

A report presenting best practise  
"Regional organisation in a cooperative structure"  
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## **The Grain Republic**

a new benchmark for collaboration in the short food supply chain

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## **Introduction**

The Oldambt, a region in the east of Groningen, is traditionally the area where many grains are grown. The sea clay of the Dollard bay provides the ultimate conditions for growing a variety of grains. In recent decades, the number of grain species in the landscape has been drastically reduced. Ninety percent of all crops grown now are winter wheat and corn, used as animal feed. This creates a monotonous landscape, and causes biodiversity and soil degradation.

The modern grain varieties have been improved to increase the yield per ha as much as possible. For example: they have shorter roots, and can therefore be sown closer together. In that way they take more nutrients from the soil and keep the top layer only slightly aerated. This had to change. An initiative, started by farmers, has now grown into a large collective of farmers, producers and entrepreneurs, united in the cooperative The Grain Republic.



## The challenges

As a farmer, you can start growing the old grain varieties, but can you sell them afterwards? Who will buy these products and can you get a fair price for them? Are the seeds of the old varieties still available and can they withstand the current conditions? And can today's food producers still handle the old grain varieties?



## The solution

Farmers, producers/processors and entrepreneurs are united in one cooperative, at a beautiful historic location in Bad Nieuweschans: an old depot for trains. The farmers and producers work together on the innovation of new products to ensure an ideal match between grain and processing. This means a transition from growing by volume to growing by taste or certain characteristics. At the venue, a brewery, a micro malting plant, a distillery, a bakery, a pasta lab, an innovation kitchen, a store and various catering establishments are resurrected. In addition, various activities are emerging on farms of fellow farmers, such as a lagering barn, a milling plant, husking plant and malting plant.

By working closely with strategic partners, The Grain Republic can operate on a scale that is both applicable to the farmers and offers market participants sufficient confidence in continuity and professionalism. The strategic partners are to be found in production and marketing. At the venue in Bad Nieuweschans many traditional and new products are developed, while at the social work company *Afeer* in Winschoten, a food hall is built. Here products can also be made in large volumes, at market rates. With parties such as Hooghoudt (spirits) and the Vermaat Groep (caterer), the cultivation and products are attuned to the needs of the market and demand is guaranteed.

In addition, the Grain Republic works closely with education, both post-secondary vocational education (Terra and Noorderpoort) and universities of applied science (Stenden, Hanzehogeschool) with assignments, internships and research. Finally, the shop and own catering is important to provide for direct demand, but also to test products.



## **The results**

The Grain Republic brings together producers, processors and the market and ensures the best possible coordination between these parties.

The cooperation with the social work place Afeer also enables the Grain Republic to offer prices at market rates, enabling it to achieve high volumes.

Because of its size, the cooperative has proven to be a suitable partner for funders and larger market parties. In addition, there are several smaller producers who see the advantage of the collective and also joined the cooperative, such as brewer Eggens and Snackbar van de Toekomst, an innovation platform that brings parties together to develop a healthier and more varied snack offering (fastfood).

This led to the realization of a malting plant, bakery, distillery, pasta factory and a milling plant. A storage shed and innovation kitchen are in the making.

## **Do you want to learn more?**

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