



Jan Schilder was the first aAa analyzer in the Netherlands. Together with Mary Weeks Dransfield, daughter of founder Bill Weeks, he watches a Dutch dairy heard.



In January 1989 it was the first time that an aAa analyzer visited the Netherlands. Phil Hasheider explains this audience the basics of the system. Jan Schilder is on the photo on the upper left.

# 'The only reason the system still exists is the farmer'

## 25 years of aAa in the Netherlands

The Triple-A farmers club recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of the aAa mating system in the Netherlands. After a turbulent and extremely difficult initial period, the independent analysis method finally got off the ground and today it is flourishing as never before. Together with the American, Mary Weeks, analyst Jan Schilder looks back.

At a young age, Jan Schilder (54) from Heerhugowaard always thought he would be a farmer in the future. But when he finished school, his father was still young and they only milked 40 cows, so there was not enough work for 2 people. Jan worked from an early age for a big rose grower and could have stayed there indefinitely. "I had a good job in the greenhouse, but the cows remained in my head," Schilder says. When A.I. Nieuw Leven

held a presentation in Akersloot in 1985, he decided to go there. "I fell into conversation with the owners, Ate Kuipers and Zeger van Pelt, and was surprised when they later contacted me. They saw something in me as a seller and I'm still grateful for them."

### Semen salesman

Jan Schilder describes himself as very shy in

that period, but he decided to start as a semen salesman anyway. He had a good relationship with his employers and traveled with them through the Netherlands and other countries. Once he went with a breeders study group to the dairy farm of Hidde Osinga in Nij Beets, Netherlands. Osinga talked enthusiastically about the aAa system and the founder, Bill Weeks. Osinga had previously been a farmer in America and knew Weeks personally.

During the same period, in 1988, Meint Posthumus wrote an article on Triple-A in *Veeteelt*. The now-deceased Posthumus had done school practicals in California and became enthusiastic about the mating system. "A.I. Nieuw Leven marketed semen from Trans World Genetics and had the idea to fly over an aAa analyzer from the United States and let him do some presentations," Schilder says. "Phil Hasheider came and I offered to take him around. I don't know why, as I did not speak English, but I think it was because I lived close to the airport."

### A lot of interest

With a folder of A.I. Nieuw Leven and a photo of the red and white Triple Threat daughter Winfarm TT Iris in his hand - he never forgot the name - Jan Schilder waited for Phil Hasheider at the airport. "I hoped Phil would not say too much," Jan laughs. "We also did not know if there was any interest. But that certainly turned out to be the case. A few months later, Hasheider again came to the Netherlands to do more presentations, analyzing cows and also bulls."

After Schilder learned the principles of aAa from Phil Hasheider and Jim Sarbacker, he met Bill Weeks at the World Dairy Expo in 1989. "I was already working to improve my English, but I still had difficulties with the aAa Explanation Page. After the Expo, Weeks allowed me to analyze cows, but I felt that I was too inexperienced. When I told him that I did not know enough yet, Weeks responded that it would go better on the farms than before I came." Despite Schilder's inexperience, the farmers did get better results because extreme matings were avoided.

### Independent

Phil Hasheider advised Jan that in order to keep it clean, he as aAa analyzer not should sell semen. His colleague, Jim Sarbacker, said the same: "If you want to do it well, you should be independent." Schilder then decided to terminate his employment and started as an independent aAa analyzer. "It was not an easy decision because the number of clients was still small and not enough to

earn an income from. I followed my heart and my feelings," he now declares.

"Moreover, I was naïve." Meanwhile, Schilder's former employer had acquired the rights to the aAa trademark. When Schilder started to visit farmers, he immediately had a lawsuit brought against him. Schilder describes the beginning as very difficult, but he still managed to get through it. He was supported by his family and by the farmers where he visited. His first client was the farm of Ab en Sietske de Groot from Lelystad. The now-deceased Ab de Groot was at that time already incurably ill, but he decided to use his energy to support Schilder by creating the Triple-A farmers club. The club was an association of farmers who use the aAa system, who hoped that the independent aAa analysis in the Netherlands would finally get off the ground.

### Second analyzer

"There was a lot of talking about Triple-A, and because the system was new in the Netherlands there was a lot of demand for presentations. I did one or two presentations a week and also got one or two new addresses to analyze from these presentations." So Schilder was able to build a living as an aAa analyzer. "The number of users increased at first, then leveled off after 3 years, but after that it increased rapidly again. In the beginning there were no bulls analyzed, after A.I. East and A.I. South asked about it in 1993. That was in order to gain a market share in the United States." The AI bulls of A.I. Samen and A.I. Kampen were already analyzed.

Jan Schilder traveled a lot through the Netherlands and also in other countries, and at one time he had more customers than he could handle. Maurice Kaul, of Limburg, was friends with Wim and Fien Leenders from Nederweert-Eind, who were aAa users from the beginning, and Kaul worked for the import organization Caneda Holstein owned by Wijnand Pon. When Pon started his own breeding program in 1997, Kaul decided to start on his own as the second aAa analyzer in the Netherlands.

### Expansion

By the end of the nineties, the European

bull analyzing trips were starting, and Jan Schilder with his American colleague James Sarbacker visited the European bull studs twice a year. Because the demand for aAa numbers continued to grow, there arose at the beginning of the new millennium space for a third analyzer. "The first time I analyzed cows for John de Vries and Martie Hoogeveen, Marcel Verboom from Boijl was also present. He was interested and joined Maurice and me three years later."

Over the past decade more and more European analyzers started. "Joost van der Horst worked for Aldert van der Spek, aAa users from the beginning who immigrated to Denmark in the nineties. Van der Horst has analyzed since then in Denmark and has started analyzing also in Sweden, a country where there is a lot of interest in the system," Schilder says. "Analyzers also started in Belgium, France, Italy and Ireland after they learned about aAa from the Dutch analyzers. Verboom, for example, pioneered in Ireland and the Island of Jersey and now also in England."

### Mary Weeks

In the Netherlands there are now four analyzers. The most recent one who joined is Jurjen Groenveld from Wommels. "When Jurjen came from school he thought he would start immediately as an analyzer. But I advised him do something else first, because he wasn't ready for it yet," Schilder says. "A couple years later he became approved and since then he has analyzed in and outside the country." When the official approval of analyzers is discussed, Mary Weeks Dransfield comes into the conversation. She is the youngest daughter of aAa founder Bill Weeks and, together with her husband Dave Dransfield, owns the aAa trademark. Mary came to the Netherlands especially to celebrate the 25th anniversary of aAa and to tell at the annual meeting of the Triple-A farmers club about her father.

### Growing up with aAa

The aAa system already existed for ten years when Mary was born, so she literally grew up with it. When she was 18 years old and did not know yet what she wanted to study, ▶

Europe nowadays counts nine aAa analyzers, with at the back Jan Schilder (Holland) and Marc Cranshof (Belgium), in the middle from left to right Jurjen Groenveld (Holland), Maurice Kaul (Holland), Lory O'Hanlon (Ireland) and Marcel Verboom (Holland) and in the front from left to right Frank Laviec (France), Daniele Valcavi (Italy) and Joost van der Horst (Denmark).



her father encouraged her to analyze cows. "My father sent me to a farmer who wanted his cows analyzed about 500 km away from home. I had to find new customers in that area to earn money for my trip back home." She succeeded but she says she wasn't ready for it at that time. "The human side was really difficult for an 18 year old," says Weeks, who later worked as a nurse for almost 30 years. "Most of the analyzers are around 30 years old when they start. You have to be grown up, know what is going on and have life experience. All analyzers are self-employed. You must not only be technically proficient, but also organize your own business. You must be motivated and be able to deal with people."

### Acceptance

"A lot of people don't want to learn from what people who are more experienced tell them," Schilder says. "You have to accept that there is always more to learn, you can always achieve a higher level and learn more, not thinking that you already know everything." "My father also lived that way," adds Mary Weeks. "Nobody knows everything and he was willing to learn his whole life." In Schilder's experience, often there is not an attitude of learning in the genetics industry. "Many people do not ask why a bull or cow is good. They do not look back at what their

parents were. Many influential bulls from the past do not have well-known pedigrees and do not have a logical background, at least not according to the conventional genetic theories. Elevation's father was the round Tidy Burke Elevation, a bull who stood on 3 legs. And for the mother of Ivanhoe, Weeks had another bull in mind than the herdsman of the herd, not because he knew Ivanhoe would be born, but because his father added something that his mother needed. That's what it is all about, not summing, but adding."

### Knowledge disappeared

"More than one hundred years ago they looked at all the parts of a cow," Schilder goes on. "Knowledge from that time has unfortunately disappeared. Breeding decisions often are done by numbers. There are fewer and fewer people who know what a good cow should look like, just because no one ever taught them. I did a presentation for genetics and veterinary students who were almost ready to graduate in Evora, Portugal. One of the attendees said no one ever told them how a cow functions." Schilder is disturbed to note that sometimes the appearance of the bull is unimportant. "People point to the old Friesian bulls who were selected purely on their appearance and their daughters gave way less milk. In those days, people admired really fat Friesian

bulls who looked like beef cattle and whose daughters gave no milk. Nowadays we admire animals that look like giraffes. In fact, nothing has changed," Schilder exaggerates to make his point. "The fat round cow of that time was not functional and needed more sharp qualities to function well, while these days there are more round qualities needed to function well. Because it is all about the ability to function well, not what people think about a cow. Bill taught us that it is important to see that all parts of a cow work together. All the body parts form a whole and can never function separately from each other."

### Passion

"Bill Weeks started aAa because of the simple reason that cows were not as good as they could be," Schilder says. "That is still the motivation of all analyzers: analyzing cows because they can be better, no other reason. The only reason that the system still exists is the farmer. He or she is seeing the results and makes the decision to analyze their cows." "Because farmers contact the analyzers themselves, it creates a positive atmosphere. When you fly to New Zealand and there is one really enthusiastic farmer, that alone makes the long trip worth it," says Schilder, who recently analyzed on the other side of the world. "The passion and positive energy keep you going." ■

Jan Schilder with Mary Weeks Dransfield and her husband Dave Dransfield, the owners of the aAa trademark in America.

