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Northern Dutch local farmer elites 17th - 19th century. Between nobles and peasants

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Two rural areas

5 parishes in Eastern
Marne (Groningen)
-> Coastal area

parish Oosterhesselen
(Drenthe)
-> Inland area



Central issues

- > Did the group that formed the local farmer elite change over time?
- > Are there important differences in the local farmer elites between the two regions studies?
- > Are there differences between the economic and political local elites?
- > WORK IN PROGRESS



Content of presentation

1. Introduction: Groningen (Eastern Marne) and Drenthe (Oosterhesselen): economic structure
2. Position of farmer elite in parish socio-economic structure
3. Economic power of local farmer elite
4. Political power of local farmer elite
5. Continuity of the local farmer elite
6. Conclusions



Characteristics

Groningen

- > Completely market-oriented agriculture
- > Sharp social division (numerous labourers and craftsmen)
- > Mostly tenants, getting secure property right c1770 (*beklemming*)
- > Land is mainly owned by institutions, nobles, patriciate
- > Relatively large impartible farms outside the villages
- > **FARMER SOCIETY**

Drenthe

- > Underdeveloped money economy
- > More egalitarian (even craftsmen were also smallholder peasants)
- > Nearly half partible freehold farms, others tenants -> continuous rise of smallholders
- > Land is mainly owned by (richest) local farmers
- > Farmsteads concentrated in the villages
- > **PEASANT SOCIETY**



Farm in Drenthe



Farm in Groningen
(Feddemaheerd)



Developments in Drenthe

- › Decreasing number of large freeholders from 1600-1850 (*verkeustering*)
- › Many farmers <-> few artisans, tradesmen, cottagers and labourers all using some land
- › *Markegenootschap* as regulating mechanism in agricultural system
- › Land control:
 - 1. Ownership
 - 2. Use of land





Developments in Groningen

- > Decreasing number of freeholders in 16th century
- > Limited number of farmers <-> many often landless artisans, tradesmen and labourers
- > Individualistic, commercial export-oriented agriculture. High specialisation of non-agricultural activities
- > Land control:
 - 1. ownership of land;
 - 2. use land for limited period (though tenants owned the farmstead themselves)





Land ownership in parishes Kloosterburen and Leens around 1600





Social structure Eastern Marne

- > 1. Nobles
- > 2. (partly) freeholders, landowning tenants, clergy and judges
- > 3. Medium-sized tenant farmers, merchants, millers
- > 4. well-to-do artisans, shopkeepers and small tenant farmers
- > 5. Indigent artisans, tradesmen, cottagers (few)
- > 6. Landless labourers



Position of farmer elite (Eastern Marne)

- > Wealthy farmers were second after nobles on the tax lists, next to only a few reverends and rich merchants. In 18th century Leens also a family of rich non-noble officials (Cleveringa, descending from 17th c. farmer)
- > From end of eighteenth century: size of farm becomes increasingly more important compared to owning freehold plots: the largest farmers start to dominate the tax lists
- > Differences in tax assessments between the few nobles and the richest farmers diminishes in size from end of eighteenth century onwards



Social Structure in Oosterhesselen

- > 1. Nobles
- > 2. Large freeholders
- > 3. Middle-sized freehold farmers and large tenants
- > 4. Middle-sized tenant farmers, well-to-do artisans (with employees) and
- > 5. Cottagers-artisans (no employees)
- > 6. Cottagers
- > 7. Landless labourers, poor people



Position of farmer elite (Oosterhesselen)

- > The local squire was always on top of the tax list, followed by the large freehold farmers
- > A few of the largest and richest freehold farmers (Kymmel and Oldenhuis) also held administrative positions
- > Not many changes over time in the position of the local farmer elite in the period 1650-1850: land owners with extensive properties remained dominating the tax lists until the end. Own farm size was of less importance



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De boerderij Ewer, Zuurdijk
Foto, 1958
7,3 x 10,4
Familie Zijlma, Zuurdijk-Leens

Economic power of elites

1. Freehold farming was scarce in Eastern Marne (exception 17th c. Huis Ewer), but not in Oosterhesselen
2. Most of farmer elite in Eastern Marne depended for part of the land on landowners; In Oosterhesselen farmer elite owned its land itself and often rented it out.
3. Income from: farming and (in Oosterhesselen) also partly from rents
4. Nevertheless Groningen farmers richer than Drenthe ones
5. Change in *Beklemrecht* (fixed rents!) increased economic power of farmers Eastern-Marne after 1770 considerably
6. Agricultural system (commons) favoured farmer elite in Oosterhesselen.
7. Rich farmers had also economic power locally as employers of labourers and customers of the mid. class



Political power in Oosterhesselen

- > Two levels:
 - 1. County (assembly/'landdag', court/'etstoel' and county government/'Ridderschap en eigenerfden')
 - 2. Local government (schulte, authorized representatives)
- > There was a small separate group of families within the local farmer elite who formed an administrative elite (*example: Tymen Kymmel, county council of Drenthe, and his urban wife*).
- > After 1800 also the other rich farmers more and more dominated local political matters, however, even before relatively many farmer families participated already in provincial political affairs
- > The local noble remained dominant in local political affairs until the 1830s, then a rich farmer became mayor

Number of times a large freeholder (eigenerfden) of the parish of Oosterhesselen was chosen as representative (landdagcomparant) in the provincial assembly, 1740-1794.

Number of times a person/family was chosen as representative	Persons		Families	
	Number of persons	total	Number of families	total
1	6	6	3	3
2	6	12	2	4
3	3	9	3	9
4	2	8		
5	1	5	1	5
6	2	12	1	6
7	-		2	14
8	-		-	
9	1	9	-	
20	-		1	20
Total	21	61	13	61



Political power in Eastern Marne

- > Two levels
 - 1. Provincial (rural assembly/'landdag' and government positions)
 - 2. Local (church, jurisdiction and water board: domanial rights in noble hands)
 - After 1800: provincial assembly and municipalities
- > Farmer elite as non-freeholders and partly religious dissenters limited representation on provincial level (largely depending on nobles). Dominance of noble and of non-noble patriciate lasted until 1848. Then change! (*example G. Zijlma: Member Dutch Parliament 1892*)
- > Nobles also dominated parish institutions until start 19th century. Local farmer elite came into power locally after 1800 (disappearance domanial rights), however, in Leens struggle farmers <-> last noble (mayor until 1839)

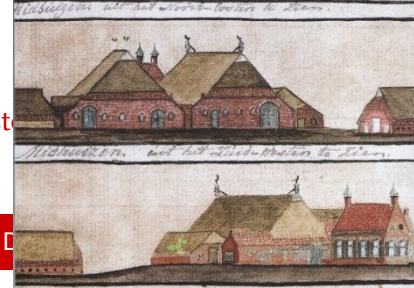


Continuity in the Eastern Marne



*Division of transfer of farms in the eastern Marne
(Groningen), 1740-1860 (percentages)*

	5-15 ha	15-30 ha	30-50 ha	50+ ha	Total
Son (married)	7%	8%	20%	23%	13%
Daughter (married)	7%	8%	9%	4%	7%
Unmarried child or children	1%	1%	3%	7%	2%
Other near relatives	7%	5%	5%	10%	6%
Total relatives	21%	22%	37%	43%	29%
Widow remarrying	12%	9%	12%	14%	12%
Widower remarrying	7%	15%	15%	13%	12%
Total remarriages	19%	24	27%	27%	24%
Unrelated new farmers (sold)	47%	44%	28%	23%	37%
Unrelated farmers (rented out)	2%	4%	3%	2%	3%
Empty / labourers / disappear.	11%	7%	5%	5%	7%
Non-family	60%	54%	36%	30%	47%
N	177	213	173	104	667



Low family continuity on farms in the Eastern Marne

- > Very large farmers remained more often in the family, but still those farms very frequently went to non-relatives
- > Very large farmers had a higher preference for succession in the direct male line, than in the female line (compared with other farmers)
- > Farms very often remained in the hands of a remarrying widow or widower
- > Consequence: long term family continuity on the farms was very low (Paping&Karel, 2011)

Male ancestors Renje Freerks Feddema, about 30rd highest tax-payer of the province in 1813

<i>1st generation</i>	<i>2nd generation</i>	<i>3rd generation</i>	<i>4th generation</i>	<i>5th generation</i>	<i>6th generation</i>	
<p>Renje Freeks Feddema, rich tenant, later freehold farmer in Hornhuizen with his first wife He married in 1807 Eetje Willems Boelens, thereafter very large tenant farmer and owner in Kloosterburen on Feddema-heerd</p>	<p>Freerk Renjes, tenant Kl'buren (Dijksterweg)</p>	<p>Renje Freerks, tenant Kl'buren (Westerkl'ster)</p>	<p>Freerk Willems, Landless publican? Kl'buren</p>	<p>Unknown</p>	<p>Rinje Tammes, freeholder Kl'buren</p>	
			<p>Remt Jeltes, (Ref.) tenant Hornhuizen</p>	<p>Schelte Halsema, tenant Kl'buren</p>		
			<p>Tonnis Jans, (Ref.) tenant Den Andel</p>	<p>Jelte Pieters tenant Hornhuizen</p>		<p>Unknown</p>
				<p>Jan Eibes, tenant Den Andel</p>		<p>Unknown</p>
		<p>?Jan Benes, tenant Den Andel</p>	<p>Unknown</p>	<p>Unknown</p>	<p>Unknown</p>	

Male ancestors Renje Freerks wife

<i>1st generation</i>	<i>2nd generation</i>	<i>3rd generation</i>	<i>4th generation</i>	<i>5th generation</i>	<i>6th generation</i>	
Eetje Willems Boelens , widow of Willem Reinders (Feddema), very large tenant farmer in Kloosterburen, remarries Renje Freerks Feddema	Willem Freerks , large tenant, later freeholder Kl'buren and Leens	Freerk Willems , large tenant Kl'buren	Willem Luurts , large tenant, land owner Kl'buren	Luurt Boelens , large tenant, landbouwer Kl'buren	Julle Boelens , large tenant, land owner Kl. Buren & Arien Jans , farmer in Friesland	
				Freerk NN , no land Kl'buren	Unknown	
				Schelte Halsema , tenant Kl'buren	Rinje Tammes , freeholder Kl'buren	Tamme Rienjes , large tenant Zuurdijk & Jacob Halsema , freeholder Kl'buren
			Unknown			
			Jan Tjarks , shoemaker, later tenant Garmerwolde	Tjark Jans , shoemaker Aduard	Jan NN Ondewierum	Unknown
					Jan Tonnis , shoemaker Aduard	Tonnis NN Groningen & Michiel NN Mensingeweer
			Alje Jans (Ref.) tenant Garmerwolde	Jan Sibolts (Ref.), tenant Garmerwolde	Sibolt Allies (Ref.) tenant Garmerwolde	
				Cornelis Willems (R.C.) tenant Garnwerd	Unknown	



Continuity within the local farmer elite

- › Rather high turnover under the richest farmers over two centuries. Reasons: high social mobility (bankruptcies), high geographical mobility and frequent marriages with partners from families with slightly lesser economic positions
- › The local farmer elite was not a completely closed group. However, no family ties with the nobles, and only a few relations (Toringa) with reverends and other families near to the political active non-noble patriciate (Cleveringa)
- › Only thin family lines between 16th/early 17th century freehold elite and rich farmers



Continuity in the parish of Oosterhesselen



Division of transfer of farms in Oosterhesselen (Drenthe), 1742-1860 (percentages).

	1-7 ha	8-13 ha	14-18 ha	19+ ha	Unknown	Total
Sons	16%	28%	24%	27%	25%	21%
Daughters	3%	5%	5%	6%	13%	5%
Other relatives	3%	11%	3%	17%	0%	7%
Total Relatives		22%	32%	50%	28%	33%
Widow Remarrying	2%	1%	0%	2%	13%	2%
Non-family	70%	53%	62%	45%	50%	61%
Unknown	6%	2%	5%	3%	0%	4%
N	288	173	37	64	8	570



On first sight, low family continuity on farms in Oosterhesselen

- > However:
 - 1. family continuity (sons!) was larger on the largest farms;
 - 2. large share of non-relatives was mostly caused by high turnover of tenant-farms (about half the farmsteads).
- > Consequence: family continuity on the large freehold farms was very high, even more when taking into account that freehold families rented farms out temporarily, to return later
- > In Drenthe weak position of daughters and widows: male line was preferred in succession



Number of years a family (male descendants) belonged to the wealthiest group in Oosterhesselen 1654-1849

category	families
0-50 year	32
50-100 year	3
100-150 year	7
150+ years	4
	46

Looking per period of 50 years, a group of eleven families in the male line with a continuity of over 100 years, comprised about 50% of the local farmer elite (taking into account the richest 19-20 households)

-> Long term continuity in local farmer elite in direct male line was rather high



Did the group that formed the elite changed?

- › In Drenthe the group of wealthiest families changed continuously, however at least half the members of this local elite belonged for at least three generations to the (economic) top.
- › In Eastern Marne the turnover within the local group of wealthy farmers seemed to have been much higher, certainly in the direct male line. Only limited family-ties between the wealthiest in 1691 and those from 1770 onwards. Perhaps after 1770 with the rise of a new farmer elite continuity increased?



Are there remarkable differences between Eastern Marne and Oosterhesselen?

Eastern Marne

- Rather low continuity
- Local power of farmer elite grew only after 1800
- Farmer elite depended on nobles until c1780
- Local farmer elite = long time more a 'sub elite'
- After Middle Ages a dynamic development in power relations
- Higher social mobility

Oosterhesselen

- Relatively more continuity
- Local power of farmer elite continues after 1600
- Farmer elite independent from noble
- Local farmer elite = a proper elite
- Relatively static power relations after Middle Ages
- Lower social mobility



Finally

- › Continuity and family connections within the local farmer elites should not be overestimated
- › Both in Drenthe and Groningen villages there are traces of the existence in the 18th and early 19th century of a rather closed non-local and non-noble political and economic elite with only loose relations with proper rich farmers (Kymmel and Cleveringa)
- › A large farm and wealthy family is no absolute guarantee for a sustained position within the elite over the generations, especially not in the commercial coastal region in the Netherlands