It is a great pleasure to present our 2022 highlights. After a long period of online meetings due to Covid, we truly enjoyed meeting face-to-face again. 2022 was a year of new connections and fresh ideas. For example, we launched official collaborations with Amped/Local2Local and Landschap Erfgoed Utrecht. We organised two key events. One on resilient food systems and the other on perspectives for farmers, thereby stressing possibilities rather than impossibilities. During both conferences, we created dialogue and exchange among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, farmers, NGO representatives and students. We are proud of being able to unite such diverse audiences. We are also delighted with the great diversity of researchers involved in Future Food Utrecht. Our last Sandpit on Fair Food Systems brought together researchers from six faculties. Such interdisciplinary interaction is vital, especially regarding food-related questions requiring a holistic, planetary perspective in which health, sustainability and fairness are equally addressed.
Merel Soons, Professor of Plant Dispersal Ecology & Conservation and former vice-chair of Future Food Utrecht co-authored a paper on ‘seed dispersal as a search strategy: dynamic and fragmented landscapes select for multi-scale movement strategies in plants’ in Movement Ecology. In this new paper, published on 29 January 2022, the authors state that knowledge on the mechanisms of plant dispersal is rapidly advancing, but selective pressures responsible for the evolution of dispersal strategies remain elusive. However, recent advances in animal movement ecology identified general strategies that may optimize efficiency in animal searches for food or habitat. The authors consequently explore the potential for evolution of similar general movement strategies for plants.

A healthy food environment is essential for prevention and health promotion

Scientists Maartje Poelman (WUR), Emely de Vet (WUR), Carlijn Kamphuis (UU) Coosje Dijkstra (VU), Sanne Djojosoeparto (UU), Wilma Waterlander (AMC), Jacob Seidell (VU) and Frank van Lenthe (Erasmus MC), wrote this position paper (14 March 2022, in Dutch) on how a healthy food environment is essential for prevention and health promotion. Creating a healthy food environment is a good example of a structural, universal, preventive measure. And a healthy food environment contributes to reducing socio-economic health inequalities. In order to create a healthy food environment legal measures are essential in the prevention of chronic diseases.

Interview with Sanne Djojosoeparto, PhD-Candidate at Utrecht University, on Healthy Food Environments

The importance of a healthy food environment has been widely discussed in Dutch parliamentary circles. On 21 March 2022, there was a roundtable discussion on lifestyle prevention. Sanne Djojosoeparto (Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning) was one of the co-authors of a position paper that was presented by the lead author Maartje Poelman (WUR). On 24 March 2022, in turn, there was a committee debate on lifestyle prevention, which amongst others addressed government policies to create healthy food environments.

Future Food asked Sanne Djojosoeparto to share her thoughts on recent developments, read the entire interview here.

We increasingly go out for breakfast, lunch or dinner. However, although eating out is considered to be pleasing and tasty, we also tend to eat more meat and get higher intakes of salt, fat and sugar when eating away from home. Though enjoyable, it is not necessarily a healthy habit. PhD Candidate Iris Claessens is diving into this contradictory question. She aims to find out how restaurants can transform their offer into healthy and sustainable menus while at the same time seducing guests to go for these healthy and sustainable options. How to achieve this while also making sure that eating out remains a delicious experience?

Her research is part of a larger research programme of Regio Deal Food Valley focusing on a healthy and sustainable food environment Read the interview with Iris Claessens.
This paper published in July 2022 introduces the GAIN transition model, a novel framework based on gamification that provides a holistic and actionable framework for short food supply chain actors to coalesce and strategize around a common vision. The authors - Danika Moore, Bob Massar (Amped), Mark Frederiks (Amped), Remco Veltkamp (UU) and Hens Runhaar (UU) - illustrate the underlying principles of GAIN and its potential for institutionalizing short food supply chains. They find that thus far, GAIN has helped to catalyze action and has proven a useful tool that provides a common language for actors to navigate this complex space.

This new comment (April 2022) in Nature Reviews Earth & Environment of an international group of researchers led by Martin Wassen and co-authored by Jerry van Dijk and Frank Berendse from the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development urges that we need an integrated nutrient directive to regulate the combined agricultural use of nitrogen and phosphorus. The ongoing nitrogen crisis in the Netherlands and Flanders illustrates how ineffective management of nutrients can lead to both serious ecological damage and political and societal upheaval.

A project aimed at developing new tools to predict and optimize potato plant growth by mapping the microorganisms living on seed potatoes was awarded a 940,000 euro funding. The project, led by biologist Roeland Berendsen, will be a collaboration between Utrecht University and the commercial partners Agrifirm, Averis seeds, Bayer Cropscience and HZPC. The funding was granted by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) and the private companies involved in the project.

Irene Lenoir-Wijnkoop: “Our daily health is in our own hands through our food choices”

On 26 September 2022 - on her 68th birthday - Irene Lenoir-Wijnkoop defended her PhD thesis titled ‘The Value of Food: Savoir Vivre = Savoir Manger’. In her thesis, which she completed further to various positions at Danone’s R&D Centre, she argues that despite the relevance of focusing on specific nutritional needs in combatting disease, for promoting health we should not forget that our daily nutritional needs can actually be met by a regular and balanced food intake in general.

Future Food talked to Irene about her career, her research and the enjoyment of completing a PhD later in life.
Michèlle Bal and Marijn Stok receive NWO Open Competition-SSH grant

Dr. Michelle Bal and Dr. Marijn Stok (Faculty of Social Sciences) were awarded an NWO Open Competition-SSH grant involving over 750,000 Euros. Together with Prof. Dr. John de Wit (Social Sciences) and Prof. Dr. Eggo Müller (Humanities) they will conduct four years of research into how young people, especially from lower socio-economic groups, think about more sustainable food. What drives and hinders young people to eat more sustainably? What do they need in order to shift to a more sustainable diet?

This successful research proposal developed out of a seed grant awarded by Future Food Utrecht.

Marca Wauben receives a ZonMW Open Competition grant

Marca Wauben (veterinary medicine) and colleagues were awarded a ZonMW Open Competition Grant for their proposal on ‘Breast milk extracellular vesicles for baby brains (EV4BB): Deciphering and exploiting the anti-inflammatory and regenerative effects on brain cells’.

This proposal was the result of a Future Food Utrecht Sandpit workshop on Early Life Nutritional Opportunities that was organised in 2021.

“Dairy farming is dramatic for the environment and farmers”

Associate Professor of Governance of Nature and Biodiversity, Hens Runhaar (Copernicus Institute), was interviewed by NRC Handelsblad (June 2022, in Dutch) about the plans announced by Minister Van der Wal (Nature and Nitrogen) to drastically reduce nitrogen emissions. In January 2022, Runhaar and colleagues published an article in Agricultural Systems in which they looked into the mechanisms blocking the transition to more sustainable, nature-inclusive dairy farming.

Spinoza Prize goes to biologist Corné Pieterse

Future Food Utrecht Board Member Corné Pieterse, Professor of Plant-Microbe interactions at Utrecht University, was one of the four winners of the 2022 Spinoza Prize. He received the prestigious prize for his groundbreaking and socially relevant research into crop protection mechanisms. Read more
In this course, more than 10 food researchers from Utrecht University address the main issues of food consumption. They handle two interrelated themes; Food shortage and Healthy choices. Participants learn to identify the key ingredients of the world’s food challenges and to think about the solutions for enabling changes in the current food system. Since 2017, nearly 14,000 learners have enrolled in the Future Food Mooc.

Teachers:
Prof. dr. Denise de Ridder, Prof. dr. Rens Voesenek and Prof. dr. Marca Wauben
Engagement with Stakeholders

**Food-Print Utrecht Region: Utrecht political parties go for healthy and sustainable food for all Utrecht residents.**

On 9 March 2022, Food-Print Utrecht Region organized the Utrecht food debate with 14 political parties in the council chamber of the city hall in Utrecht. The parties debated each other on the basis of four propositions. It was an exciting evening with an enthusiastic audience, inspiring initiators of the propositions and passionate representatives of the political parties. A good prospect for Utrecht. Curious what was discussed? Read the highlights of the evening. If you would like to learn more about this and other FPUR activities please visit the website [in Dutch](#).

**Utrecht University and Landschap Erfgoed Utrecht are going to work together on the health, happiness and well-being of all inhabitants of Utrecht**

Finding solutions to urgent issues in the fields of climate, nature, landscape and cultural heritage in the province of Utrecht together. That is the core of the collaboration that Utrecht University and Stichting Landschap Erfgoed Utrecht entered into on Monday 14 March 2022. The two institutions believe that this will let them contribute to healthy inhabitants in a healthy and appealing (cultural) living environment. [Read more](#).

**Collaboration with Amped/Local2Local: “The new normal is local”**

Future Food Utrecht and AMPED/Local2Local will work closely together on the transition to local food and a regional food system, heritage and landscape, biodiversity and climate adaptation. A lot of work has been done in recent years to build a robust short chain in Utrecht. This collaboration should enable the transition to accelerate. On Friday 13 May 2022, this collaboration was officially launched in the presence of HRH Prince Carlos de Bourbon de Parme, chairman of the Short Chain Taskforce, Professor Anton Pijpers, chairman of the Executive Board of Utrecht University, Mark Frederiks, CEO of Amped /Local2Local and Professor Johan Garssen, chairman of Future Food Utrecht. [Read more](#).

**Green Deal on Nature-inclusive Agriculture in Green Education signed**

On 16 May 2022, Minister Staghouwer of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) signed a new Green Deal ‘Nature-inclusive Agriculture in Green Education’. This Green Deal focuses on promoting new ways of producing food that decrease the pressure on nature and enhance biodiversity. In addition to other government agencies and farmers’ organizations, 18 educational institutions signed the agreement, including Utrecht University. [Read more](#).
We can look back on a very successful annual Future Food Utrecht Symposium, held online on 3 February 2022. We welcomed around 95 participants who actively took part in the discussions.

We were fortunate to have two very interesting plenary keynote presentations by Ilse Geijzendorffer (director Louis Bolk Institute) and Brian Dermody (assistant professor Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development).

In addition, we had a versatile program of breakout sessions including short presentations by Jaap Seidell (VU Amsterdam), Yann Hautier (Utrecht University), Koen Beumer (Utrecht University), Michel Meuwissen (general practitioner), Stacy van den Brink (Ballast Nedam Development), Casper Zulim de Swarte (Schuttelaar & Partners), Marije Thybaut (VKON) and Mark Frederiks (Amped).

The program focused on different aspects of the food system, such as sustainable food production, food and health and local communities and the debate on the latest insights on resilient food systems.

**Reintroducing oats in the Netherlands: bottlenecks and opportunities**

As a result of a POP3 Oat-project in the Province of Utrecht, Utrecht University, Wageningen University & Research and Keep Food Simple set up a ‘Taskforce Oats’ in 2021. At the beginning of 2022, the taskforce published a position paper ‘Reintroducing Oats in the Netherlands’. This paper stated that despite the unique properties of oats that make it a healthy grain for humans, animals and the soil, cultivation in the Netherlands has been minimal for years. On 11 May 2022, the taskforce organized a symposium to discuss the key bottlenecks and opportunities in relation to the production and consumption of oats in the Netherlands: One Health, sustainability and viable business models. A wide range of stakeholders including amongst others BO Akkerbouw, LTO, Ministry of Agriculture, Wiersum Plantbreeding and several oat producers and processors joined the debate.

**Fair Food Dialogue – 9 June 2022**

On 9 June 2022, Future Food Utrecht in collaboration with the Institutions for Open Societies (IOS) Platform Fair Transitions: Towards Safe, Inclusive and Climate-Resilient Landscapes, held a Dialogue on fair food and decolonization. Scholars, researchers and student participated in the interactive dialogue and debate based on the several presentations of current research projects and relevant knowledge was shared by all speakers. You can find a summary of the results of this dialogue on the Future Food website.

**Asia-Pacific Agri-Food Innovation Summit**

Chair of Future Food Utrecht and Professor of Pharmacology Johan Garssen represented Future Food Utrecht at the Asia-Pacific Agri-Food Innovation Summit that took place 26-28 October 2022 in Singapore. The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) organised a special mission to this event focusing on alternative proteins. Johan Garssen was one of the panelists of targeted sessions that focused on the alternative protein shift and its implications for consumers, producers, innovation, sustainability and socio-economic change.
The Savior Seeds Harvest Festival took place on 28 October 2022 at Fort bij 't Hemeltje, resulting from the strategic collaboration between Future Food and Amped, in partnership with Local2Local and Grounded.

The theme: heritage crops and animal breeds in the context of regional, regenerative food systems. During the day, participants learned about historical, social and environmental properties of these crops and animals and how they can help strengthen regional and resilient food systems. In addition, we provided multi-sensory activities so that participants could smell, taste and feel these special historical foods. We heard all about the rich heritage of Utrecht and vegetables and the relevance of the varieties and seeds. The afternoon concluded with networking moments between practitioners, communities, experts and enthusiasts who shared what they are working on and how they are involved in saving seeds and crops as a cornerstone in rediscovering and transitioning to regional, regenerative food systems.

In November 2022, Future Food Utrecht organised a Symposium on new perspectives for farmers. Together with scientists, farmers, policy makers and NGO-representatives we discussed the future of agricultural- and food systems in the Netherlands. We particularly focused on the role and position of farmers. The conclusions and recommendations of the symposium are available on our website (in Dutch).

Future Food Utrecht now also has its own LinkedIn page. Follow us, join our community and stay up-to-date on news, events and research activities.

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