I can still remember that thrilling sensation during a truffle conference in Rabat, Morocco in the spring of 2011 when I first heard about the Gotland truffle (see MB46). Amazing that truffles could be found so far north! And, if you could produce truffles in Sweden, then why not in the Netherlands too? That was how Gotland became my personal, magical destination. Gotland is Sweden’s largest island and measures 52 by 176 km. The island has calcareous soil and lies in the warm Gulf Stream in the Baltic Sea. Super conditions for truffles! At the time of the Vikings, Gotland was a centre of commerce and trade in the Baltic Sea and Visby was a bustling, prosperous Hanseatic city. Nowadays, Visby has 25,000 inhabitants and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. But whereas the many ruins and ancient city walls are very visible in the cityscape, the Gotland truffle remained an invisible secret for centuries. The first truffle was discovered by pure chance in 1997. Student Christina Wedèn became fascinated by the truffle and she graduated in 2004 on the genetic variation of the Gotland truffle and the ecology of the truffle. She also played a significant part in the development of truffle cultivation. 

Truffles in Gotland
Now, twenty years later, 700 kg of truffles are harvested in the wild every year. There are also 30 truffières (plots of land cultivated to produce truffles) and about 50 people with trained truffle dogs. The truffle season of the Gotland Burgundy truffle generally runs from 15 October to 15 December. However, like many other European truffle growing regions, the island suffered severely from drought this year, and the truffle yield was disastrously low. The yield of truffles harvested in the wild is low compared to other areas and the truffières often only come into production after 10 years (the first harvest in southern countries can often be expected after 6–10 years), probably due to the shorter growing season. Production from the truffières is still low. But this doesn’t worry the islanders. “We enjoy the bounty that nature gives and the pleasure and enjoyment of the truffle,” says Ulf Gustavson, one of the pioneering truffle growers.

Truffles on the map
The Gotland Truffle Festival is held every year. Christina Wedèn, a biologist at Uppsala Univer-

Prior to the Gotland Truffle Festival held from 16 –18 November, truffle scientists and growers convened in Visby for a conference on truffles.

By Judith Evenaar

Dr. Charles Lefevre from New World Truffières, James Trappe – Oregon State University, James Ure – Oregon, Zakina Marjanovic – University of Belgrade and Damien Berlureau from AgriTruffe.

Photos: TAUESG 2018
Gotland, like other European truffle regions, suffered severely from drought this year, and yields were very low.

Truffles at the conference
The international truffle conference was also led by Christina Wedén. The 55 participants included some famous names from the world of mycology: Jim Trappe from Oregon, Giovanni Pacioni, Gerard Chevalier and Johan Brune, all of whom are retired scientists. They have all contributed to the development of truffle cultivation in Gotland from the very beginning. Most of the presentations were on the influence of soil and climate on the traits of the truffle. Other highlights were:
- French researchers still lead the way in the field of genetics. However, it’s possible that the more knowledge you have, the harder it is to manage the cultivation process.
- Germany is showing great promise in terms of the Burgundy truffle. The soil there is excellent.
- Australia is now the largest truffle producer in the world at 400 tons per year. The Australian sector serves a rapidly expanding market for truffles in Asia.

All the participants are eagerly looking forward to the next meeting in Serbia in 2020, when Zaklina Marjovic from the University of Belgrade will organise the next gathering of the European Truffle Research Group. Together with truffle researchers, truffle growers, truffle traders and truffle seekers, we will ensure that we can keep on harvesting truffles!