers wanted to stop farming, land became available. This ‘redundant’ land was used to expand the remaining farms, create nature areas and widen the railway tracks.

Windmills, farmers and nature

On Goeree-Overflakkee, there are two extra claims for space in addition to agriculture: nature and windmills. Nature development received an extra boost of a €13.5m grant from the Dutch Postcode Lottery’s “Dream Fund” to develop the natural environment

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in the area. What helped in solving the complex jigsaw puzzle was the contribution of 230ha of land from the province and the willingness of those involved to give and take.

Farmer Wim van Leeuwen of Stellendam says: “For farmers, it’s attractive to have windmills on their land. And we’re situated at a top location for wind energy, far from the village centres. This meant that it could be a package deal: we will grant space for nature if we can introduce windmills and buy extra land for farming.”

And vice-versa. Natuurmonumenten, a nature conservation organisation, could only buy land from the province for a nature reserve if it agreed to wind turbines being constructed along the reserve’s borders. For the farmers, the rule was that they could only buy land from the province if they allowed a wind turbine to be installed.

It works. Two years after the launch of the project, much has been achieved. The farmers have been able to buy 167ha of land from the province to expand their businesses and to introduce wind turbines.

Kadaster’s contribution in the land reallocation process was beneficial for Van Leeuwen. “They have expert knowledge, speak the farmers’ language and are focused on finding solutions.”