
ANNUAL REPORT 1999-2000

AND

YEARPLAN 2001

**European Society for Agricultural and
Food Ethics (EurSafe)**

Utrecht, September 2000

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1) Introduction

EurSafe is a new, independent organisation, which provides a focal point for those who have a professional interest in the ethical issues involved in agriculture and food supply. It is an inter-disciplinary, cross-cultural and non-partisan organisation. EurSafe describes its goals in its statutes. EurSafe aims:

- to encourage academic education and research on the ethical issues involved in agriculture and food supply
- to encourage international public debate on the ethical issues involved in agriculture and food supply

These goals are intended to guide the actions and plans of EurSafe and this document describes how the Society's goals have been translated into current actions and future action-plans.

The document combines the Annual Report 1999-2000 and the 2001 Yearplan. In the Annual Report the Founding Board describes the activities it has undertaken since the Wageningen Conference (March 4-6, 1999) and in doing so it accounts for its activities to the General Assembly (GA) of EurSafe. In the 2001 Yearplan the Executive Committee proposes an action-plan to the General Assembly which clarifies its intentions for the forthcoming year. This definitive Yearplan will serve as a programme for the actions of the Executive Committee up to the next General Assembly.

2) Structure of the document

In 2001, the Executive Committee plans to build upon the achievements of the Founding Board of EurSafe established at the Wageningen Conference. At the conference the provisional members of EurSafe agreed the appointment of a Founding Board who would be responsible for the establishment of EurSafe as a formal society. Subsequently, the Founding Board has undertaken several actions which are described in this document as individual themes (the Report). Each theme concludes with details of actions scheduled for 2001 (the Yearplan).

2.1 Founding the Society

The Constitution of EurSafe was drafted in line with Dutch legislation. The statutes were discussed with a civil notary and at two board meetings. The final draft of the statutes was approved by members at the General Meeting of the Second Congress in Copenhagen and it

is now the task of the newly elected Executive Committee to formalise the official foundation at the Notary's office.

2.2 Executive Committee

The Founding Board invited new members to form an 'Executive Committee' which was elected at the first General Meeting. When proposing new board members the Founding Board searched for a balance between disciplines, languages, nationalities, and gender.

Although the Netherlands is richly represented in the new Executive Committee, the Founding Board believes that this is acceptable as the Secretariat is based in the Netherlands. For logistical reasons, the Secretariat finds it very helpful to have several Board members based in the Netherlands. The Founding Board, however, considered that when the legal formalities were completed, the election of a non-Dutch president would be more in line with the international character of EurSafe. The Society is pleased to announce that the vice-president of the Founding Board – Peter Sandøe – is prepared to serve as EurSafe president for the next three years. The organiser of EurSafe 2001 – Claudio Peri – has been elected as the new vice-president. No changes in the membership of the Executive Committee are foreseen during 2001.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (2000 - 2002)

<i>President:</i>	Peter Sandøe Centre for Bioethics and Risk Assessment, Royal Agricultural and Veterinary University, Copenhagen, Denmark
<i>Vice-President:</i>	Claudio Peri Department of Food Science and Technology, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Milan, Italy
<i>Secretary:</i>	Frans WA Brom Centre for Bio-Ethics and Health Law, Utrecht University, The Netherlands
<i>Treasurer:</i>	Abbo de Wit Ethics Committee, Royal Agricultural Society, Wageningen, The Netherlands
<i>Members:</i>	Andrea Arz de Falco Swiss Ethics Committee on Non-human Gene Technology, Bern, Switzerland
	Linda Fulponi Directorate for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, OECD, Paris, France
	Emmanuel Jolivet Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique, Centre de Jouy-en-Josas, France
	Ben Mepham Centre for Applied BioEthics, School of Biosciences, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom

Cees Veerman
Executive Board of the Wageningen University and Research Centre, The
Netherlands

FOUNDING BOARD (1999 - 2000)

- President:** Cees Veerman
Executive Board of the Wageningen University and Research Centre, The
Netherlands
- Vice-President:** Peter Sandøe
Centre for Bioethics and Risk Assessment, Royal Agricultural and
Veterinary University, Copenhagen, Denmark
- Secretary:** Frans WA Brom
Centre for Bio-Ethics and Health Law, Utrecht University, The Netherlands
- Treasurer:** Abbo de Wit
Ethics Committee, Royal Agricultural Society, Wageningen, The
Netherlands
- Member:** Ben Mepham
Centre for Applied Bioethics, School of Biosciences, University of
Nottingham, United Kingdom

2.3 Conferences and Workshops

In 2000, EurSafe initiated and participated in the organisation of the Second European Congress on Agricultural and Food Ethics in Copenhagen and prepared and organised the first meeting of the "Transatlantic Platform for Consumer Concerns and International Trade." This was a closed meeting of more than 50 experts from various disciplinary, regional and professional backgrounds.

In 2001, EurSafe will organise the Third European Congress on Agricultural and Food Ethics. This conference will be held on 3-5 October in Florence, and the Accademia dei Georgofili will be the host organisation. It is proposed that the central issue of the third congress be defined by the triangle: Food Safety - Food Quality - Food Ethics, conveying the message that food quality and food safety cannot be based solely on business and law, but also on a sound, internationally shared ethical vision. The theme of this conference is not limited to the issues that arise in food production: questions related to animal welfare, environment and professional standards will also be included.

2.4 Members

During the first year a great deal of time was spent building a network of potential individual members. At present there are almost 400 individuals on the EurSafe mailing list. Besides

individual members, the society has also invited several European organisations to become institutional members. To date, the society has received several positive responses.

It has been decided that in 2001 all recipients of the Newsletter will be invited to become members of the society, at an individual membership fee of 25 Euro. For those who attended the Copenhagen congress the membership fee for 2001 was included in the conference fee. The society realises that some members who did not attend the congress may not renew their membership if they are charged a fee. Nevertheless, the society aims to have 400 individual and 40 institutional members.

2.5 National Platforms

In the first year of its existence EurSafe searched for ways to link national and international activities and discussions. The Board suggested ideas and plans for bringing together National and International activities and decided that a network of National Platforms might be helpful. The Founding Board emphasised that these platforms need to go beyond the circle of bio-ethicists. They should – like EurSafe itself – be platforms not only for philosophers and ethicists who are concerned with the future of agriculture, but also (and equally important) for farmers, agricultural suppliers, food manufacturers, retailers, caterers, policy makers in government and industry, NGOs, academics, research scientists and the general public.

The National Platforms could join or even lead discussions and activities on a national level. This would be extremely important as a source of information for international networks and the activities of EurSafe. Moreover these platforms could serve as useful resources for the EurSafe secretariat.

During the last year a National Platform was established in The Netherlands in co-operation with the Netherlands Society for Bio-ethics. Michiel Korthals of Wageningen University is co-ordinator of this National Platform. In the UK the Food Ethics Council has taken initial steps towards the formation of a UK Platform. In Italy the Accademia dei Georgofilli has organised a series of meetings on Agricultural and Food Ethics as part of the preparation for EurSafe 2001.

In 2001, the Executive Committee will focus on the possibilities of creating National Platforms in other European Countries. These platforms do not have to be new organisations. It may be preferable to find existing networks that could organise such discussions on a national level. EurSafe members who identify possibilities for National Platforms in their own countries are invited to contact the EurSafe Secretariat.

2.6 Transatlantic Platform on Consumer Concerns and International Trade

Although the society is still in *statu nascendi*, the Board has supported the foundation of yet another new organisation: The Transatlantic Platform on Consumer Concerns and International Trade. Consumer concerns in this area are related to the safety of agri-food products for humans, animals and the environment, as well as the social and ethical implications of certain agri-food production methods. The events of recent years have shown that these consumer concerns create difficulties for national governments and international relations. They emphasise cultural differences between nations and create social and political pressure on national governments to lay down restrictive, trade distorting measures. The EurSafe Board agreed, therefore, with the idea that it is vital to reconsider the dynamic relationship between national governments, civil society and the market. This has to be done through an interdisciplinary approach, involving experts from many disciplines: technical and hygiene experts, veterinarians, public administration experts, lawyers, philosophers, ethicists, sociologists and economists. Thus, the society has supported the foundation of a platform which will focus on issues such as international trade liberalisation, the cultural identity of distinct communities and the functioning of the democratic nation state.

The Transatlantic Platform held its first meeting on 15-17 June 2000 in Lelystad (NL) and was attended by more than 50 people from Europe, the USA, and as far afield as New Zealand, Canada, and the Philippines. The meeting was organised by the EurSafe Secretariat in co-ordination with the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, Wageningen University and Research Centre, and the Centre for Bio-ethics and Health Law of Utrecht University.

Many different organisations in the field of agri-food were represented at the meeting, such as the USDA, the OECD, the FAO and the Danish Ministry of Agriculture. The meeting was announced in the EurSafe Newsletter and the Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics. At the meeting ideas for further research in the field were discussed and based upon these discussions the organisers hope to publish a research agenda detailing specific activities that will help to foster academic research and debate on the ways that International Trade, Consumer Concerns, Global Justice and Cultural and Personal Identity can be reconciled. The EurSafe Secretariat holds the secretariat of the Platform.

In 2001, the Executive Committee plans to support the new activities of the Platform. The EurSafe secretariat will run the platform until at least January 2001, with the hope that funds will be available for an extension of this period. EurSafe promotes close links between its (institutional) members and the platform and as far as it is able will support its future activities. The secretariat intends to publish the platform's activities in the EurSafe Newsletter on a regular basis.

2.7 Communication

Since the Wageningen conference the Founding Board has stressed the importance of internal and external communication by EurSafe.

2.7.1 Newsletter

The EurSafe Newsletter has fostered internal communication. Volkert Beekman (Chief-Editor), Berit Faber, Dirk Lips, Kate Millar, Erminio Monteleone and Silke Schicktanz have published five issues of the Newsletter since the Wageningen Conference. Although these issues have offered important and even vital information, it has become apparent that the Newsletter has only a limited capacity to provide a forum for discussion for EurSafe members.

In 2001, the Editors of the Newsletter, supported by the Executive Committee, intend to build on established results. The main objective of the Newsletter will continue to act as a source of information on conferences, courses, institutes, etc. The Newsletter will present this information in seven sections, i.e. 1) Announcements, 2) EurSafe News, 3) Conferences and Courses, 4) Institutes and Projects, 5) Books and Journals, 6) Legislation and Policy, and 7) Web-sites. The Editors wish to improve the quality of the sections on institutes and projects, books and journals, and policy and legislation. Members of EurSafe can choose between receiving a paper or electronic version of the Newsletter. Other interested individuals may also receive the electronic version or look at the EurSafe homepage for the latest issue.

2.7.2 Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics

In addition to the value of the Newsletter, EurSafe has succeeded in creating a strong link with the Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics. The Journal, under its new Editor-in-Chief Richard P. Haynes (University of Florida), published two special issues based on the EurSafe conference at Wageningen. Continued co-operation between the Journal and EurSafe is foreseen in the near future, especially since the Secretary of EurSafe has become the new European Editor of the Journal and several members of EurSafe are members of the Journal's New Editorial Board.

In 2001, the Executive Committee proposes to build on its relationship with the Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics. Members of EurSafe will be encouraged to subscribe to the Journal for a reduced rate. For 2001 (volume 14) the individual rate will only be 25 Euro and will consist of 4 issues. It is intended that one of these issues will be a special issue consisting of papers that were presented at EurSafe 2000 in Copenhagen. The Executive Committee hopes to interest the majority of its members in subscribing to the Journal.

2.7.3 The EurSafe Website

EurSafe has its own website at <http://www.theo.uu.nl/eursafe>. However, difficulties have been experienced in building and maintaining a good website. Up to now it has not functioned

adequately, e.g. links to the EurSafe 2000 page were not established in time, and the last issue of the Newsletter was not available. In general, information on the website has not been updated regularly.

In 2001, the Executive Committee intends to improve the website. Therefore, procedures to facilitate updating the website are under construction, and a further integration of the website in EurSafe's overall communication strategy is foreseen. The Editors of the Newsletter have offered to assist in the construction of a virtual forum for discussion that could be linked to the homepage, e.g. a mailing-list or a discussion-group for the members of EurSafe.

3) Conclusions

EurSafe has had a prosperous start, nearly 400 individuals subscribe to the mailing list of the society at present. The first two conferences set a high standard. Throughout Europe and the USA there is much interest in agricultural and food ethics, and local groups are starting to contact national branches of EurSafe.

We now run the risk that 'ethics' will be seen as a panacea for all the problems facing the agriculture and food sector. This is not the case. Instead, it is necessary to realise that the role of agricultural and food ethics is to:

- understand the values underlying modern agriculture and food production. Describing and elaborating these values is important, because without focus on these values modern agriculture and food production has no compass to guide them in a new direction.
- understand the attitudes of social groups towards agriculture and food production: i.e. consumer and public concerns about, for instance, novel foods, food safety, environmental issues and animal welfare. These attitudes represent hopes and fears of people regarding agriculture and food production, and these hopes and fears should be taken into account when contemplating the future of agriculture and food production.
- conduct a critical assessment of these values and attitudes. Critical reflection needs to be engaged in not only by philosophers and ethicists but also by agricultural scientists, policy makers and farmers. Without this, it is not possible to steer agriculture and food production in an ethically sound direction.

The seed of EurSafe has been sown; the soil is fertile. It is now our task to protect the shoot so that it may grow.

For more information

Dr. Frans W.A. Brom (secretary) or
Drs. Franck Meijboom (executive officer)

European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics
Centre for Bioethics and Health Law
Utrecht University
Heidelberglaan 2
NL-3584 CS UTRECHT

Telephone ++31 (0)30 253 9203
Fax ++31 (0)30 253 9410

Dutch Postbank: 104 185

Colophon
Design Front Page: Arjen van Reenen