

Field tour May 29

## 1. Agroforestry and food forest in Belgium



This field tour brings us to the north-eastern part of Belgium in the region called Haspengouw. An undulating landscape with fertile loamy soils, a rich history and known for its many orchards, making it the most fruit producing region of Western Europe Here we will visit first a Dutch farmer successfully developing the largest and oldest food forest of the Netherlands and Belgium and then we will visit a Belgian farmer who is transforming his farm by integrating agroforestry principles.

### Samenland

The farm is called Samenland ('Together land'). Its development started ten years ago by converting a bare crop field into vegetable gardens and, gradually, a food forest. Farm size four ha, the land belonging to the adjacent castle Nieuwenhoven. Location: Sint-Truiden (Belgium), 175 km south of Nijmegen.

Farmers: Taco Blom and Sonja Klagens.

**General:** Taco is a Dutch farmer and a pioneer permaculturalist. Samenland is the largest and most developed food forest in its region. It all started as a CSA biological vegetable farm, to generate income. Taco and his partner Sonja farm without applying for any subsidy. They gradually developed the food forest while downsizing their permaculture vegetable farm.

**Integration:** Taco designed this food forest in a series of multi-story hedgerows, most of them separated by a narrow strip of grass. Trees (high-low), shrubs, perennial vegetables and

herbs are closely integrated. The aim is 70% perennials and 30% pioneer species (vegetables). The latter, to produce food during the summer period. There is no livestock but abundant wildlife on this farm. Taco and Sonja are keeping bees.

**Benefits:** Samenland is situated on a gently slope. Swales help to make optimum use of the runoff water, that in earlier years frequently flooded the castle yard. The optimum use of water, land and sunlight while arranging the crops in a way which allows for efficient (hand) harvesting are essential. Taco and Sonja run the farm working on average 3-5 days per week. They are growing a wide range of vegetables, berries, fruits and nuts. Roughly 80% of their products are sold to local restaurants.

**Contribution:** Samenland is an example of a passionate farmer who develops a commercial food forest, using no subsidies, by transforming arable, conventional farmland into a food forest.

**Must see:** Samenland is a beautiful, well situated, sizable food forest which allows for a wonderful field visit. The road Taco and Sonja went so far in developing their food forest, the experiments they conducted and their philosophies on food production are worth hearing while roaming around on this farm.

### **Natlandhoeve**

**Natlandhoeve** ('Wetland farm') is the farm of Jos de Clerck. It is a biological farm with livestock (Limousin beef cattle), cereal crops, orchards and hedgerows. Jos has recently started to integrate them. He planted a large number of sweet chestnuts and walnuts in his pasturelands. Cattle and sheep graze his orchards, use the straw and some of the cereals. Jos is member of a farmer's cooperative. He sells his beef and grinds his cereals into flour in an old mill. He teaches on agricultural schools, receives a lot of visitors to propagate biological farming and agroforestry principles, and is well versed.