

Thinking about the future:

## Sustainability at the heart of strategy

**Sustainability and future-proofing are inherently connected. The term “sustainability” is so widely used that it has become a catch-all term and is the subject of many important discussions.**

At YEALD, we prefer to be concrete and look at sustainability from different angles. Context is essential. Companies that are striving for the smallest possible carbon footprint in their operations or provide products that contribute, for example, to energy transition or the recycling of raw materials, see sustainability in different contexts. “Future-proofing”, as mentioned above, is also important to us: How do you ensure that the next generation will work in a financially healthy sector or company? And how do you ensure that, as an organization in an explosively booming market, you will remain in control and thus be future-proof?

### Different perspectives

In this edition of YEALD Neaws, we engage in conversations with various organizations regarding sustainability, highlighting these different perspectives. We talk to Van der Valk Solar Systems and VDH Solar, internationally active companies contributing to energy transition. We discuss the rise of innovative plastic recycling with Bas van den Ende Recycling and controlling growth with Kwekerij Overgaag. These companies have sustainability at the core of their strategies and operations and have also experienced rapid growth. Furthermore, we discuss the unique, sustainable nature of companies in the Dutch horticulture sector with Glastuinbouw Nederland. We are eager to share the insights gained from these discussions. We conclude by introducing two new team members because we, too, think about the future. Enjoy reading this edition of YEALD Neaws. <<

### Van der Valk Systems

Van der Valk Systems used a crisis to enter an entirely new market segment and they succeeded.



### Bas van den Ende Recycling

Learn how Bas van den Ende turned a personal trade in his father’s shed into a multimillion company that Europe looks up to.



### VDH Solar

Discover how VDH Solar transitioned from a greenhouse builder to a successful distributor of solar panels.



### Glastuinbouw Nederland

Jacco Vooijs from Glastuinbouw Nederland discusses the impact of sustainability on growth.



### Kwekerij Overgaag

Kwekerij Overgaag has experienced tremendous growth through focused planning and by jumping on unexpected opportunities.



### New Faces

We introduce two new team members to you.



Interview with Van der Valk

# “IT’S NEVER BORING IN THE SOLAR COASTER.”

VAN DER VALK SYSTEMS USED A CRISIS TO SUCCESSFULLY  
ENTER A NEW MARKET SEGMENT.

Van der Valk Systems is a household name in horticulture, globally recognized for innovation and quality in greenhouse systems. However, they have also successfully ventured into the solar industry. With Van der Valk Solar Systems, the Westland-based company is growing in a completely new market. “In the solar industry, you need a completely different mindset than in horticulture,” says Denis de Vette, Managing Director of the solar division of Van der Valk.

In 2007, horticulture was hit hard by the banking crisis. “It seems like the horticulture sector always gets affected by every crisis,” Denis says casually. “But the banking crisis prompted us to focus on another area alongside horticulture. We considered guardrails, clothing racks, and, later, substructures for decking systems until we noticed a lot of development taking place in energy within horticulture. So, we decided to explore what we could produce in the energy sector that would be aligned with our DNA.”

### Learning from experience

“Solar was gaining momentum in Germany, so we investigated whether, as a production company, we could work with mounting systems in solar energy,” Denis continues. “We attended courses at the ECN, interned at solar panel manufacturers, and had to learn what a solar panel actually was. Eventually, we gained enough knowledge for our first project at the Ter Laak orchid nursery. We created a system that allowed us to attach small solar panels to our own external screen. Yes, we learned a lot from that experience, you could say.” “Then we started developing trackers that allowed solar panels to follow the sun,” Denis adds. “Brilliant, except that our market advantage soon disappeared

with the development of cheaper solar panels. After that, we moved on to field systems for open fields such as meadows and landfill sites, and from there, we expanded to flat roofs and, finally, to systems for pitched roofs. Essentially, we transitioned from highly complex systems to relatively simpler ones. But that means we now have a solution for every situation.”

### Too arrogant

Van der Valk Systems is a well-known name in the horticultural world, and Dutch horticulture is renowned worldwide. “Yes, it’s completely different in the solar industry,” Denis laughs. “In solar, the Netherlands was a relatively insignificant player when we started out. We needed to take a completely different market approach. Perhaps we were a bit too arrogant in the beginning, and – driven by our enthusiasm to conquer the world – we weren’t really paying enough attention to the market.”

“The Netherlands is not a leader in solar energy, so we had to adapt to the market. Moreover, in solar energy, one works with intermediaries whereas in horticulture, we deliver directly to end customers. To work in solar, you have to generate distribution channels and create mass. That’s why we collaborated with companies like

VDH Solar, which we already knew from horticulture, and entered the solar market together.”

#### Relationships are the foundation

In the end, DNA in the horticultural division also seemed to contribute to success in the solar segment. “Yes, we share R&D at the front end, as well as logistics, administration, and HR” explains Denis. “There is a synergy advantage. Furthermore, our culture is aligned with our target customers. People are important, so you speak to real people when you call us. The fact that Van der Valk is a family business also plays a role. Relationships are at the heart of our business. Additionally, innovation is in our blood, and we always strive for the highest quality. That is a plus in any industry.”

#### Growth is a means

“Despite being and remaining a family business, a corporate structure is needed to facilitate the necessary growth to maintain a market share,” Denis continues. “We have expanded in Monster and are going to expand further in ‘s-Gravenzande. We are allowing our organization and management to grow. And we are establishing new distribution channels. But growth is a means, not a goal. It provides risk diversification within the solar energy sector, a diverse product portfolio, and the opportunity to enter new countries, such as Sweden, with those products. The Van der Valk family is taking a realistic approach, and we are using our own financial resources to grow.”

#### Speaking the language

Even in new countries, it mainly all boils down to people. “You want boots on the ground, with locals who are familiar with your product,” says Denis. “We are still a new brand in a new market, but the people in these new countries know their culture and speak their customers’ language. A sales manager based in the Netherlands oversees the foreign offices, and our marketing, project, and operational departments provide support. The area we work together on is product development, for example to create systems that can withstand heavy snowfall.”

#### Solar coaster

“We sometimes refer to the solar energy sector as the solar coaster,” concludes Denis. “It’s truly a roller coaster, partly due to fluctuating subsidy policies that vary from country to country. There are many stakeholders in the market, so you have to constantly build your network. Despite market saturation, we anticipate significant growth in the coming years, such as in residential solar panels in the Netherlands. And in Spain, hardly any houses have solar panels yet, so there are ample opportunities there. Additionally, we are involved in exciting projects such as the Galgenwaard stadium, Amazon distribution centers, and the Tesla Gigafactory in Berlin. In any case, it’s never boring in the solar industry.” <<



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## The three lessons from Van der Valk Solar Systems

- 01.** A crisis can serve as a catalyst for diversification, and diversification can bring balance to a growing organization if introduced carefully and if you are willing to invest in learning.
- 02.** The competencies of a company can work exceptionally well in different markets as long as the company’s DNA and culture are solid and successful. The proven drive for innovation and focus on the quality of Van der Valk Systems in horticulture is also the foundation for their success in the solar industry.
- 03.** The organization determines the pace of growth and scalability, not vice versa. Growth can be well managed by maintaining control over scalability and by making strategic choices with respect to organizational structure.

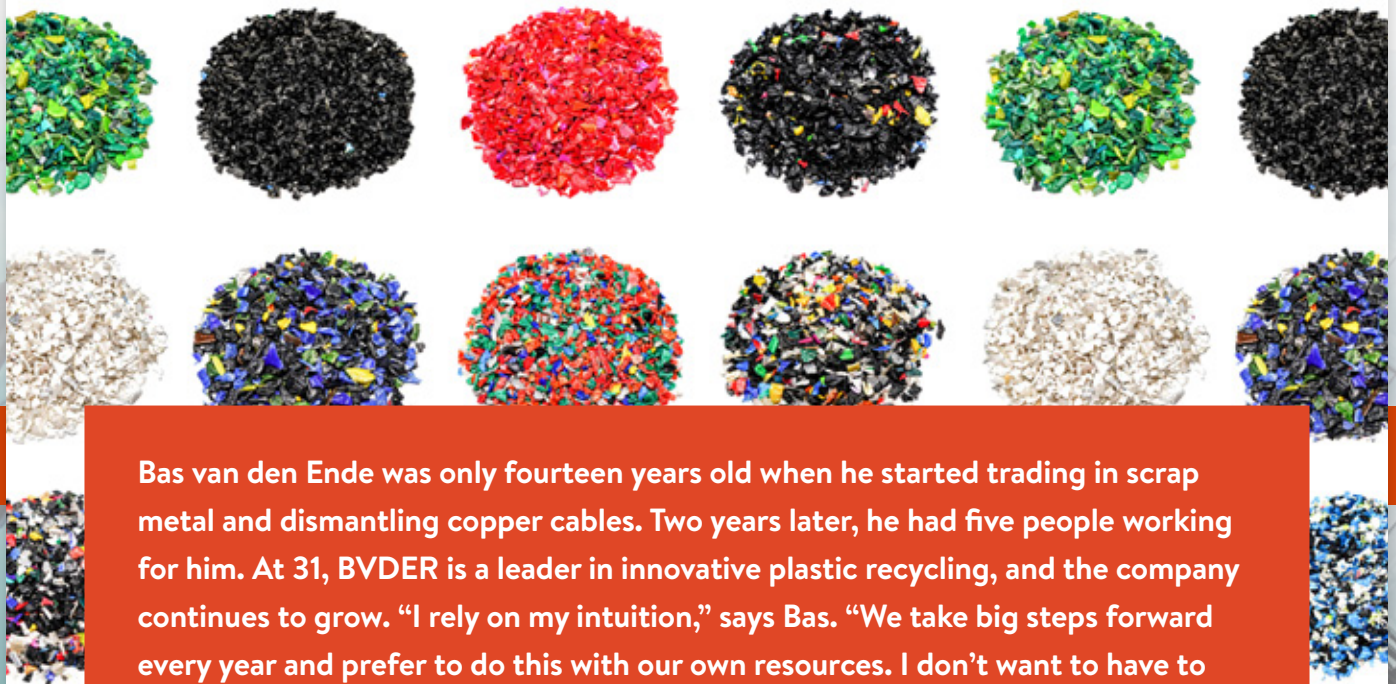
## About Van der Valk Solar Systems

*Since 2009, Van der Valk Solar Systems has been one of the fastest growing companies in the solar industry, focusing entirely on developing and producing solar panel mounting systems for pitched roofs, flat roofs, and open fields. Van der Valk Solar Systems operates from two main locations in the western Netherlands and has an office and warehouse in the UK, offices in Sweden and Spain, and is currently active in 13 countries. They develop and manufacture their mounting systems in their own factory in the Netherlands and they stand out for their versatility, quick installation, and high quality.*

Interview with BVDER

# “WE DO WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS NEED US TO DO.”

THIS IS HOW BAS VAN DEN ENDE TURNED HIS OWN LITTLE TRADE IN HIS FATHER’S SHED INTO A MULTIMILLION COMPANY THAT THE WHOLE OF EUROPE IS WATCHING.



Bas van den Ende was only fourteen years old when he started trading in scrap metal and dismantling copper cables. Two years later, he had five people working for him. At 31, BVDER is a leader in innovative plastic recycling, and the company continues to grow. “I rely on my intuition,” says Bas. “We take big steps forward every year and prefer to do this with our own resources. I don’t want to have to ask anyone when I want to go somewhere.”

Bas is the type of owner who is the first to arrive at the business and the last to leave, and he doesn’t hide away in a fancy office. “I’m not important; the person with the broom is important because they see everything,” he says modestly. At the same time, he is a pioneer in plastic recycling, with a company being watched by the whole of Europe, built from a bit of tinkering in his father’s shed in Honselersdijk. “I like to think in terms of solutions. That’s why I enjoy working on the production line. I can see where the challenges are and how we can solve them.”

#### An interesting business

In 2010, Bas started dismantling copper cables at his father’s horticulture company. “I used to throw away the plastic from the cables until I heard you could get money for it. That seemed pretty interesting since my father, a horticulturist, always had to pay a lot to

dispose of the plastic. So, I started experimenting with separating and cleaning the copper and plastic, including doing it at my mother’s kitchen sink.” The experimenting quickly led to his own company, which he established in a warehouse at an industrial park in Poeldijk. “I bought a production line for a lot of money, but there were many problems with it,” Bas recalls about those early days. “So, I built a complete production line myself because then you know how the machines work. I have always had a problem-solving mindset.”

#### A fire

A major fire destroyed the building in 2014. Bas was nevertheless able to continue his business activities the next morning at a new location. “Rob from YEALD took care of many business matters for me, such as insurance, the press, etc. He also immediately looked



<< for a new location in Hoek van Holland, so that I could pick up where I had left off, rebuild the machines, and continue serving my customers. Initially, it was on a 3,000-square-meter site, and now it's 21,000 square meters."

#### **Automation versus manual work**

While they initially operated with one production line in Poeldijk, Bas developed more lines in Hoek van Holland, gradually automating the process. "You should automate whatever can be automated, but a part of the business will always require manual work," he explains. "We do what our customers need us to do. Our customer base is quite diverse, ranging from horticulturists in the Netherlands to waste collection services, collectors from all over Europe, and junkyard companies, to name a few. We process all that plastic into regrind, which can be reused for items like flower pots and plastic pallets, or turned into granulate."

#### **Big Bags**

Thanks to Bas' problem-solving mindset, BVDER has created several highly innovative production lines. "Recycling is hot; there's an increasing demand for recycled materials, and legislation is becoming stricter. For example, Big Bags are those large plastic bags used in construction and transportation. They are sent from Europe to Vietnam, where they are recycled by hand. I thought: Why we can't we make a profitable business out of that in Europe? So, I started investigating," he says. "We have now developed our own machines

>> *"You should automate whatever can be automated, but a part of the business will always require manual work."*

for recycling Big Bags." Bas continues. "The drying process, in particular, proved to be very challenging. We dismantled the production line nineteen times, and now the twentieth version is running. We assigned two full-time employees to the project, but, well, we are a bigger company so they can work on this exclusively. We are finally achieving the results we were hoping for, but it has required significant investment, lots of brainstorming, and repeatedly going back to square one. It's been one big learning experience, but it solves many challenges in the market. We have become an interesting party for many companies who want to process Big Bags in Europe."

#### **Acquisition**

Constant rapid growth, a focus on innovative solutions, and an owner who works seven days a week – that's BVDER. Expanding on the current site eventually became a challenge. "We acquired the company PRC in Schijndel," Bas explains. "They already had all the permits, and considering the 2014 fire, I find it com-



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## The three lessons from BVDER

**01.** Entrepreneurs who follow their intuition never get stuck. That's why listening to the person behind the entrepreneur is always essential. They know their product and market; over the years, they have developed a "fingerspitzengefühl" (instinct) that may be better than market analysis, business plans, and economic statistics.

**02.** Innovation leads to new markets. BVDER develops its own technological concepts, creating new markets and a great deal of distinctiveness.

**03.** Keeping pace with the market is only possible if the entrepreneur and the team are willing to work hard. "We do what our customers need us to do" may sound like a marketing strategy. Still, it primarily means being engaged with the business 24/7 and being willing to invest time and energy in the company. An entrepreneur who does that and builds the team to support this will be very successful.

*"We have faced major setbacks, but I trust my intuition"*

forting to have two locations. Moreover, sixty percent of PRC's production already consisted of our material, so we already had a good relationship based on mutual trust. With our knowledge from Hoek van Holland, we can make the process even more efficient and create high-quality recycled plastic."

### Relying on intuition

This is a business built by an entrepreneur who knows what he wants and how to get there. "Look, when it comes to recycling plastic, we purely look at tonnage," Bas concludes. "That's the only thing that matters to us. Our growth can be attributed to our own team of motivated people; guys who are willing to work hard. We have faced major setbacks, but I trust my intuition. Looking ahead, plastic recycling is a good business. It would be great if consumers and business changed their behavior. If plastic became more standardized, we could create more monostreams as a society. That would make recycling easier and much more sustainable. If you handle plastic properly, it can all be recycled, and nothing needs to be incinerated." <<

## About BVDER

*BVDER is a processing company specialized in rigid plastics. They are equipped with the latest machines and techniques to effectively separate and convert more raw materials into high-quality regrind. BVDER continually invests in skilled and enthusiastic staff and production lines. They have recently started a line for recycling Big Bags. BVDER operates from two locations: Hoek van Holland and Schijndel, providing nationwide coverage.*

Interview with VDH Solar

# “YOU’RE CONSTANTLY OPENING UP NEW MARKETS.”

HOW VDH SOLAR TRANSFORMED FROM A GREENHOUSE BUILDER TO A SUCCESSFUL SOLAR PANEL DISTRIBUTOR.

VDH Solar made a conscious choice regarding its market and business philosophy. “We supply solar panels and accessories to installers, working exclusively with top-tier brands,” says director Lucien van der Heide. “Managing VDH Solar in this relatively new growth market is a case of learning on the job, with the only difference being that the job in question is piloting a full-speed fighter jet. You have no choice but to learn quickly, adapt, and above all, maintain speed.”

“Yes, we supply solar panels, charging stations, inverters, and now also batteries to solarteurs,” explains Lucien. “That’s what we call installers in the solar panel industry. Originally, we were in the greenhouse construction business, primarily building foil greenhouses. At a certain point, we noticed a demand for solar panel systems in the horticulture sector, so we dove into it. There was a big project outside the horticulture industry, at De Kleperstee campsite, where solar installers were in great need of our products.”

#### Always deliver

Yes, we are a distributor and wholesaler, but VDH Solar’s success goes beyond simply supplying goods. “We provide full technical support to all installers,” says Lucien.

*“Trains, planes, submarines... we considered every option. We always deliver.”*

“We already preselect the quality of the products. For instance, we have exclusivity for AEG solar panels, which sets us apart. Moreover, we can assist any installer with advice and can deliver products tailored to meet the requirements of each individual residential or commercial project. That’s how you end up growing alongside each other.”

“Have I mentioned that we can always deliver? One always has to be able to deliver, even in times of scarcity. For example, when the Suez Canal was blocked, we immediately made sure that all our customers could still be supplied. Trains, planes, submarines... we considered every option. We always deliver.”

#### High ask, give much

VDH Solar’s growth in this new sector has been tremendous, but facilitating development comes with risks. “We’ve stepped on the gas,” says Lucien with a smile. “Quite a lot. We took some risks financially,

but you know there's a market. Renting additional properties, buying properties; we kept pushing forward." "We have always been conscious of keeping the organization lean, and we've been able to do that because our people always go the extra mile. If we have to load a truck until 10 p.m. on the weekend, then we do that. So, there's always pressure on the organization, but we have now started investing in the HR and Finance departments, and we've added a management layer. We provide a good lunch where we all eat together, and we also have regular company outings. We ask a lot from our employees, but they also get a lot in return."

#### Pioneering together

"We ended up making the strategic decision to transition completely from installation to distribution," Lucien continues. "We knew the procurement routes and had a good relationship with Van Der Valk Systems due to our horticultural background. They had also entered the solar panel business, so we started pioneering and growing together in this sector. You do notice the difference compared to horticulture, where the Netherlands is considered an expert and specialist, while we are only a small player in the solar panel world."

#### Growth and acquisition

VDH Solar's original business partner has been bought out and they have now found a partner in Gilde Equity Management with which they hope to expand. "They leave the entrepreneurs to do their own business, which I personally really appreciate," says Lucien with a laugh. "But you do receive full management support, 24/7. We're shaping the company together, with the aim of gaining a 30-35% market share in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany." "We're doing that through organic growth and acquisitions, like with Navetto. They share a similar vision to ours, they're also based in South Holland, and we've been collaborating for a while with minimal overlap in our customer base. We're now in the process of merging our companies."

#### Simple calculation

VDH Solar will continue to grow, at least for the time being. "Energy demand is increasing faster than energy production," says Lucien. "It's a simple calculation. This trend will continue for now, and new markets are also emerging. Think about energy storage, such as batteries. In turn, we are developing a software system that can deal with the energy stored in the batteries." "So, we're constantly opening up new markets in solar energy, which keeps this sector very interesting for the foreseeable future. Luckily, we have a solid foundation, and at the same time, we're flexible enough to adapt quickly. Indeed, learning to fly by being handed the controls of an F16 racing through the sky at Mach 1. Isn't that amazing?" <<



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## The three lessons from VDH Solar

**01.** In a rapidly growing market, staying in control means focusing on the core success factors. For VDH Solar, this means prioritizing proven products with top-tier status and maintaining a goal-oriented organization.

**02.** In a new market, you can influence developments. VDH Solar achieved this by establishing a full-service concept, developing new products and capturing market share.

**03.** The entrepreneur has to grow alongside the company. Those who recognize this, adapt, and gather a strong team around them are the most successful.

## About VDH Solar

*VDH Solar is a total supplier with a wide range of solar panels, inverters, mounting systems, EV chargers, heat pumps, battery storage, and accessories. VDH Solar exclusively provides certified top-tier brands known for their sustainability, reliability, and user-friendliness. With its main headquarters in the western part of the Netherlands, VDH Solar operates in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, aiming to secure a top 3 position in all its markets. VDH Solar receives support from Gilde Equity Management.*



Interview with Glastuinbouw Nederland

# “THOSE WHO KEEP LEARNING ARE THE ONES WHO WIN.”

## JACCO VOOIJS FROM GLASTUINBOUW NEDERLAND ON THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINABILITY ON GROWTH.

Glastuinbouw Nederland advocates for the collective interests of the SMEs that make up the horticulture sector. “The structure of SMEs is inherently sustainable,” says Jacco Vooijs, board member of Glastuinbouw Nederland and chairman of Glastuinbouw Westland. “The DNA of these kinds of businesses, often family-owned, is focused on continuity for the next generation. Continuity is the goal, and growth is a means to achieve it.”

“There are so many aspects of SMEs that contribute to sustainable business practices,” Jacco continues. “In addition to being set up with the intention of being passed on from one generation to the next, these family businesses are often deeply rooted in the local community. From sponsoring local associations to providing

employment for the municipality, SMEs directly impact the social, economic, and cultural aspects of the regions where they operate.”

### Energy as a bottleneck

In 2018, Glastuinbouw Nederland developed a vision with its members, stating that they aim to achieve fossil-free cultivation by 2040. “Back then, there was no indication that we would have to transition away from natural gas at an accelerated pace,” Jacco explains. “Gas was the cleanest fossil fuel at the time, it was cost-effective, and there was an abundant supply. However, we were already ahead of the trends and crises in horticulture. We collaborated with the government to explore alternatives and started investing in geothermal energy and LED lighting.”

### Scaling up

Energy transition has been significantly accelerating in recent years due to various factors. “But without our strategic choices, this acceleration would have been much more challenging,” Jacco explains. “Entrepreneurs continue to push for innovation, which is inherent in the horticulture sector. We ensure that information can be shared quickly, and despite the competitiveness in the sector, there has historically been a lot of cooperation. Growers are adopting a more corporate structure that includes energy, HR, software, finance, sales, and marketing. However, the fundamental DNA of the sector remains rooted in SMEs.”

### Conscious choices

“Having said that, I want to emphasize that scale-up is not the holy grail,” Jacco adds. “But as an entrepreneur, you need to make conscious choices. If you opt for retail and, therefore, scale, the size of the retail sector automatically determines the volume that you will need to generate. Then, managing the company no longer remains a one-person task, and professionalization is required. However, you can also choose a specialization, serving a niche with higher margins. We see success stories of both approaches in our horticulture sector.”

**Affordable energy**

Energy is needed to produce food, flowers, and plants. However, the way we organize energy in terms of regulation, financing, and infrastructure involves political choices. “There are a thousand and one things to consider in the energy sector,” Jacco says. “But one thing is clear: we need energy. And it is in our interest to play a role here. We bring focus through open discussions among our members. From the government, we primarily ask for a long-term vision with a clear goal and investments in viable alternatives. Affordable energy means economic development, and our businesses and government need to strive for that.”

**Decentralized water regulation**

But there are, of course, many more challenges that the horticulture sector faces or will face. Currently, energy is a key focus, along with crop protection, but water consumption is also becoming an important issue. “Just as we have very practically decentralized energy production in the horticulture sector by using combined heat and power (CHP) units, we can also help maintain water levels locally,” Jacco explains enthusiastically. “We see the need emerging during periods of drought and sudden heavy rainfall. With Rainlevelr, we can drain our water reservoirs before a heavy downpour and capture all the water during the rainfall. This makes the ditches entirely available for draining water from residential areas. As horticulturists, we are part of the solution rather than part of the problem.”

**Net water supplier**

“Eventually, instead of letting excess rainwater flow away we will be directing it into the ground through our silos and water reservoirs,” Jacco explains. “In Kwintsheul, for example, we are working on a project to fully utilize rainwater either for crops or for infiltration into the ground. By reducing our water consumption through the smart circulation of irrigation water and using purified wastewater during extreme drought, we can become a net supplier of water, just as we can be a net supplier of energy. If the government stimulates such projects, rapid progress can be made, resulting in a significant and direct impact on society.”

**There is no failure**

“Recently, a basketball player lost in the playoffs,” Jacco concludes. “When asked by a journalist if he had failed, he responded that there is no failure in life. You either win, or you learn. And I believe in that. The one who ultimately ‘wins’ is the one who keeps developing, keeps innovating, keeps collaborating, and keeps trying. That’s what we see in the horticulture sector, regardless of whether you choose to scale up or specialize. Making strategic choices, seizing opportunities, adapting continuously, and putting in the effort; that’s where the strength of SMEs and horticulture lie.” <<



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*The three lessons from Glastuinbouw Nederland*

- 01.** Extensive collaboration and a collectively endorsed strategic vision are necessary to achieve collective continuity and development.
- 02.** Due to the structure of SMEs and family businesses, the horticulture sector is inherently sustainable. Entrepreneurs continually adapt to changing circumstances to increase their company’s chances of survival. This involves innovation in energy, water, and crop protection.
- 03.** The winners of the future are those who are willing to take risks, continue to innovate and continue to collaborate nationally and internationally. Failure doesn’t exist; it’s all about learning.

**About Glastuinbouw Nederland**

*Vision - Horticulture entrepreneurs grow vegetables, flowers, plants, and soft fruit responsibly under glass to promote a healthy society. Together, they can economically reconcile consumer demands and environmental requirements in their operations. In the protected environment of the greenhouse, they make optimal use of the goodness of nature, keep diseases and pests at bay, and eliminate environmentally harmful waste streams. They also offer challenging jobs at various educational levels and fields. Glastuinbouw Nederland unites and supports entrepreneurs in achieving this. Its principal activities include lobbying at national and international, provincial, and regional governments, driving knowledge development and inspiring entrepreneurs through knowledge sharing.*

Interview with Kwekerij Overgaag

# “THOSE WHO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS THE FASTEST WIN”

KWEKERIJ OVERGAAG HAS EXPERIENCED TREMENDOUS GROWTH THROUGH BOTH TARGETED PLANNING AND UNEXPECTED OPPORTUNITIES.

Every challenge is an opportunity. Absolutely. But every opportunity is also a challenge. Imagine that you have the opportunity to double your company’s output overnight without the organization being prepared for this. Would you let the opportunity go, or would you seize it? At Overgaag pepper nursery in Westland, they know what they would do. “Your neighbor’s property goes up for sale only once,” says John Overgaag, one of the directors. “In our case, it happened a few times in quick succession with different neighbors. You have to be brave.”

Arend Overgaag started the nursery in 1950 with 8,000m<sup>2</sup> of glass at Achterlaantje in De Lier, growing tomatoes in the summer and lettuce in the winter. In 1976, his three sons grew tomatoes at Schefferweg, also in De Lier. From the 1990s, Kwekerij Overgaag switched to bell peppers, and the company grew to 10.5 hectares by 2006. “That’s when the younger generation, Gerrie, Wouter, and I, came into the picture,” says John. “In that

year, a new greenhouse and sorting location were also developed.”

#### Growing because of the organization

In 2009, a new location in Maasland was added, expanding the company to 15.5 hectares. Wouter joined the company, followed by Gerrie and John in 2011. “In 2013, we decided to focus on growth,” explains John.



“We wanted to build an organization and allow the older generation to step back. So, we needed to grow in terms of hectares. As the older generation gradually stepped down, their positions were taken over to ensure the organization’s stability.”

#### One team, one task

The company has three locations: Maasland, De Lier, and Honselersdijk. “Each location has its own management,” continues John. “But it’s one company, one team, with the directors working across all three locations. We all have our own interests, so we complement each other nicely. At the same time, we advise the three locations regarding cultivation and organization, and if necessary, we are hands-on in the greenhouse. We have expanded middle management to cover sickness and vacations.”

#### Strategic triangle

“In 2015, we considered selling everything in Westland to expand to 20 hectares in Dinteloord,” says John. “But well, that would have been a drastic choice to grow by only 4.5 hectares at the time. We finally purchased an additional 8.5 hectares in Honselersdijk, fully focusing on Westland. The three locations now form a triangle, where everything is efficiently arranged within a ten-minute drive of each other. All strategic choices are now aimed at growth and development within that triangle, and we consciously chose that direction.”

#### Change of perspective

The acquisition of the Honselersdijk property presented some practical challenges. “It was a difficult time for greenhouse horticulture before the purchase, with

*“All strategic choices are now aimed at growth and development within that triangle, and we consciously chose that direction.”*

businesses regularly going up for sale,” says John. “However, we never won the bids for those companies, so we turned the tables. Our organization needed to grow, so we sat down with YEALD and proactively approached various parties. Eventually, we approached a rose nursery, bought it, and converted it into a pepper nursery within three months.”

“Since 2016, YEALD has been helping us with financing, growth, and strategy. We have a six-person organization supported by middle management, but we outsource what we don’t have in-house in terms of expertise and knowledge.”

#### Opportunity = crisis = opportunity

In 2019, our neighbor in Honselersdijk suddenly put their property up for sale. “Yes, just when we thought everything was in order, such an opportunity arose,” says John with a smile. “It was an opportunity, but an opportunity can also go wrong. Still, we bought the land and built a greenhouse. We personally oversaw every detail. We wanted as directors to know and decide everything. It took time and energy, but we learned so much from it. And in 2021, the greenhouse went into production. Then our neighbor in De Lier put their property up for sale...” That neighbor was also acquired. “It was already a pepper grower, which helped,” explains John. “But well, in the summer of 2021, the energy crisis emerged, so you start to worry. 2022 was about production and optimization with the crisis and Ukraine war in the back of our



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## The three lessons from Kwekerij Overgaag

minds. We were already investing in the company, but future investments became more uncertain.”

### Careful internal consideration

“We were planning to invest in a new sorting hall during the same period,” says John. “A new sorting hall doesn’t provide direct profit since it doesn’t help produce more bell peppers. And then our neighbor in Maasland was put up for sale as well. And we faced another opportunity or risk; well, you tell me. After careful internal consideration, we invested in the packaging hall and the Maasland hectares. We combined them into one investment plan, investing in both hectares and processing capacity simultaneously. And it turned out to be the right solution in every way.”

*“We still have the structure of a family business.”*

### Excited about growth

“The experience of having been involved in building the greenhouse in 2020 is helping us tremendously now,” says John. “We’ve been through this all before, and you can tell. It’s becoming easier to grow, also because the steps are becoming relatively smaller. In 2016, we had to grow to give the organization a chance; now, we’re growing because we feel like it. The organization is expanding steadily, and people are also progressing; in middle management, but also from being a harvester to becoming a crop protection specialist. Stability provides greater opportunity for personal development.”

### Solving problems the fastest

“We still have the structure of a family business, and it’s a business that is professionally organized,” concludes John. “At board level, we focus on monitoring, motivation, and management. We see all our locations as one company in a phase of organic growth. Essentially, we are like one large company, but in our own unique

**01.** Entrepreneurs who understand the technology required, implement innovations, and oversee construction create distinctive qualities and even partly their own market.

**02.** Often, the organization grows alongside the company, but sometimes a company becomes stronger by allowing it to grow in line with the organization. The key to success is to recognize the company’s phase and make strategic choices based on that.

**03.** There can be a thin line between an unexpected opportunity and a crisis. Companies that can adapt quickly, operate flexibly, and that know their product and technology can take advantage of crises and unexpected opportunities.

## About Kwekerij Overgaag

*Kwekerij Overgaag is a family business specializing in cultivating and packaging red bell peppers. They operate in three locations in Westland, with a combined area of approximately 32 hectares. Wouter, Gerrie, and John Overgaag have been leading the company since 2019.*

way. We do everything ourselves, from technology to cultivation to management. In this sector, those who solve their problems the fastest win. And when there is something that we can’t do ourselves, we use the Harvest House cooperative’s logistics, marketing, and sales channels or the expertise of YEALD. That way, we can focus on what we’re good at: growing high-quality bell peppers.” <<

Introducing:

## NEW TEAM MEMBERS

Meet Melanie Dubbeld and Sanne Weerdenburg, our two new team members at YEALD.

### Melanie Dubbeld

*Melanie is our new analyst at YEALD. She holds a degree in Business Administration and Agri-food Business from the HAS University of Applied Sciences, where she learned about various horticulture sectors. In addition to her role as analyst at YEALD, Melanie is in the final phase of her master's degree in Finance and Investments at the Rotterdam School of Management.*

Melanie has had a strong affinity with the horticulture sector from a young age and has experienced different steps in the value chain. She brings sector-specific knowledge and is an enthusiastic and critical team player who always strives for the best collaboration between the team and the entrepreneurs. <<



### Sanne Weerdenburg

*Sanne has also joined our team at YEALD as an intern while pursuing her bachelor's degree in Business Administration at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. Growing up surrounded by greenhouses in the Westland region, Sanne feels strongly connected to the agricultural sector.*

The internship at YEALD is allowing Sanne to gain valuable experience in the M&A sector while combining her passion for horticulture with the business world. In September 2023, she will start her master's degree in Finance and Investments at the Rotterdam School of Management. At YEALD we work with interns on a continuous basis and are excited to develop and gain new insights and knowledge from having Sanne here with us. Sanne is providing our team with valuable input and inspiring us with her fresh perspective and enthusiasm. <<

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