

## IS THE VETERINARY PROFESSION READY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF VETERINARIANS?

By Joop Loomans DVM PhD, CEO Oculus Insights

There are those dream professions that children talk about when they first start secondary school. Didn't we all do that? Pilot, carpenter, doctor, police officer, firefighter, hairdresser, professional soccer player, veterinarian. How (un)realistic was this dream? For me personally it was quite clear I wanted to become a veterinarian as young boy growing up in the agricultural environment just outside of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. It has been a long and winding road, but I managed despite negative school advise, rather average school grades, tight quota for the vet school and despite the large number of applicants. But that was 50 years ago.

Last week, the Dutch Bureau for Statistical Research came with surprising new insights and figures about career choices after a longitudinal study of Dutch scholars starting in 1999/2000. They were asked then what would be their "dream job", and seventeen years later, when they were in their thirties, they were asked what their current profession was. On average, over different profession groups, one out of five was living their dream and had a job in the sector of their preference 17 years before.

<u>Male working in their "dream job" of 17 years ago</u>	<u>Female working in their "dream job" of 17 years ago</u>
46,0% Carpenter	41,3% Childcare
22,6% Car-mechanic	34,2% Teacher
20,2% Computer programmer	25,9% Personal health care in private homes
17,0% Architect	16,4% Hairdresser
16,9% Information Technology	10,4% Beautician
16,8% Cook	8,1% Lawyer
9,7% Police	6,1% Police
8,3% Military	6,0% Architect
6,5% Lawyer	2,4% Veterinarian
6,4% Pilot	1,6% Veterinary Technician

Source: NRC 050719/RvS/CBS

The biggest example where dreams did not come through was veterinary medicine and animal care. One out of ten girls at secondary school were dead serious about a future as veterinarian or veterinary technician. However, only 2,4% of this group becomes veterinarian and 1,6% veterinary technician.

Where does it go wrong? Why do these females not advance in larger numbers, where do they hit the wall? For sure there would not be room for all of them in this sector, and while there is a large female shift in the veterinary profession globally it seems that a lot wake up from this dream and fear reality might make it too hard for them to succeed. Furthermore, those who become veterinarians do not stay in practice for too long. A significant part of veterinarians leave practice in about 5 years after starting their career.

On the same day this research was published in a Dutch Newspaper (July 5<sup>th</sup> 2019) I was invited to join a preview of a new Dutch movie called Veearts Maaïke (Veterinarian Maaïke). In this professional movie, Maaïke van den Berg, a Dutch dairy veterinarian working in the northern province of Groningen, provides us insights in the lives of Dutch dairy farmers. Maaïke is working in a large group practice doing only dairy farms and supports these farms with her veterinary skills but also management and strategy, teaming up with the farmers to keep the animals happy and highly productive. Together they work on a sustainable and safe production of milk and meat. It shows the struggle of the farmers and vets with continuously changing rules and regulations regarding production, animal welfare, milk quota, phosphate quota, building new stables and one of the most important topics; antimicrobial resistance.

Maaïke is not an actor, she is a female veterinarian working hard to achieve her goals and create awareness amongst politicians, farmers and veterinarians that we must strive to make dairy farming in the Netherlands more sustainable and work on a very restricted use of antimicrobials. She is not only working in practice but also on the board of the Royal Dutch Veterinary Association and representing the European Veterinarians at the World Veterinary Association.

Where these two stories come together is at the end of the movie. Maaïke has decided to leave the practice and reconsider her future career as veterinarian. She is emotionally exhausted and feels very guilty to leave the team behind. However, already early in the movie her older colleagues predicted that this would happen given her clear signs of a bigger ambition she shows. Her colleagues understand the contribution she can make on another level for the profession, but she is feeling she is abandoning them and “her” farmers.

Veterinarian Maaïke is showing the new reality of the veterinary profession. Young and bright people who, unlike the previous generation, do not want to work in (one) practice forever. They need different kinds of challenges and will not “marry” to their job for the rest of their lives. As a profession we must realize we cannot stick to “business as usual”. It is important we give the right people a chance to study veterinary practice which means selecting better “at the gate”, from the large groups of people applying to veterinary school. But we must also change our practices and organizations accordingly. It is not about production but about outcome. Our customers and society want healthy and happy animals as pets, but also as the source of our food. We as veterinarians have an important role to play, in practice, in politics, in society, as leaders and as businesspeople and as the animal’s advocate. It is important to create places where (young) veterinary professionals can thrive and exceed us in our skills, knowledge and connections to society.

I surely hope there will be a translated version of Veterinarian Maaïke to share with our foreign colleagues, because it shows the important role of veterinarians in society but also the struggle of a young ambitious new generation of veterinarians that want to make a difference.

SELFMADE FILMS PRESENTEERT IN COPRODUCTIE MET KRO-NCRV  
EEN FILM VAN MUSCH & TINBERGEN

Een unieke  
inkijk in het echte  
boerenleven

# VEEARTS MAAIKE

SCENARIO: JAN MUSCH | REGISSEUR: TIJS TINBERGEN | MONTAGE: MAARTEN KOOPMAN | MUSIEK: ERIK LANGHOUT | KOSTUUMS: PETRO VAN LEEUWEN | HAAR: JAN JAAP KUIPER  
OPNAMELEIDERS: RINO JANSSEN | PRODUCENT: REINT VERKERK | VERLENERS: CINEMA DELICATESSEN | REDACTIE: ANJA CLOOSTERMAN, ANKE HELLEBRAND  
PROJEKTLEIDER: YOLANDE VAN DER BLIJ | VERLENERS: JELLE PETER DE RUITER | MONTAGE: NIEK KOPPEN EN JAN DE RUITER  
DEZE FILM IS TOT STAND GEGOKEN MET EEN BIJDRAGE VAN HET NEDERLANDS FILMTOEGESCHENDE, DE NETHERLANDS FILM PRODUCTION INCENTIVE EN COOP

VANAF 25 JULI IN DE FILMTHEATERS



© 2019 SELFMADE FILMS / KRO-NCRV

