The Chancellor of Ghent University has the honour of inviting you to attend the public defense of the doctoral dissertation of

Sophie de Graaf

Title of the doctoral dissertation:

Assessment, market potential and margins of improved dairy cattle welfare

The public defence will take place on 17 February 2017 at 15:00 in the Vergaderzaal 3.1 Edgar Blancquaert, at Het Pand, Onderbergen 1, 9000 Ghent.

There will be a contiguous reception to which you are heartily invited.

Please confirm your attendance before 15 February 2017 to sophiedegraaf@gmail.com

Abstract of the doctoral research

This doctoral dissertation contains a multidisciplinary approach exploring the possible introduction of a Welfare Assurance Scheme (WAS) for dairy cattle in Flanders, Belgium, with added value for the animals, consumers and farmers. Research questions relate to 1) credible, implementable and cost-efficient welfare assessment, and to the existence of 2) a consumer market for animal-friendly milk and 3) a positive relationship between animal welfare and farm performance. Results show that the integrated herd welfare scores from an existing welfare assessment protocol (the Welfare Quality® protocol) do not match well with the opinions of trained users of this protocol. Therefore, an alternative dairy herd welfare assessment protocol is developed, which is transparent, simple, multidimensional, discriminative, and correlates with expert opinion. A highly heterogeneous consumer market for animal-friendly milk was identified in Flanders, for which product differentiation is a promising strategy. Dairy cattle health, access to pasture and perceived advantages of such milk match well with the opinions of trained users of this protocol. Therefore, an alternative dairy herd welfare assessment protocol is developed, which is transparent, simple, multidimensional, discriminative, and correlates with expert opinion. A highly heterogeneous consumer market for animal-friendly milk was identified in Flanders, for which product differentiation is a promising strategy. Dairy cattle health, access to pasture and perceived advantages of such milk match well with the opinions of trained users of this protocol.

Brief Curriculum Vitae

Sophie de Graaf was born on May 27th, 1988 in Voorburg, the Netherlands.

After earning her bachelor's degree in animal management at Hogeschool van Hall Larenstein in 2005, she began the Master study 'Animal Sciences' at Wageningen University. In 2012, she earned two master's degrees: one at Wageningen University and on at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU).

In 2012, she began her doctoral studies at ILVO and Ghent University. From 2013 to 2014, Sophie worked on the European Food and Safety Authority (EFSA) project 'Use of animal based measures for the assessment of dairy cow welfare'.

Sophie de Graaf is the author or co-author of several scientific publications and reports. She was a speaker at several national and international conferences. In addition, she developed and taught classes for Veterinary Medicine students and for postgraduate training on assessing animal welfare.