UNIVERSITY FUND
WAGENINGEN



Gerrit Grijns Fund

For tomorrow's health

creating a difference together



Healthy people on a healthy planet

Nutrition touches everything: our health, wellbeing, economy, biodiversity, and the climate. Yet crucial questions remain unanswered. How does nutrition truly help people live healthier lives? How can we better tailor dietary advice to different target groups? And how can we ensure that the shift to more plant-based proteins is not only sustainable but also delivers health benefits and contributes to a circular, economically viable food system?

Wageningen University & Research (WUR) is highly committed to tackling these urgent challenges. In doing so, we are inspired by pioneer and Wageningen professor Gerrit Grijns – co-discoverer of vitamin B1 and founder of modern nutritional science. His legacy lives on through the Gerrit Grijns Fund – an ambitious thematic fund that promotes groundbreaking research, education and entrepreneurship at the interface of nutrition, food and health.

Contributing to the Gerrit Grijns Fund is a unique opportunity to make a lasting impact on nutrition, health, and the future of our planet.

Gerrit Grijns Fund:

enabling breakthrough discoveries and innovations

Fundamental research and bold ideas often struggle to access conventional funding – even though it is precisely these projects that can achieve major breakthroughs in science and society. The Gerrit Grijns Fund aims to change this.

We stimulate the development and exchange of new knowledge and foster strong scientific networks, giving innovators the space they need to make an impact. That's why we focus intensively on attracting philanthropic contributions – together we can bring nutritional science forward and accelerate societal transformation.

Our ambition: To mobilise at least €2 million over four years to sow innovative ideas and support groundbreaking initiatives – with the goal of nurturing world-class solutions. Specifically, the Gerrit Grijns Fund aims to support:

1

Talent development

Scholarships for MSc students, PhD candidates and postdocs. International exchange programmes and collaborations in innovative fields such as data science for food & health, and interdisciplinary nutrition research. We also support extra-curricular programmes such as student competitions to inspire and connect young talent. The focus lies on Indonesia, where Grijns' vitamin research took place.

2

Interdisciplinary consortia

We aim to improve collaboration between research groups within WUR, with businesses and 'civil society'. We focus on shared societal issues, such as improving plant-based meat analogues by evaluating their effects on human health, mapping differences in the absorption of various dietary proteins in the elderly, and predicting nutritional intake using computer models.

3

International knowledge exchange and networking

We support the organisation of symposia, lectures and other exchange formats which bring scientists, policymakers, and entrepreneurs together to foster new connections in the fields of nutrition, food, and health.

4

New research initiatives on lifestyle, health and immune systems

From studying the health effects of plant-based diets during vulnerable life stages (infants, children, adolescents, pregnant women, and the elderly), to innovative experimental research into nutrition and the immune system. We also stimulate interdisciplinary research into accelerating the transition to a healthy and sustainable diet – both in high- and low-income countries, including Indonesia.

5

Pre-incubation of innovative entrepreneurship

We support student teams and young researchers in developing novel, market-oriented solutions that generate social impact. For example, an AI tool that automates data analysis on chewing, biting, and swallowing measured by consumers. This also enables food companies to make data-driven decisions in consumer testing, thereby improving product development.

6

Science communication and inspiration

We keep Gerrit Grijns' legacy alive as a source of inspiration for new generations of scientists, strengthening the connection between science and society. For example by supporting the food education programme Taste Lessons, developed by WUR.



Why now?

Today's nutrition and health challenges demand immediate action. At the same time, the transition to a more sustainable food system requires broad cooperation, time, and financial support. Wageningen has the knowledge, the networks, and the momentum to accelerate change – what is still needed is sufficient funding, which is exactly where your support can make a difference.

Gerrit Grijns:
father of nutritional science

Gerrit Grijns (Leerdam, 28 May 1865 – Utrecht, 11 November 1944) was Professor of Animal Physiology in Wageningen from 1921 until his retirement in 1935. His contribution to the discovery of vitamins earned him a key place in scientific history.

In 1896, Grijns was appointed to continue research at the Medical Laboratory in Batavia, succeeding Christiaan Eijkman as head of the laboratory. For three years, he studied nutrition in chickens on the laboratory grounds, who suffered from polyneuritis, a sign of the beriberi disease. He sought to identify an unknown substance in unpolished rice that related to this disease.

He concluded that brown rice contained an essential, previously unknown substance for the metabolism of the nervous system. Grijns proposed that polyneuritis was not caused by something in white rice (e.g., bacteria or toxins), but by the absence of a protective factor removed during polishing.
He introduced the term 'partial hunger', demonstrating the existence of deficiency diseases. The protective substance Grijns described – now known as vitamin B1 – was later isolated in pure form by Barend Jansen and Willem Donath. The term "vitamin" was by then widely adopted.

In 1921, Grijns was appointed Professor of Animal Physiology in Wageningen. There, his research focused on the link between nutrition, fertility, and milk production in cows. His work again touched on vitamin research – he helped establish the role of vitamin E in reproduction. Six doctoral theses were completed under his supervision.

In 1929–1930, he served as Rector Magnificus.

Grijns was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1926 and 1927 for his contribution to vitamin research. The prize later went to Christiaan Eijkman and Frederick Gowland-Hopkins in 1929.

Five years after leaving Wageningen, he was awarded the prestigious Swammerdam Medal – presented once every ten years by the Society for the Advancement of Natural, Health, and Medical Sciences, affiliated with the University of Amsterdam. The inscription hailed Grijns as "the founder and father of modern nutritional science."



Gerrit Grijns
28 May 1865 – 11 November 1944
Wageningen's greatest scientist



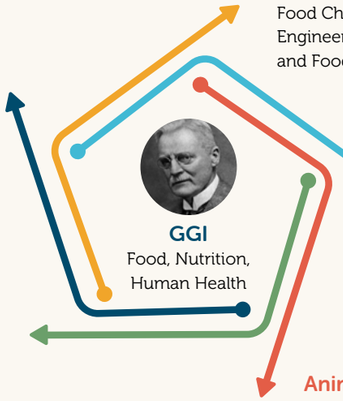
Working together on knowledge and innovations

for public health

WUR is a world leader in solving complex nutrition and health issues. With extensive expertise in nutrition, health, and the production of high-quality, tasty and healthy food, WUR develops impactful insights and innovations. This includes the Gerrit Grijns Initiative, a cross-disciplinary collaboration involving no fewer than 23 academic chair groups. WUR is a global leader in solving complex nutrition and health challenges.

Nutrition Sciences
Global Nutrition, Nutrition and Disease, Nutrition Biology, Nutrition, Metabolism and Genomics, and Sensory Science and Eating Behaviour.

Food Sciences
Food Chemistry, Food Microbiology, Food Process Engineering, Physics and Physical Chemistry of Foods and Food Quality and Design.



Biomolecular Sciences
Microbiology, Toxicology and Systems and Synthetic Biology

Social Sciences
Consumption & Healthy Lifestyle, Health and Society, Knowledge, Technology & Innovation, Strategic Communication, Operations Research & Logistics, Marketing & Consumer Behaviour.

Animal Sciences
Animal Nutrition, Cell Biology and Immunology, Human and Animal Physiology, Host-Microbe Interactomics

Participating chair groups in the Gerrit Grijns Initiative

Promising ideas need time and financial backing to grow into truly impactful projects. By investing in these initiatives, we can drive innovation and create the environment necessary for groundbreaking discoveries.

Examples include co-financing essential research infrastructure, such as the long-term study of cohorts of children, students or pregnant women. These efforts not only accelerate current research but also lay the foundation for future breakthroughs.

Some research themes echo Grijns' legacy – from vitamin and mineral deficiencies in emerging economies to nutrient status during the shift from predominantly animal- to more plant-based diets. Broader questions are also central:

- How can we translate proven dietary interventions into practice and embed them in policy and society?
- What is the influence of food consumption and lifestyle in early adulthood on health later in life?

WUR already has the unique knowledge and networks to address these challenges. But science requires curiosity – and space for new questions and answers. For example:

1

There is little research on the health effects of predominantly plant-based diets in populations. Among young adults in particular, we need to understand the consequences for bone health, body composition, mental wellbeing, physical fitness and fertility. This demands a solid research infrastructure combining biomedical, microbial, and social science approaches.

2

Dietary guidelines need to be updated. Current ones provide general advice and mostly address links to chronic diseases that develop later in life. They pay insufficient attention to group-specific traits and individual needs: how does nutrition affect short-term factors such as performance, wellbeing, and the needs of different target groups? WUR is developing innovative research models to address these questions.

3

We want to better understand how individuals' behaviour is shaped by their social and physical environment – and how that environment can be positively influenced. Consider smart lifestyle programmes for pregnant women, where midwives, dietitians and digital tools (like apps) collaborate with local initiatives in families, neighbourhoods, and supermarkets. How can we scale and embed such successes?

Our promise

Gerrit Grijns' discoveries changed the lives of millions. Through perseverance and out-of-the-box thinking, he became a pioneer of nutritional science. Your support can do the same – for current and future generations. Together, we will ensure his spirit lives on: curious, ground-breaking, and committed to bringing better health within everyone's reach.

You can support the Gerrit Grijns Fund in various ways – through a one-off or regular donation agreement, or by including the Fund in your will.

As a supporter, you will be invited to exclusive events, lectures and (international) symposia, and you'll have the opportunity for personal contact with researchers and students. You'll become part of a growing movement of people helping Wageningen University & Research realise its mission and contribute to a healthier future for people and planet.



Information and contact

Initiators and Advisory Committee

Adriaan and Lambert Grijns, great-grandchildren of Gerrit Grijns, are the fund's initiators. Adriaan Grijns has worked at international law firms and multinationals in the United States, Brazil, Switzerland and the Netherlands and is currently the New York partner at Pierson Ferdinand LLP. Lambert Grijns was the Dutch ambassador to Indonesia in Jakarta until August 2024.

They are supported by an advisory committee, consisting of:

- Edith Feskens, Dean of Research and Professor of Global Nutrition, Wageningen University & Research
- Louise O. Fresco, former President of the Executive Board, Wageningen University & Research; scientist, author and Non Executive Board member
- Maaike Groot, Global Head of Communications, Public and Regulatory Affairs, and Sustainability, East-West Seed
- Jacqueline Pieters, Chair University Fund Wageningen, former Executive Food and Agribusiness Rabobank,
- Saskia Osendarp, Executive Director Micronutrient Forum
- Sander Kersten, Director of the Division of Nutritional Sciences and the Schleifer Family Professor at Cornell University

University Fund Wageningen

The Gerrit Grijns Fund is a thematic fund of the University Fund Wageningen (UFW), the independent support foundation responsible for managing and expanding WUR's philanthropic activities. UFW is a Public Benefit Organisation (ANBI). Donations are tax-deductible under Dutch law, and no gift or inheritance tax is levied on contributions to UFW – your donation fully benefits the Gerrit Grijns Fund. UFW is part of Transnational Giving Europe and has an American Friends Fund that is accommodated by Myriad USA.

Do you want to make a direct contribution to the Gerrit Grijns Fund? Make your donation here.



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Our manifesto

We stand for a healthy and liveable future on Earth

We make a demonstrable contribution to a more sustainable world

We do this by building on our rich history spanning almost 75 years

By connecting special donors with special, talented WUR academics and WUR research

By stimulating scientific talent and entrepreneurship

By seeking solutions to today's societal challenges

By finding new ways to make a difference off the beaten track

With philanthropic partners who play a vital role in fulfilling our mission and whose valuable gifts facilitate our meaningful work

We talk to donors about their passions and motivations, as we value a personal connection with our partners who are committed to making a difference with us

Welcome to University Fund Wageningen!

creating a difference together