



2007-01-01

De Boerinn (Netherlands)

Thomas Cooney

Dublin Institute of Technology, thomas.cooney@dit.ie

Follow this and additional works at: <http://arrow.dit.ie/buschmarcas>

 Part of the [Advertising and Promotion Management Commons](#), [Business Administration, Management, and Operations Commons](#), and the [Marketing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cooney, T: De Boerinn (Netherlands) in Dickson, B. et al: The Working Partnership:SMEs and Biodiversity. Cambridge, Fauna & Flora International, 2007.

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Marketing at ARROW@DIT. It has been accepted for inclusion in Case studies by an authorized administrator of ARROW@DIT. For more information, please contact yvonne.desmond@dit.ie, arrow.admin@dit.ie, brian.widdis@dit.ie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License](#)



De Boerinn (Netherlands)¹

Hendrik Jan Hoogendoom and his parents sat around the family dinner table and once again discussed the key problem facing the business in which they all worked. There had been many changes in the use of their land over the past two decades but they knew that they had not yet achieved the maximum economic return from it. Currently, the primary income came from recreation activities, which were extremely successful for six months of the year. But the challenge remained on how they could keep the business equally active during the long cold winter months. As Hendrik and his father Arie examined the various options that were available to them, they were joined at the table by Petra Wey who was the company's new Marketing Executive. Two visitors from the European Commission had arrived to discuss the business with them and were particularly keen to learn about its future plans. But what could Hendrik and Arie tell them when they were still uncertain in their own minds as to what the most effective option might be and whether it was possible to implement such an option given the significant legal difficulties that they faced?

Background to the Business

The Hoogendoom family farm is located just outside Kamerik, a village that is centrally located between Rotterdam, Amsterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht. The 18 hectares of grassland were the basis of a busy dairy farm when the business was run by Hendrik's grandfather, but trends in the farming industry had indicated to Hendrik's dad, Arie, that the long-term future for dairy farmers was bleak. Over thirty years ago Arie began examining ways in which he could expand the income streams from the farm and saw opportunities in the area of cheese-making. Given that he had a ready supply of the principal ingredient required to make cheese and that his wife had the necessary skills, it appeared a natural solution to their dilemma. As an extension of that opportunity, Arie decided to open the farm to visitors who wanted to buy real farm cheese just after it was made, an idea which later

¹ This case was prepared by Dr Thomas M. Cooney as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either the effective or ineffective handling of a business situation. This case was first published in the report "The Working Partnership: SMEs and Biodiversity" which was written by B. Dickson, D. Watkins, D. & J. Foxall (2007) and published by Fauna & Flora International, Cambridge, UK. The case was written as part of the EU funded Probioprise project which was undertaken by Fauna & Flora International, EFMD and the European Bureau for Conservation and Development.

turned into cheese-making demonstrations, and finally evolved into cheese-making workshops. These activities had opened the farm to a wider range of income streams, introduced people to the products and services of the farm, and reduced its dependency upon dairy farming itself. The difficulties with this solution were that it was very limited in terms of the amount of income that it could generate, and that it would never be possible to expand the scale of its operations to such a degree where it would bring significant financial returns.

As Arie considered the future options for the business at that time, he decided that if he could not expand the scale of the business, then maybe he could extend its scope. When people arrived at the farm, instead of making cheese, they might be interested in undertaking some other activity. As a waterway ran through the farm, canoeing was certainly one possibility, while beautiful natural walks across the land offered another alternative. It was his decision to introduce 'Klompengolf' that most radically altered the basic business model which they were pursuing. Klompengolf ('Farmers Golf') is a field version of Crazy Golf in which a player uses a wooden club with a large mallet head to hit a large plastic golf ball across the field and into a large golf hole. The game is about having fun and cannot be taken too seriously. It is unique to Holland where it can be found in approximately one hundred locations. Indeed, there is an association for the owners of Klompengolf courses, of which Arie was Chairman for many years. This change in the direction of how the family farm would be used was taken in 1995 and the number of visitors has grown steadily since that time to where they now cater for approximately 25,000 visitors a year.

In 2001, Hendrik Jan Hoogendoorn took over the business from his parents. None of his brothers had wanted to work in dairy farming but Hendrik had always shown an interest in developing the use of the land in some other way. He had studied business at Erasmus University in Rotterdam and helped out at home on weekends. His final year thesis at college studied the success factors of rural tourism as he constantly considered what the future might offer for the family business. Since 2003, the land holding and the business activities have been legally registered as two separate limited companies, both fully owned by Hendrik. The reasons for establishing two companies were tax-related and to spread risk. His parents continue to work with him every day but they are shortly to leave the family home and move to the village of Kamerik, after Hendrik marries a local teacher. The transfer of the family land and business through the generations has appeared less stressful than is normally found amongst family businesses, and everyone is quite clear that Hendrik is now in charge of

operations. This is reflected in the way that the business has altered over the past five years with Hendrik putting his stamp of identity on how the business should be managed.

Current Activities

With all of the changes on the family farm over the past decade, understanding the structure of the activities of De Boerinn has now become more complex. Hendrik believes that agriculture is its past, recreation is its present, and nature is its future. Approximately one-third of the farm is currently used for both recreation and agriculture, while the remaining two-thirds is used solely for agricultural purposes. However, the land's official designation is for agricultural use, although Hendrik is currently looking to have this revised to cover both agriculture and tourism. The official designation of the land is very important for the future of the business as it impacts upon getting planning permission for a variety of projects that De Boerinn wishes to undertake. However, the application to change the official designation of the land is being challenged by a neighbouring farmer who believes that increasing the number of visitors to De Boerinn will have a negative impact upon his own farm, due largely to regulations limiting the number of pigs that can be reared within a certain proximity to residential areas and tourist venues.

The variety of activities available at De Boerinn has been significantly increased over the years. The most important group of activities in terms of attracting visitors is 'Poldersport' which offers visitors many different types of sporting and survival challenges. These include using ropes to get over water, climbing over a wooden wall, and manoeuvring oneself across wooden poles in the hope that you will not fall off. A range of activities are also available indoors, such as archery and karting, but due to a lack of space these are far more limited. In total, De Boerinn offer approximately fifty different activities under the heading of 'Poldersport', which can be undertaken as part of a team or on an individual basis, and which range from easy to very difficult. It is the ambition of the company that there is something for everyone to enjoy when they come to visit De Boerinn. For legal purposes, each client over the age of 18 has to sign an indemnity form before doing the activities, while teachers or parents have to sign for children below the age of 18. Children younger than 8 years old are not allowed to take part in the Poldersport activities. Additionally, all facilities are regularly checked by independent inspectors and safety certification occurs annually.

If the challenges of sports or survival courses are not a desired form of activity for a visitor, then other options are available also. As mentioned previously, Klompengolf is a favourite for people of all ages and abilities since it is simple and it is fun. Indeed, to increase variety within this activity De Boerinn provide a driving range and a putting green, in addition to its 18 hole course. If Klompengolf is not one's preferred option, then De Boerinn also offer a number of different excursions which can be taken by canoe, bike, or walking. Each form of transport has a range of distances and times mapped out to enable the visitor to take the option which best suits their time availability and level of fitness. The only disadvantage to all of these activities is that they are outdoor and so less viable during the winter months.

As part of its service offerings, De Boerinn has developed training and teambuilding courses for the corporate market. Using their existing activities and facilities, De Boerinn has developed a package that can be tailored to the particular needs of each company. They will also provide facilitators to enhance the training or teambuilding experience by explaining the activity and how it should work, and then drawing out the lessons for the participants once it has been completed. As a further source of income, De Boerinn provides small meeting rooms for any organisation that wishes to have off-site meetings, and these rooms are also used for training and teambuilding activities.

As part of enhancing the whole experience at De Boerinn, the company also provides a wide range of catering. From offering a simple tea or coffee on arrival to a variety of lunches and buffets, and on to a full barbecue, the company aims to give the visitor or groups of visitors a broad selection of catering which will suit their budget. Visitors can also bring their own food and drink with them and simply use the indoor or outdoor facilities when eating. The catering also offers alcohol which they can serve but not sell due to their official designation of existing for the purposes of agriculture. The company's ability to sell alcohol would change if the land were to be designated for tourism.

But as De Boerinn has continued to grow, the company has not forgotten its origins as it still offers demonstrations and workshops in cheese-making. Because the workshops are only of a one-and-a-half hour duration, it is not possible for participants to bring the cheese that they make home with them, and the company does not offer to keep the cheese until it has matured. All that can be achieved during the workshop is that the participants develop an understanding of what is required to make one's own cheese. Because of the success of this workshop over many years, other types of workshops have also been attempted but it is only

the creative workshops that are now offered. These workshops have shown continuous popularity since their inception and are presented under a number of different themes. These workshops on creativity can also be incorporated into training and teambuilding courses if a company requests them.

It is interesting to note that the company does not present itself to the visitor as a farm attraction, despite it being a working farm and having an agricultural designation. From an income perspective, rearing dairy cattle is unprofitable (as foreseen by Hendrik's father) with milk in this region of Holland costing around 2c per litre more to produce than in other parts of the country, due largely to the complexities of water-level management. Many farmers in the area work part-time in agriculture, having additional paid jobs to supplement their income. While there are obviously some animals on the land, the number is currently limited and would need to be enlarged if De Boerinn was to be promoted as a Visitor Farm. It is also noteworthy that despite the wonderful natural environment in which the activities that De Boerinn offer take place, no guided nature trails are available to visitors currently. Again, for this activity to be offered, much work would need to be undertaken to develop this side of the business so that the company could present something that is worthwhile. Additionally, the company does not offer educational workshops or classes for people on animals or the environment, although such an option has been discussed in recent times. The opportunity to develop educational classes would fit the current position of the company as they would utilise empty meeting rooms, they could take place during the winter months when business is quiet, and they would maintain the themes of animals and the environment which were the original strengths of the business.

Customers

While the business began by offering cheese-making as its main attraction, De Boerinn has since grown to hosting approximately 25,000 visitors per year with a turnover in the region of €1 million. Two-thirds of the income is generated by its activities while the remaining one-third comes from catering. In addition to this turnover, the agriculture side of the business contributes approximately €25,000 and last year the business received a government subsidy of €15,000. The company's fixed assets (i.e. the land and buildings) are currently valued at around €1 million. Between 75% and 85% of the visitors arrive between the mid-April and mid-November, with the lack of visitors during the remaining period of the year being the

single greatest challenge that the company faces. In an attempt to change that position, De Boerinn have constantly added to the activities that it offers, and as management sought new revenue streams, the target markets have had to be expanded. The following table is an approximate estimate of the current breakdown of visitor groups:

Table 1 – Visitor Groups to De Boerinn

Students / Schools	16.5%
Families	16.5%
Bachelor Parties	16.5%
Children	16.5%
Companies	34.0%

While companies are responsible for 34% of visitor numbers, they actually generate almost 50% of the turnover, having a relatively long average visit time of half to one day, and so represent a significant proportion of De Boerinn’s business. Alternatively, children represent 16.5% of the visitor numbers but as they stay for an average of less than two hours, they contribute poorly to the profitability of the business.

Hendrik believes that innovation and customer satisfaction are critical to the success of the business. From customer feedback he has established that people arrive at De Boerinn because they have either (1) been there before, (2) through word of mouth, or (3) via the internet. He argues that by improving the customer experience, more visitors will be encouraged to come back again (what has been referred to as the ‘Boomerang Principle’), and they will also be more likely to tell other people of their positive experiences. Towards improving the customer experience, each visitor is given a feedback sheet and asked to score their experience under a variety of headings. Each heading has a score ranging from 0 to 5, with 5 being excellent. The scores are aggregated at the end of the season and any activity scoring less than 3.5 is subjected to a full review. For example, last year the lunches received a rating of only 3.4 and so were reviewed. As a result of this review, much of the product offering was altered, and the way in which they were presented was also changed so as to cater for the needs of the visitor. Almost 50% of the beef that they use now comes from the farm, as do products such as milk, cheese, apples, and bread. Offering produce from the farm improves the profitability of the business, integrates the different uses of the land more effectively, and gives the customer a more authentic farm experience. It also helps to bring

about an improved balance in the way that the farm is run which is a key objective in Hendrik's future plans for the business.

Hendrik recognises that not only does his business have to overcome environmental and legislative challenges, but that De Boerinn also faces many different types of competitors. Effectively their competition is anyone who is operating in the leisure market, while there are approximately one hundred other Klompengolf courses in Holland, and a substantial number of businesses offering survival programmes. Therefore he feels that the business must have a distinct competitive advantage, or unique selling point, which he currently believes is its wide range of activities which caters for everyone from active to passive participants. He has given considerable thought to the concept of biodiversity as an attraction for visitors in its own right but has concluded that although it will enrich the experience of visitors while with them, it is not a strong enough attraction on its own. Instead he works extensively with his staff in training them to get closer to the visitor and help them exceed their expectations. He asks staff whether they really know what the visitor is looking for and how staff can deliver what the visitor wants. But Hendrik also knows that by getting the staff closer to the customer that there will be the opportunity to improve the 'spend per person' which is not at a level currently that Hendrik finds acceptable. For visitors to be truly happy with the experience that they have with De Boerinn, the role of staff members is crucial, and therefore one must invest in them if the company is to grow profitably.

Staffing

As the company has grown over the years, so also has the number of staff. De Boerinn currently employs seven full-time staff and fifty part-time staff, the latter including a large number of students and people from the local area who are 'on call' when the need arises. Amongst the full-time staff is Hendrik as CEO and manager of external affairs, an office manager, and an operations manager. The part-time staff can work a maximum of 20 hours per week, which will be dependent upon the availability of the individual and what group bookings are expected by the company on any particular day. One of the challenges of operating a still largely seasonal business is only being able to offer irregular, part-time employment. Nevertheless, it is important to the company to retain an experienced and motivated team as far as possible. Hendrik believes that in any organisation there are three types of employees: leaders, followers, and laggards. It is his ambition to encourage the

leaders to bring the followers to high-levels of service delivery, and for himself to identify and weed-out the laggards.

To help raise the quality of service standards, Hendrik has identified a number of rules for staff when working with the company (such as no mobile phones when working, being present a minimum of fifteen minutes prior to a group booking arriving), he has produced a series of handbooks for each job within the company (which are available also on the internal website), and he provides detailed on-the-job training. He regards the recent expenditure of €10,000 on formal training courses for himself and two junior managers as a very worthwhile investment. Additionally, staff working directly with visitors will wear either green tops (if in charge) or orange tops (if a support person) to make them readily visible to visitors, and they will complete forms at the end of each day detailing any issues that may have arisen during the course of their work.

Hendrik believes that the greatest strength of the business is that they truly empower their staff and that staff are given responsibility for their own careers. Staff are encouraged to view De Boerinn as their business, although while the managers may receive a financial bonus at the end of the season, everyone else is not similarly rewarded. However, everyone is reviewed at the end of each season, there is a night away in November to celebrate the summer season, a Christmas drinks party to which everyone is again invited, and a weekend away in the springtime to prepare for the beginning of the new season. Hendrik also believes that the culture of the company has changed significantly over the past five years, particularly the philosophy that staff are allowed to make mistakes, once they learn from the mistake. Additionally, he has nurtured a culture of open communication, co-operation, and fun. In return he has asked staff to be cost conscious and to examine how their output per hour can be improved, to be aware of the needs of the customer and how they can be satisfied, and to encourage both positive and negative feedback from the visitors. He stresses that one can learn as much from failure as from any successes. There is also an opportunity for staff to learn and to identify new work opportunities within the company. The identification of new tasks that need to be undertaken does not result in more work, but in different work.

The best barometer of the effectiveness of Hendrik's human resource policies is in staff turnover which currently is extremely low. He has developed a strong permanent and part-time team around him who share his commitment to customer service and who have

developed a loyalty to the company. He is supported by his parents who make available to him on a daily basis their many years of knowledge and experience. He does not have any outside mentors or board of advisors but may consider such a possibility in the near future.

Influence of Government

Hendrik's greatest frustrations arise when he considers the considerable influence that government has upon his business. De Boerinn is affected by decisions made by the European Union, national government, regional government, and local government, but frequently he feels that these different levels of government are not working in harmony. Hendrik has always agreed with his father that there is no long-term future in dairy farming and as he watches its decline in Holland, he notes that more and more farmers are now looking for alternative uses for their land. He suggests that if the agriculture industry is to survive, then the European Union should begin by broadening its definition of 'agriculture' so that it can include such activities as rural tourism. He also smiles sadly when he hears references by national government to the development of the 'Green Heart' of Holland in which he lives, as he knows from experience that the central question to this strategy is 'how will it be paid for?' This question however is even more complex as he perceives that the national government is slowly withdrawing from its commitment to environmental issues, and particularly its funding for the retention of green space.

A critical decision is to be made in the near future by local and regional government which will have an enormous impact upon the economic potential of De Boerinn. This decision relates to the redesignation of land-use categories. If De Boerinn does not succeed in achieving the formal double designation of two-thirds of its land for both agriculture and tourism purposes, then it will not be able to pursue its future expansion plans, including the construction of a large new 'haybarn' with glass external walls. This new structure would significantly alter the operations of the business as it creates greater space for indoor activities, it provides more room for training, meetings, and conferences, and it means that the business can operate more effectively during the winter months. While the land is designated as agricultural only, planning permission for the building can never be attained. As Hendrik points out, it is extremely difficult to plan for the future when you have to await the decisions of others as to what you can and cannot do with your own land.

Another controversial area relates to the water levels in the drainage channels that dissect the region's farmland. Conventional farmers want to maintain relatively low water levels to favour maximum agricultural production. However, low water levels causes the peat soil to dry out and shrink (at a current rate of 2cm per year), meaning that the ditches and channels have to be widened to generate spoil for topping-up the level of the fields, or pumping costs have to be increased to lower the water level still further. Environmentalists are advocating for summer water levels to be maintained at least 20cm higher than at present so as to keep the soil wetter and thus reduce shrinkage. This is an ongoing debate – even a battle – but one whose outcome has significant implications for De Boerinn, since water levels on the farm are controlled regionally and can only be influenced by individual farmers to a limited extent. Hendrik believes that in the long term, government policy will shift towards supporting wider ecological goals, rather than purely agricultural production, but he wants to get ahead of the game by developing biodiversity-related attractions for visitors immediately. The main element of his plans so far regarding this matter is to extend the area of natural habitats by creating a three-hectare wetland in one of the less disturbed areas of the farm close to the main river channel. The wetland will be flooded artificially and separated from the rest of the farm by a dyke. It would be fully inundated in winter, with lower water levels in spring and summer to encourage nesting birds. This would greatly extend the biodiversity interest of the farm, which is currently limited to a rather narrow range of habitats and species typical of extensive areas of Holland, including birds that are common and widespread even in quite urban areas. Without habitat diversification, the business will find it difficult to attract customers whose main interest is in nature. To take these early stages of his idea into the next phase, Hendrik intends to bring in experts (initially through contacts with the National Agricultural Union) who can advise him on how best to use the land for nature and the most effective methods for attracting wildlife. He also needs advice on legislation in this area as he is aware that there are strict national and EU rules regarding nature conservation and water management. However, before putting any of these plans into practice, Hendrik will await the outcome of the land-use re-designation application. As he puts it, “We have to address the weakest link first”.

Another element of ecological diversification that the business has not yet explored in detail is a conversion to organic production. The farm is currently run along conventional lines, but artificial fertilizers are no longer used. In the past, under the ‘maximum production’ philosophy, artificial inputs meant that stocking densities reached 2.5 cattle per hectare. In

recent years, the standard density has fallen to 2, and now to 1.7. Organic meat production in the future could be an attractive element of De Boerinn's future business; for example, visitors could eat organic meat products from the farm, and will be able to see at first hand how lower intensity farming can generate high quality produce and be good for water quality and nature conservation.

It appears to Hendrik that there is no escaping the influence of government in his attempts to develop his business, but the influence of government has not necessarily been negative. Through catalysing a consortium of 50 local entrepreneurs, Hendrik was successful in securing €150,000 in funding from the EU's Leader+ programme, though this sum had to be matched by funding from other sources. De Boerinn has also received €80,000 from grants available to support the 'Green Heart' of Holland. This money was used to upgrade the company's car-parking facilities, making it possible for more and larger vehicles to park close to the main reception area. If the company is successful in obtaining planning permission for the proposed new haybarn, then it will be eligible for a further 'Green Heart' matching-funds grant of €80,000. But he gets irritated when he applies for government subsidies or grants, as initially it is difficult to determine whether one applies to local, regional, or national government for the funding, and then when an appropriate programme is identified, eligibility is dependent upon the goals of the programme rather than upon the needs of the business. Despite having access to these financial supports, Hendrik's view of government is generally negative as he feels that many agencies are too intrusive upon a small business and that the agricultural and ecology sectors particularly are over-regulated. He appreciates that the environment needs to be protected but he simply wishes that there was coherency between the different layers of government and that decisions could be made more efficiently. When asked recently what the European Union could do for him, he laughed and said "just leave me alone".

Future Plans

While the dairy farming industry is declining and more farmers are converting their land to other uses, nevertheless this is a very exciting time for De Boerinn as its future contains many wonderful possibilities. Part of the reason why De Boerinn's opportunities are so much more positive than for those people currently looking to get out of agriculture, is because they have a ten-year start on their counterparts. Over the past decade, the Hoogendoorn family have

developed enormous experience and knowledge in the rural tourism industry, and they have built a strong brand name and reputation for their business. While these achievements are important, Hendrik recognises that the company must also continue to evolve and so has identified three priorities for the business over the next three years:

- (1) Increase revenue,
- (2) Improve profitability,
- (3) Change the way in which the land is used (and therefore its official land-use designation).

Hendrik feels that the next three years are about building a solid business platform from which the company can then move on to the next stage of growth. A strategic business plan has not yet been written but he has identified a number of actions that need to be taken if the business is to achieve these goals.

To increase revenue, Hendrik returns to the perennial challenge of how to get more visitors during the winter months. He believes that the key to answering this question is through the development of the proposed new haybarn, as this structure, with modern, flexible facilities but a natural look, would offer a wider range of activities to visitors at De Boerinn during the winter months. Besides enhanced indoor recreational activities, the company could also run educational classes on such themes as 'How To Maintain Your Family Pet', it could host small conferences or seminars for companies, and with some creative thinking it could identify a wide variety of other uses that have not yet been considered such as hosting birthday parties. The haybarn could also act as the connection between education, agriculture, and nature with displays located around the building on the different types of nature that can be found on the surrounding land. Indeed, the haybarn would effectively become the hub of the attractions for the visitor, giving them a reference point from which all activities are located.

Increasing the profitability is more of an internal organisational issue than a marketing issue. Hendrik and his managers are to develop a plan on where greater efficiencies can be found within its operations that would help the overall profitability of the business. Already staff are familiar with the need to maximise their productivity and to increase the visitor 'spend per person', but they also recognise that there is no end to the level of improvement that they can make to the business. For the management team, the improvement in the financial returns and customer satisfaction ratings following the in-depth review of the lunches highlighted what

can be achieved when approached with a positive mind. It is the principle of never ceasing to find new ways of improving one's product or service offering that Hendrik suggests will bring greater profitability to the business operations. One important market sector that is growing, but which has yet to be tapped in any targeted way by De Boerinn, is retirees. In principle, retired people have more time available to devote to leisure activities and there is a significant share of the market willing to pay a premium for quality, comfort and other value-added features of a product.

Since before joining the business on a permanent basis, Hendrik has been concerned with finding a greater balance in the way in which the land is used and in the way in which the business is run. He readily accepts the continued importance of recreation activities for the survival of the business but has a strong desire to develop the ecological side of the business into an important strategic element of De Boerinn's operations. As mentioned previously, he is looking to flood part of the land so as to create a broader range of wetland habitats and this should attract a greater variety of wildlife – especially waterbirds – to the farm. He acknowledges that he is not an authority in these matters but he will hire an expert to help plan out the most effective and efficient ways in which he can develop the ecological attractions of the business.

It will be a challenge to integrate expanding recreational activities with nature-watching in such a compact area, but Hendrik is convinced that it can be achieved, particularly if De Boerinn expands its landholding in the future. Perhaps key to his strategic thinking is integrating agriculture, recreation, nature, and education. While the farm cannot compete with specialised nature reserves for the 'hardcore' wildlife market, further diversification of the business to incorporate simple nature trails and environmental education will appeal to families and school groups.. However, these possibilities have yet to be explored in depth and no definite plans have been considered, though it is likely that Hendrik's future wife, with her educational background, will play an important role in developing the environmental education side of things. As part of the development of the land beyond its current use, Hendrik is also considering added a greater variety of animals so as to create a Visitors Farm where children can come to look at animals such as cows, horses, pigs, goats, sheep, and other farm animals. Given the proximity of the business to the four major cities of Holland, such an attraction could open the way for a whole new group of visitors. These children could also be placed on some kind of learning continuum where they begin with farm animals,

move on to birds, from there to local ecology, and finally to wider environmental issues. It would be a way for the business to build relationships with their visitors rather than seeing them as occasional customers. Indeed, this could even be extended to establishing a Nature Club which the children could join and educational classes could be given as part of the club's activities. The possibilities for De Boerinn in this area of activity are again wonderfully exciting but dependent upon local government making a decision on the water levels in the area.

One overarching decision that needs to be taken by the company is whether it markets itself primarily as 'cheap and cheerful' or as a 'quality' venue where clients are prepared to pay a premium for special or unique experiences and service. Currently it attempts to do both but the management team feel that they need to make a decision to focus on one business model or the other. The argument in favour of cheap and cheerful is that if prices rise too high, people may stop coming because they can get an equivalent product cheaper elsewhere, or simply go into the countryside for free. However, if the emphasis is on low cost, then profitability is going to be affected and given that visitor volume cannot be significantly expanded during the summer months, any attempts at economies of scale are limited. It is the general understanding of the management team, although without formal agreement, that if the haybarn and nature reserve are developed, then the additional facilities being offered to visitors will need to be reflected in a higher price. Management recognises that there are ways of generating visitor perception of value-for-money through offering family tickets, group discounts, and frequent visitor programmes, but feels that the central message should be that De Boerinn offers high quality services and therefore, as with any other product or service, one has to pay for that quality.

Conclusion

It would appear at first glance that the Hoogendoorn family farm has been in transition for almost thirty years now and that any transition should not take such a long time. But on deeper inspection, what it demonstrates is the ability of the family to constantly monitor the environment for threats and for opportunities, and to act when it is necessary. This ability to adapt is reflected in the manner in which the family succession has occurred over three generations while dramatic alterations have been made to the use of their land. It is this

capacity to deliver during times of transition that gives Hendrik such optimism in facing these latest challenges.