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

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Dr. Richard Paping
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 (*verkeuterings*)
- 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: landowners with extensive properties remained dominating the tax lists until the end. Own farm size was of less importance.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of times a person/family was chosen as representative</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th></th>
<th>Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of persons</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>Number of families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>5-15 ha</th>
<th>15-30 ha</th>
<th>30-50 ha</th>
<th>50+ ha</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Son (married)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter (married)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried child or children</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other near relatives</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total relatives</strong></td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow remarrying</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widower remarrying</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total remarriages</strong></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated new farmers (sold)</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated farmers (rented out)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty / labourers / disappear.</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-family</strong></td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st generation</th>
<th>2nd generation</th>
<th>3rd generation</th>
<th>4th generation</th>
<th>5th generation</th>
<th>6th generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Freerk Renjes, tenant Kl’buren (Dijksterweg)</td>
<td>Renje Freerks, tenant Kl’buren (Westerkl’ster)</td>
<td>Freerk Willems, Landless publican? Kl’buren</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Rinje Tammes, freeholder Kl’buren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Remt Jeltes, (Ref.) tenant Hornhuizen</td>
<td>Jelte Pieters tenant Hornhuizen</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tonnis Jans, (Ref.) tenant Den Andel</td>
<td>Jan Eibes, tenant Den Andel</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jan Benes, tenant Den Andel</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; generation</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; generation</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; generation</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; generation</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; generation</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eetje Willems Boelens, widow of Willem Reinders (Fedema), very large tenant farmer in Kloosterburen, remarries Renje Freerks Feddema</td>
<td>Willem Freerks, large tenant, later freeholder Kl’buren and Leens</td>
<td>Freerk Willems, large tenant Kl’buren</td>
<td>Willem Luurts, large tenant land owner Kl’buren</td>
<td>Luurt Boelens, large tenant, landbouwer Kl’buren</td>
<td>Freerk NN, no land Kl’buren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Tjarks, shoemaker, later tenant Garmerwolde</td>
<td>Schelte Halsema, tenant Kl’buren</td>
<td>Tjark Jans, shoemaker Aduard</td>
<td>Rinje Tammes, freeholder Kl’buren</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Tamme Rienjes, large tenant Zuurdijk &amp; Jacob Halsema, freeholder Kl’buren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alje Jans (Ref.), tenant Garmerwolde</td>
<td>Jan Sibolts (Ref.), tenant Garmerwolde</td>
<td>Cornelis Willems (R.C.), tenant Garnwerd</td>
<td>Sibolt Allies (Ref.) tenant Garmerwolde</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 (Torringa) 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).

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>category</th>
<th>families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-50 year</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-100 year</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-150 year</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150+ years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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