



Interview Dirk Baets and Marc Sneyders  
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## “WE TAKE PEOPLE TO A REAL FARM”

*Bayer knows how to address not only agricultural challenges but also consumers' expectations. The Bayer ForwardFarms will play an important role in this process as a knowledge and dialog platform for sustainable agricultural practices. Hof ten Bosch near Brussels (Belgium) is one of these farms. In this interview, Marc Sneyders, Head of Marketing Bayer CropScience Belgium, and Dirk Baets, Bayer CropScience contact person for Hof ten Bosch, explain what sustainable agriculture is all about and how farmers and society can benefit from Bayer's new initiative.*

### **When did the idea of establishing a Bayer ForwardFarm here in Belgium first come up?**

Dirk Baets: “When discussing food security, there are certainly many aspects that need to be tackled, such as health, nutrition, productivity increases, and environmental protection. How can we get together to discuss solutions and make this happen? In 2011, we came up with the idea of creating a demonstration farm that showcases our commitment to sustainable agriculture in practice. Our aim was to develop and launch an initiative that helps farmers increase both their productivity and income. So first we started off with some smaller projects.”

Marc Sneyders: “That’s right. At that time we were also looking for a different way to communicate to stakeholders how we at Bayer support sustainable agriculture. We thought that going to a real farm would be the best way to show in practice what we are doing in the areas of research and development as well as product stewardship. And to show how farmers can use modern solutions and technologies to enhance food security while minimizing the environmental impact.”

### **Could you please describe these projects you mentioned in a little more detail?**

Dirk Baets: “Together with the farm owners we are now running several projects on soil, water, biodiversity, integrated pest management, and application technology. We have a lot of experience here on the farm, especially in soil erosion and run-off. As you know, protection of surface water and groundwater is one of the most important environmental issues at stake and therefore we have set up field trials in corn and potatoes.”

### **Let’s talk about the stakeholders. How has the response been so far?**

Marc Sneyders: “When we started the project we had no idea that there would be so much interest in what we were doing. We were able to reach out to a very diverse audience including authorities, researchers and academics, politics, universities, consumers, advisors, distributors, and by no means least, farmers – one of our most important stakeholders. Although we are still in the building-up phase the response has been really great so far and this year we will reach more than 1,000 visitors.”



**Farms like Hof ten Bosch are an important part of the Bayer ForwardFarming concept. What's behind this?**

Marc Sneyders: "The Bayer ForwardFarming initiative is part of our efforts to further promote the benefits of sustainable agriculture. Sustainable agriculture means that you take into account protection of the environment but also the economic benefits for the farm and social responsibility. What we are doing at this farm is combining these three elements. Bringing them together and making people understand how important a balance of these three elements is – that is what's really great about this project."

Dirk Baets: "In fact it helps us to raise awareness and public acceptance. So the main advantage of this project is that we can show the public a variety of projects here, and that we are able to take people to a real farm to explain what sustainable agriculture is all about. Namely that we need to freeze our environmental footprint and learn to farm the available land better."

**What is the difference between a Bayer ForwardFarm and a normal farm?**

Marc Sneyders: "Well, a Bayer ForwardFarm is a normal farm. For the owners, it is a real business; they operate this farm for profit. That's the great point. What we are doing here is implementing the latest technology, for example new application methods to further reduce the exposure of pollinators to crop protection products, and also sharing the latest insights into integrated pest management with farmers and advisors."

**Could you please tell us more about the benefits of running a Bayer ForwardFarm like Hof ten Bosch?**

Marc Sneyders: "The big benefit of working on a real farm is that we are able to demonstrate our solutions in real life, in agricultural practice. For example, integrated crop solutions combining high-value seeds, chemical and biological crop protection products, services, and proactive stewardship. And that we get a lot of direct input and positive feedback from the farmers. But the most important thing is that our first Bayer ForwardFarm in Belgium gives us a dialog platform to inform and educate others about sustainable agriculture and what Bayer CropScience is doing to realize this."

Dirk Baets: "For us a Bayer ForwardFarm like Hof ten Bosch is really important because we want to engage in dialog with our stakeholders and discuss future farming approaches. Many people still think that sustainable agriculture is only about protecting the environment. But as Marc mentioned before it is much more than that. It is a holistic approach and I think that, together, we can help farmers increase their revenue and enhance food security."

**What role do stewardship measures play at Hof ten Bosch?**

Dirk Baets: "Stewardship is an integral part of our activities. Stewardship measures ensure best practices and maximize the benefits from product use while minimizing potential risks to human health and the environment. They are very important because they are key requirements for society's acceptance and thus the sustainable and future viability of our business."

Marc Sneyders: "It is in fact fundamental because it deals with the proper use of crop protection products. It is important to instruct farmers how to use products responsibly and correctly to get the best results, but also so that there won't be any negative impact on their own health or the environment."



**Bayer ForwardFarming is also about partnerships. Who are the most important partners here in Belgium?**

Marc Sneyders: "Well the most important partners for us here in Belgium are Jan and Josse Peeters who own this farm, because they are always looking for new solutions that can improve their daily agricultural practice. Alongside that, we have also cooperation agreements with universities and research stations as well as with a local NGO, which monitors the presence of different bird species on the farm. Biodiversity is key for Jan and Josse. For example, easy-to-maintain nesting boxes for small birds and nesting places for larger predatory species such as falcons, buzzards, or owls are important tools that contribute to biodiversity."

Dirk Baets: "Another example are flowering strips and mixed hedges that provide continuous flowers with nectar and pollen during the whole season, creating a reservoir for beneficial insects and pollinators like honey and bumble bees. We are very happy to work together with the two brothers here at Hof ten Bosch, because this farm is very open to new ideas and innovations and to implementing sustainable agriculture practices that help to protect the environment."

**Are there any plans for the future, like installing even more Bayer ForwardFarms in Belgium?**

Marc Sneyders: "The Bayer ForwardFarming initiative for Belgium is now in place. In the future, we will look into the fresh produce area and have specific farms where we will also set up some projects in fruits and vegetables that are grown in greenhouses. So there won't be more Bayer ForwardFarms like Hof ten Bosch in Belgium. But there will be farms with which we will work together to develop and improve our solutions."

Dirk Baets: "In the future, we plan to offer hands-on farmer-to-farmer training in sustainable farming here on this farm. And we are looking forward to discussing sustainable agricultural practices with academics, regulators, farmer associations, and advisors. I firmly believe that we can and will make a sustainable difference in driving forward food security by joining forces to secure the right educational, political, and economic frameworks required to breathe life into sustainable agriculture."

For more information please visit: [www.forwardfarming.com](http://www.forwardfarming.com)