

# ROTTERDAM'S MULTI-STORIED AGRONOMIC DOME

— By Stephanie Roth —

*'Ecological agriculture' – the high-tech fundamentalist approach.*

In the world's largest harbour, that of Rotterdam, the ground is being prepared for the construction of a factory the like of which has never been seen before. If planners get their way, by 2010 an industrial complex will be raised between cargo storage terminals and refineries that will be beyond anything previously thought possible. The complex will be six floors high, 400 metres wide and one kilometre long. It will take half an hour just to walk around it.

But it is not the exterior that will make the so-called 'Deltapark' unique. The interior will become home to an automated production line for food, a 'saturation-machine' for Rotterdam's population. This is high-tech fundamentalism applied to agriculture, in perhaps the most extreme form seen to date. There are no fields, no farmers, no seasons, no soul. The producers will risk the highest possible vulnerability to pest infestations, but will reap the 'reward' of the maximum possible efficiency – at least as it is dishonestly calculated today.

Intensive animal husbandry alone will take on hair-raising proportions. Up to 300,000 hogs will live on some of the skyscraper's various floors, as well as 250,000 laying-hens and 1,000,000 battery chickens. Fish will swim in a giant aquarium in the cellar while myriad chirping crickets, crawling maggots and other rapidly multiplying insects will take over some of the space in between. Their role will be to provide the 'high quality protein' required to feed the hordes of animal machines. One floor will be completely dark, devoted to the cultivation of chicory and mushrooms, and two or three floors above this an ultra-modern conservatory will house hundreds of acres of lettuces, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and much more besides.

No pig or chicken will ever leave Deltapark alive – the requisite abattoirs and packaging units will all be in-house.

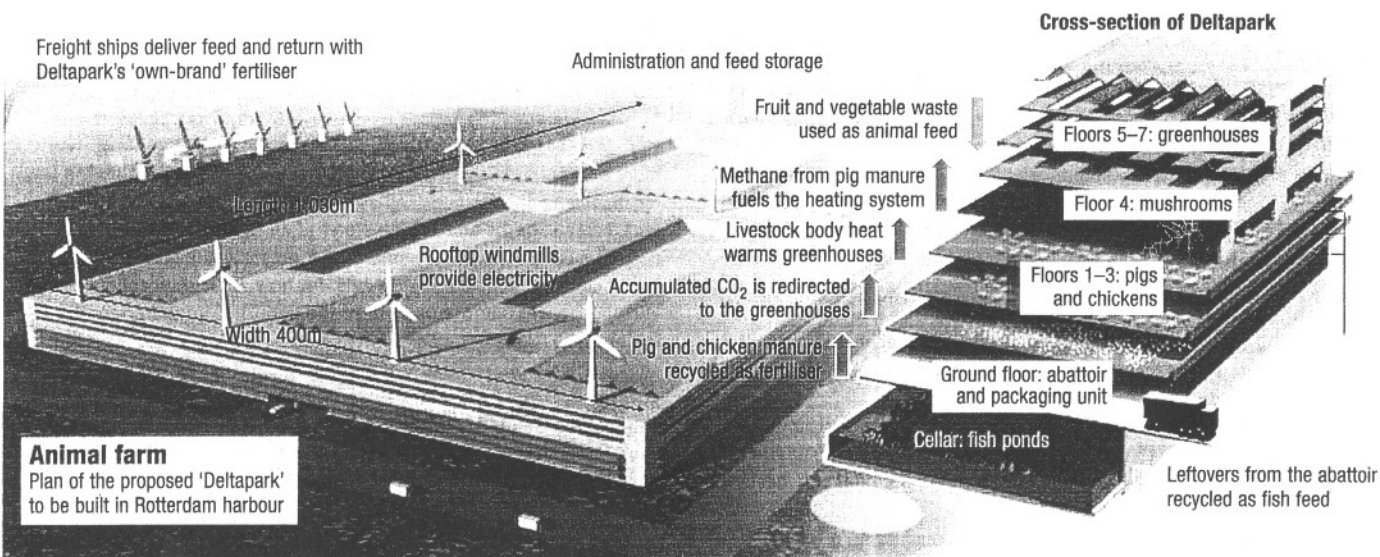
Animals will leave 'ready cut' and neatly packed according to supermarket prescribed instructions.

A giant 200 hectare 'agro-slot-machine' in the middle of an industrial estate? Have the Dutch gone mad? Mr Brinkhorst, the minister for agriculture is deadly serious. He wants to turn the Netherlands' agriculture on its head, to 'modernise' it. It is well known that whenever Brinkhorst opens his mouth, farmers squirm with fear. This man does little to conceal his fervent belief that farmers are no more than an economic and ecological burden. Brinkhorst believes that such 'agro-production-parks' will solve the enormous environmental problems of intensive agriculture. At Rotterdam's Deltapark the various production processes will be inter-linked and because this will all happen under one roof, a lot less energy and chemicals will be used. What's more, the warm carbon dioxide-rich air breathed out by the 30,000 hogs, 250,000 laying hens, and 1,000,000 battery chickens, will be filtered and channelled to the conservatory – where it will stimulate the growth of the crops. The colossal amount of animal manure produced will be used for generating biogas (methane) and as fertiliser. The planners claim 600,000 gigajoules of energy will be recycled and much of the carbon dioxide too. What could be more ecological?

Equally 'ecological' will be the wind turbines situated on all four corners of the roof, together with the biogas generators. A paradise on earth? The planners admit that 'many people will find this project abhorrent' but they 'believe it makes a lot of sense'. Indeed, Mexico, Hong Kong, Singapore and Lagos have all expressed interest in similar projects.

It's so disturbing that such 'abhorrent' ideas should be dressed up and sold as being an 'ecological' advantage.

*Stephanie Roth is News and Campaigns editor at The Ecologist.*



DER SPIEGEL