



# European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (EurSafe)

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## **Newsletter**

### **Volume 4, No.4, December 2002**

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**EurSafe Newsletter Special Issue**  
***“Ethics as a Dimension of Agrifood Policies”***  
**Volume 5, No. 1, March 2003**

The next issue of the EurSafe Newsletter will be a special issue about ethics as a dimension of agrifood policies. The editors would like to invite you to submit short position-papers or statements of not more than 500 words addressing the following questions:

- Why should ethics be included in the future development of agrifood policies?
- How should ethics be included in the future development of agrifood policies?
- What does the inclusion of ethics in the future development of agrifood policies imply for the prospective role of EurSafe as a network of ethical expertise?

The deadline for this special issue is set at February 1, 2003. Contributions should be submitted to the chief-editor of the EurSafe Newsletter, e-mail: [volkert.beekman@wur.nl](mailto:volkert.beekman@wur.nl)

**Wanted:**  
***New Editors***

Volkert Beekman will resign as chief-editor of the EurSafe Newsletter at the 4<sup>th</sup> EurSafe Congress in Toulouse, March 2003. Geir Tveit will succeed him in this role. The editors would like to invite you to candidate yourself as new member of the editorial board of the EurSafe Newsletter. If you are interested, you should notify the chief-editor before March 1, 2003, e-mail: [volkert.beekman@wur.nl](mailto:volkert.beekman@wur.nl)

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# Is Alternative Food Production Safe?

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**In terms of food safety, alternative livestock production (organic, free-range, etc.) has mostly been looked upon positively. There has been little attention to the fact that some alternative livestock production methods can increase the risk of herd infections with microbial pathogens. It seems to be a big difference between consumers' perception of the safety of food from alternative production and what can be found scientifically, which may cause a series of problems.**

Looking at outdoor bred pigs as an example, it has been shown that pig herds with access to outdoor facilities have a higher prevalence of *Salmonella*, *Toxoplasma* and helminth parasites than indoor bred pigs. Microbial pathogens such as *Listeria* occur naturally in the soil, but free ranging herds are also infected by soil and water contaminated with faeces from previously infected livestock or by contact with rats or other wild fauna. Bacteria and parasitic cysts can survive in the soil for years. Thus an important part of the management scheme is to keep new herds in areas, which have not previously – or at least not for a long time – been used for stocking farm animals. Areas free from pathogens can be limited on small farms with a long tradition for outdoor herds, and as the production increases, the problem of herds using areas where the soil is contaminated will probably increase.

Poultry from free ranging production systems have been shown to harbour *Campylobacter* more frequently than indoor-bred poultry, probably due to exposure to *Campylobacter* from wild fauna and the environment.

Many alternative products only undergo minimal processing before they are made available to consumers, and parts of these products are sold from farm outlets and direct distribution companies – circumstances, which can compromise food safety. The national control programmes focus primarily on large scale production and distribution units, and as animals infected with e.g. *Salmonella* or *Campylobacter* usually are without symptoms, there is an increased risk of undetected infections in small herds and thus in some alternative livestock production systems. In some EU countries, pigs reared on organic farms intended for own or family consumption do not require inspection at normal EU standards. The combination of a potentially higher risk of zoonoses in the animals, limited surveillance and control with the small farm outlets and the extended use of minimal processing can result in serious compromises of food safety and public health.

Cheese was originally developed as a means of preserving raw milk in times of excess production, and cheese is generally considered to be a relatively “safe” food. Traditionally, it has been assumed that pathogenic micro-organisms in raw milk die during cheese manufacture due to the production of high acidity and competition from the “starter cultures” deliberately added to produce a characteristic flavour and texture. However, it is not possible to generalise about either the composition of cheese or the behaviour of contaminating pathogens. Nevertheless, the production of some cheeses still occurs from milk that has not undergone a full pasteurisation. Cheese

manufactured by “traditional” processes may be made from raw milk (i.e. milk that has received no heat-treatment at all). Some pathogenic bacteria, such as *Listeria monocytogenes* and *E. coli* O157 may survive the cheese processing and thus contaminate the final product. Unpasteurised milk products have in recent years resulted in a series of outbreaks implicating thousands of cases.

When consumers turn to food from alternative production systems, health, animal welfare and environmental concerns are the primary reasons, and studies suggest that food safety plays a significant role in some consumers’ choice of food in the EU. The EU FAIR study from 1997 showed that 58-68% of the consumers were “very concerned” about pathogenic bacteria when buying fresh beef, pork or chicken. The perception of risk varies across Europe, as Spanish and Irish consumers were the ones most concerned about salmonella in meat, whereas British and German consumers were the least concerned. In all countries freshness was perceived to be the most helpful in assessing the safety of fresh meat products. Alternative production methods such as organically produced pork and free range chicken were noted as the second most helpful safety factor by consumers in Ireland, United Kingdom, Germany, Spain and Italy. In contrast, Swedish consumers perceived alternative production methods as the least helpful factor for assuring the safety of fresh pork and chicken products. An American survey showed most of the respondents thought organic products were safer than conventionally produced foods, and nearly 50% of the respondents perceived a reduced risk of pathogens in organic foods.

Thus, there appears to be a discrepancy between the consumers’ perception of the risk and the actual measurable risks of animal products from alternative production systems.

This is a potentially dangerous situation of two reasons: If food products from alternative production systems

harbour more pathogenic bacteria, the consumers are more at risk and more gastrointestinal diseases may occur within the community when these production systems are enlarged over the next few years. Secondly, consumers when informed may react strongly against alternative food products if they get the impression that they are marketed under “false pretence”. This in turn could lead to a severe set back for this expanding industry and could potentially affect the future development of agricultural production systems that are desirable from the perspective of the environment and animal health and welfare.

Government inspection programmes are primarily designed for conventional large-scale production systems, whereas they are less capable of addressing food safety issues in small and heterogeneous alternative production systems. Furthermore, own-control programmes and modern quality assurance systems, increasingly being implemented in large-scale conventional food production, are not nearly as rapidly implemented in small-scale alternative production.

This is probably because of the huge administrative burden of this undertaking, which will threaten any small-scale production. Another reason can be a resistance to these programmes due to their lack of recognition of the special characteristics of alternative production.

The combination of a potentially higher risk of pathogenic micro-organisms in the primary production, limited surveillance and control of products and production facilities, and the use of minimal processing may constitute a potential food safety problem.

If consumers’ confidence in the alternative production systems is to remain, risk management tools must respect the specific qualities of these production systems which are highly valued by consumers. The dilemma is that this proviso, to some extent, may be in conflict with a food safety objective. In order to

solve this dilemma, it seems necessary to involve the consumers of alternative products. We need to know to which extent these consumers would be willing to run a

comparatively greater risk in order to ensure the small scale and other specific characteristics of alternative production.

## Conferences & Courses

### January – March 2003

- Jan 11– 15** *Plant and Animal Genomes XI Conference (USA)*  
Meeting held in San Diego, CA, USA. More information: Darrin Scherago, phone: + 1 212 643 1750; fax + 1 212 643 1758; e-mail: pag@scherago.com; website: <http://www.intl-pag.org/pag/>
- Jan 21 – 24** *Introgression of Genetically Modified Plants into Wild Relatives and its Consequences (The Netherlands)*  
ESF Conference, Amsterdam. More information, website: <http://www.science.uva.nl/research/ibed/Introgression/>, e-mail: [bartsch@zalf.de](mailto:bartsch@zalf.de), [nijs@science.uva.nl](mailto:nijs@science.uva.nl) or [esf@lgce.nl](mailto:esf@lgce.nl)
- Jan 30 – 31** *Towards Sustainable Agriculture for Developing Countries: Options from Life Sciences & Biotechnologies (Belgium)*  
Life Sciences Discussion Platform, Charlemagne Building, Brussels. More information, website: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/sadc/>
- Feb 6 – 7** *Conference on Changing Dimensions of the Food Economy: Exploring the Policy Issues (The Netherlands)*  
OECD, The Hague. More information: Loek Boonekamp, fax + 33 1 44306118, e-mail: [Loek.Boonekamp@oecd.org](mailto:Loek.Boonekamp@oecd.org)
- Mar 20 – 22** *Ethics as a Dimension of Agrifood Policy, 4<sup>th</sup> EurSafe Congress (France)*  
Toulouse, France. More information: e-mail: [Emmanuel.Jolivet@jouy.inra.fr](mailto:Emmanuel.Jolivet@jouy.inra.fr), website: <http://capoul.toulouse.inra.fr/eursafe2003/>

### April – June 2003

- Apr 2 – 4** *UFAW Symposium Science in the Service Of Animal Welfare (UK)*  
University of Edinburgh, UK. More information, e-mail: [scioff@ufaw.org.uk](mailto:scioff@ufaw.org.uk)
- Apr 7 – 8** *Consumer Perceptions of Healthiness of Food and Consumer Acceptance of New Functional Foods (Denmark)*  
MAPP, Middelfart. More information, website: <http://www.mapp.asb.dk>, e-mail: [mapp@asb.dk](mailto:mapp@asb.dk)

**Apr 10 – 12    *Bioethics in a Small World (Germany)***

Europäische Akademie in Bad-Neuenahr Germany. International conference on bioethical problems related to the globalisation process. More information: Richard Ashroft (e-mail: [r.ashcroft@ic.ac.uk](mailto:r.ashcroft@ic.ac.uk)) or Felix Thiele (e-mail: [felix.thiele@dlr.de](mailto:felix.thiele@dlr.de))

***July – September 2003***

**Jul 7 – 9        *Technology and Global Society (USA)***

13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Society for Philosophy and Technology, Park City Utah. More information, e-mail: [pault@purdue.edu](mailto:pault@purdue.edu), website: <http://www.spt.org>

**Jul 16 - 20    *Feeding the World: Opportunities without Boundaries (USA)***

12th World Congress of Food Science and Technology (IUFoST Congress XII), Chicago, Illinois, USA. More information, website: <http://www.worldfoodscience.org/congress/overview.html>

**Aug 10 - 17    *XXth World Congress of Philosophy: Philosophy Facing World Problems (Turkey)***

International Federation of the Philosophical Society, Istanbul, Turkey. More information: fax 90-312-0296, website <http://www.tfk.org.tr/>

**Sep 4 –7        *Food Quality Products in the Advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Production, Demand and Public Policy (Greece)***

83rd EAAE Seminar, Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAICh), Crete. More information: Dr. George Baourakis, e-mail: [baouraki@maich.gr](mailto:baouraki@maich.gr)

## Books & Journals

### **Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission, *Report on Animals and Biotechnology***

Report by a government strategic advisory body on biotechnology issues affecting agriculture and the environment in the United Kingdom. More information, website:

[http://www.aebc.gov.uk/aebc/animals\\_report.html](http://www.aebc.gov.uk/aebc/animals_report.html)

### **BioTIK, *Reports on Biotechnology Ethics***

Two reports from the BioTIK-secretariat, "*Ethical Principles in European Regulation of Biotechnology*", and: "*Gene Technology and Ethics in the Plant and Foods Area*", have now been published. In 2001 the Danish Parliament launched the BioTIK-project. It is a four-year project focusing on both the possibilities that gene technology offers, and the ethical principles that are to be considered in order to make the right decisions. BioTIK is a Danish abbreviation of biotechnology and ethics. Hence nine Danish Ministries have joined a Task Force with the purpose to incorporate ethical principles in regulation of biotechnology, in decision making processes and as a basis for public perception and information. More information, website:

<http://www.biotik.dk>

### ***Environmental Effects of Transgenic Plants***

National Academy Press, 2002 (ISBN 0309082633).

### **European Commission, *Ethical, Legal and Socio-Economic Aspects of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Biotechnology***

An overview of research activities 1994 – 2002. More information, e-mail:

[elena.sachez@cec.eu.int](mailto:elena.sachez@cec.eu.int)

### ***The European Federation of Biotechnology (EFB)***

The European Federation of Biotechnology is the association of scientific institutes, societies, companies, biotechnology associations and personal members active or interested in biotechnology and its safe and beneficial applications. The Task Group has some 50 members from biotechnology industry and research, communications and survey research, the media and social organisations like environmental, consumer, patients' and animal welfare organisations. Members come from all EU and most other European countries. More information, website:

<http://www.efbpublic.org/>

### **Evenson, R.E. et al., *Economic and Social Issues in Agricultural Biotechnology***

Oxford University Press, 2002 [ISBN 0851996183].

### **Farley, W. et al. (eds.), *Gentechnologie als Wirtschaftsfaktor. Definitionen und Bewertungskriterien***

Spektrum Akademie Verlag, 2002 [ISBN 3827414008].

### **Food Ethics Council**

The Council has made its response to DEFRA's consultation "*Sustainable Food and Farming: Working Together*", 2002. More information, website:

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~foodeth/noticeboard.htm>

***Journal of Food Agriculture and Environment***

A new journal published by World Food RD. More information, website: <http://www.world-food.net> or <http://www.isfae.org>, e-mail: [info@world-food.net](mailto:info@world-food.net) or [dris.uh@kolumbus.fi](mailto:dris.uh@kolumbus.fi)

**Office of Technology Assessment, *Impacts of Applied Genetics: Micro-Organisms, Plants, and Animals***

Books for Business, 2002 [ISBN 0894992066].

***Parallax: The Journal of Ethics and Globalization***

November 2002 issue about sustainable development. The papers examine the recent United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg and/or the issues and ethics of sustainable development. More information, website: <http://www.parallaxonline.org/community.html>

# Regulating on Biotechnology requires Biodiplomacy

*Linda Nielsen & Berit A. Faber*

**The dilemma facing regulatory bodies is often referred to in very negative terms as a choice of either major principles and lofty, vague, concrete rules borne out of consensus, but which out of ignorance of the technologies are condemned to insignificance, or, explicit, precise rules that are restrictive and only prescribe for current issues and are therefore condemned to premature obsolescence.**

In our opinion this pessimism is neither helpful nor justified. However, it is true to say that the outcome of research is essentially unpredictable, and that this presents an obstacle to the aim for regulation to draw on predictable values. But by employing models that contain both robust international “brake pads” at the all-essential level, and also flexible regulatory models, such as debate models and national framework legislation, ethical principles can yet be operationalised. This will enable social responsibility to be assumed, which will prevent privatisation of ethical issues and hence ensure that core ethical principles are observed.

If we turn to some of the EU directives, we find that there are differences in which ethical principles they take into account. The EU directive on clinical trials on medicinal products for human use require an ethical evaluation to be carried out, and require that this must be performed on the basis of predefined ethical considerations (balancing of benefits and integrity). The directive also meets the requirement for ethical evaluation to be concrete in relation to each individual trial. Against this, the directive does not require the involvement of lay people following an open consultative process.

In the latest review of the directive on deliberate release, the preamble states that ethical considerations concerned with

approval of the release of GM crops are to be incorporated. However, the directive on deliberate release makes no reference to ethical considerations and does not stipulate the involvement of lay people following an open consultative process.

## ***Ethical Criteria***

In this report we have made use of four ethical criteria. If we consider these, we also find significant differences among the regulatory options for translating them into legal requirements.

The first criterion of *economic and qualitative benefit* essentially reflects the ethics of utilitarianism. This criterion entails assessment of any potential damage and risks, together with assessment of both economic and qualitative benefits. An assessment of this nature can be expressed relatively simply in regulations, and implemented according to a relatively objectivised process.

The criterion of *integrity/vulnerability* and the criterion of *just distribution* are probably the two criteria that present the greatest regulatory challenges. This is primarily due to the fact that these criteria entail broad estimations, which can be difficult to standardise on to ensure that the result of their application meets fundamental requirements for legal protection, i.e. predictability. Conversely, it is generally recognised – at least in relation to certain applications of gene technology – that the ethical considerations involved are of great significance.

The criterion of *openness and co-determination* is essentially a procedural requirement that may be identified with relative ease in regulation in the form of requirements regarding administrative routines and decision-maker forums.

It should be emphasised that these four ethical criteria should all be incorporated in any assessment of gene technology applications. The final decision should be made by weighing up the assessments made of each criterion. As such there can be no question of straightforward decision-making requirements according to which just a single criterion or all four criteria must be met, but rather a coherent balancing of one against the other. This presents yet another problem in standardising on the application of ethical criteria in formal regulation. Overall, the conclusion has to be that while two of the ethical criteria may be expressed relatively simply in procedural regulation in substantive terms the two others can be expressed only in more general terms in regulation. Some of the ethical criteria thus entail assessments based largely on estimation.

### ***Biodiplomacy***

We conclude that it is feasible from a legal point of view to incorporate ethical criteria in EU regulation of the application of gene technology. This may be achieved by operationalising requirements to that effect in procedural regulations comprised of the following components:

- a requirement regarding ethical evaluation;
- formulated ethical criteria;
- including an open process to ensure co-determination.

Against that, it will be inordinately difficult for regulation to prescribe the significance or impact of ethical evaluation. Nonetheless it is essential to address these aspects, especially the question as to how far ethical evaluation can “displace” scientific risk assessment both in a positive and negative sense. This then opens up for two possible scenarios: A scientific risk assessment reveals that the application of a field of genetic engineering might be attended by a certain degree of risk. If the ethical

assessment finds little objection to authorising this application, should it then be allowed to proceed? Conversely we have a scenario in which a scientific risk assessment reveals that there is no attendant risk in application of the field of genetic engineering, while the ethical assessment questions the justification for approving the application. How would this scenario be dealt with?

In considering this dilemma it is important to bear in mind that regulation at the EU level is not driven solely by content-based political assessment, but also by the general aim of ensuring uniform laws and thereby a single market in the EU. This produces two likely consequences. The more ethical evaluation is performed at EU level, the more can it rest on estimation and still produce uniform laws. The more ethical assessment is performed at national level, the more can it take into account differences in national culture and values, and the more can it ensure an open process and co-determination.

Consequently our position is that while incorporation of ethical criteria in EU regulation is feasible it is also associated with considerable challenges. Furthermore it may be noted that regulation will to a large extent amount to procedural standardisation, and that the consequences of a decision-making process at the EU or national level will be significant. The essence of our conclusions may also be expressed to say that the incorporation of ethical consideration in EU regulation concern dialogue and decision-making processes just as much as they do the legal technicalities of regulation.

Thus it should be expected that there will be a need for both regulation proper – social ethics from the top down – and acceptance from stakeholders in the broadest sense – i.e. ethics from the bottom up. Top-down and bottom-up will, however, be equally important. Biodiplomacy is one of the new concepts in the area.

[This article is an edited version of conclusions from the authors' report "Ethical principles in European regulation of biotechnology". The full report can be downloaded from website:

[http://www.biotik.dk/myndigheder/bioTIK/Udredninger/etiske\\_principper/engelsk/](http://www.biotik.dk/myndigheder/bioTIK/Udredninger/etiske_principper/engelsk/) and a paper copy can be ordered from e-mail: [biotik@biotik.dk](mailto:biotik@biotik.dk)]

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## Newsletter

The Newsletter of the European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (EurSafe) is published quarterly. The Spring Issue is published and mailed in March, the Summer Issue in June, the Fall Issue in September, and the Winter Issue in December. Requests for subscriptions and address changes should be sent to the

EurSafe Secretariat (e-mail: [eursafe@theo.uu.nl](mailto:eursafe@theo.uu.nl)). Items for inclusion in the EurSafe Newsletter should be sent to chief-editor Volkert Beekman ([volkert.beekman@wur.nl](mailto:volkert.beekman@wur.nl)). The deadline for the next issue of the EurSafe Newsletter is:

- Volume 5, No.1 – February 1, 2003

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# Application Form

## Membership of the European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (EurSafe)

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- |                          |   |          |
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Date

**B:** Subscription fee can also be transferred to Utrecht University bedrijf 002, European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics, EurSafe, Dutch Postbank 104185

### Please return this form to:

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