

Wubbo Ockels predicts

We will get back to nature

The sun will play a vital role as a fuel source in the future. In fifty years' time we have used up millions of years of oil reserves. The way it looks now there is only enough left for some twenty to thirty years. The 2000-2050 era will therefore be of the utmost importance for our future.

The good thing about the coming solar era is that the sun is available worldwide and particularly in those countries where people now live below the poverty line, it can help with their development. You notice this shift particularly in education, where there is a growing interest in subjects linked to nature (e.g. biology, chemistry, physics and maths). You will also see that quality will become more important again and we won't accept things at face value. The importance of politics and religion will decline. And then, as the philosopher and ethnologist Lévi-Strauss once said, science will lead to greater knowledge which will pay off in technological applications. It will be the entrepreneurs, developers and big investors who will steer this 'back to nature' concept.

Nature will compel mankind to change. What that means in real terms is that within ten years the sun will become the most important energy source, transport over short distances will take place in small private cars and for longer distances we will have the use of other means of transport. How will this affect the future of the agricultural sector? More and more replacement products for meat and milk will very likely be introduced. If you realize that some ten to fifty thousand litres of water are needed to produce one kilogram of meat, then the future of meat consumption has to be a matter of discussion. Crucial in all of this will be the extent to which the agricultural sector can make the general public aware of how delicate the balance of nature is and generate an understanding and appreciation of this among people.



Wubbo Ockels, physicist, pilot, professor and the Netherlands' first astronaut.

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