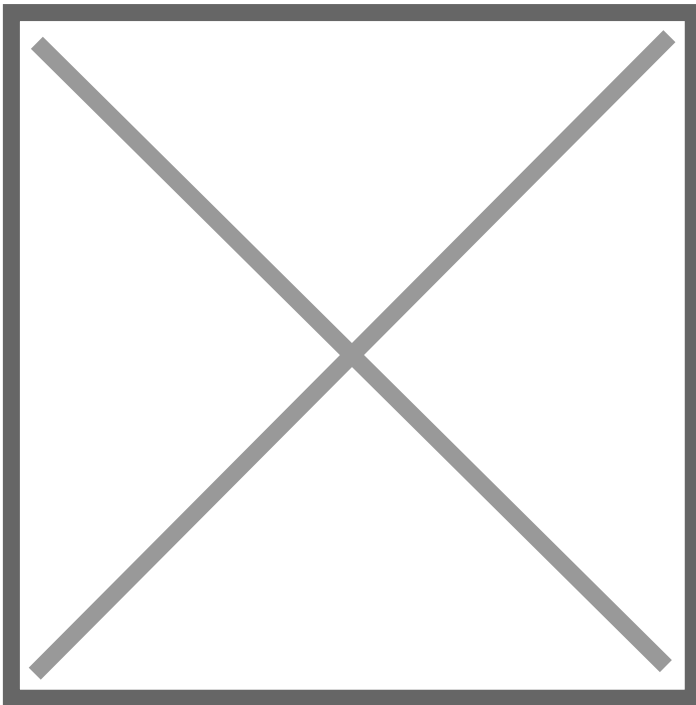


Rijk Zwaan opens advanced Open-Field Research Hub to accelerate next-generation crop innovation

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Rijk Zwaan has strengthened its global research and breeding capabilities with the official opening of its Trial Centre Open Field in the Netherlands, a state-of-the-art facility designed to advance innovation in open-field vegetable production and support the development of next-generation crop varieties.

The new centre represents a strategic investment in applied research, precision breeding, and customer collaboration at a time when open-field agriculture is undergoing profound transformation. Rising mechanisation, evolving disease pressures, changing climatic conditions, and the emergence of new production systems are reshaping grower requirements and creating demand for increasingly specialised crop varieties.

Located in one of Europe's leading horticultural innovation ecosystems, the Trial Centre Open Field will serve as Rijk Zwaan's principal platform for testing, evaluating, and demonstrating open-field crop varieties to growers, retailers, and value-chain partners from around the world.

The facility supports research across 20 open-field crops, including lettuce, brassicas, spinach, and chicory, and integrates advanced technologies with practical field-based experimentation. Among its standout features are a digital phenotyping laboratory, which enables precise data-driven assessment of plant characteristics, and a dedicated darkroom for chicory trials, allowing researchers to evaluate crop performance under highly controlled conditions. Additional trial zones focus on specialised activities such as asparagus breeding and seed production.

As agriculture increasingly embraces digital technologies, Rijk Zwaan sees the integration of advanced analytics with traditional breeding expertise as critical to accelerating innovation.

"Open-field cultivation is evolving rapidly, and growers face increasingly complex challenges," said Marco van Leeuwen, Managing Director at Rijk Zwaan. "By combining practical research with data-driven techniques such as digital phenotyping, we can evaluate varieties faster and with greater precision. Together with growers and partners, we translate those insights into varieties that create tangible value in the field."

Beyond research, the facility is designed as a global showcase for the company's open-field portfolio. Customers and industry stakeholders will have opportunities to explore new varieties, cultivation approaches, and agronomic insights through demonstrations and knowledge-sharing events. The company's annual autumn demonstration programme, scheduled for September, is expected to become a flagship event at the new site.

The opening reflects Rijk Zwaan's broader strategy of investing in specialised research and demonstration infrastructure that bridges scientific innovation with commercial agriculture. Over recent years, the company has expanded its network of advanced trial centres, including the Trial Centre Hydroponics in Dinteloord, focused on water-based lettuce production systems, and the Trial Centre High Tech in De Lier, which showcases greenhouse-grown cucumbers, tomatoes, and peppers under highly controlled conditions.

The Trial Centre Open Field has been operational since early May and was formally inaugurated on 11 June in the presence of project partners and company representatives.

For Tom Hollemans, Station Manager for Open Field Crops, the opening marks the culmination of years of planning and collaboration.

"It is immensely rewarding to see this facility become a reality," he said. "The project reflects the commitment, expertise, and collaboration of everyone involved, and it provides a strong foundation for future innovation in open-field crop development."

The launch also signals a transition for Rijk Zwaan's long-standing open-field demonstration site in Fijnaart, which served the company for more than 25 years. The site will now be repurposed for breeding activities and field trials, allowing the company to further strengthen its research pipeline.

As global agriculture faces mounting pressures from climate variability, resource constraints, and evolving consumer demands, Rijk Zwaan's newest investment underscores the growing importance of research-driven breeding programmes. By combining cutting-edge technology, practical agronomy, and close collaboration with growers, the company aims to accelerate the development of resilient, productive, and market-oriented varieties capable of meeting the future needs of open-field agriculture.