

EurSafe News

European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics



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Open Forum

Trust in the food sector: Why trust is needed and providing information is not enough

Everyone who enters a supermarket will notice that trust is important in the agro-food sector. In every purchase one may be con-fronted with a risk concerning one's health or the infringement of personal values concerning sustainability, animal welfare etc. Therefore, it is not surprising that trust plays a dominant role in the discussion of agro-food policy. However, trust in the food chain has become more problematic and vulner-able than it has ever been before. And that seems strange, at least according to many European governments, because experts say that food has never been as safe as it is today, so food safety is not a real problem.

Moreover, governmental and many other actors within the chain seem to have provided enough information on safety, healthy food etc. And yet we are still con-fronted with a rather uncertain situation in regard to consumer trust. To make it more complicated, it is obvious from several em-pirical studies (e.g. Kjærnes, 2004) that there is no real crisis. People are not com-pletely paralyzed. So what is the problem?

by Franck L.B. Meijboom

Three lines of development

I think it might be helpful to sketch three lines of development in the food chain that explicate some of the problems regarding trust.

First, we are confronted with the growing distance, both in time and space, between production and consumption. The gap between the food system and the public is widening. Your dinner may include beans from Egypt, potatoes from Malta, a steak from Argentina, and some red wine from Southern Africa.

This is what Giddens (1990, p. 63-65) describes as the 'stretching' process in which different social contexts or regions become networked across the earth's surface as a whole. In itself this does not lead to problems of trust, yet we are confronted with complexity and uncertainties on a global scale. Consequently, nobody has the ability to fully control the production process leading to the food that is finally consumed. We often have little or even no idea who is involved in the process preceding the moment we buy the product. This lack of (full) control in or even the uncontrollability of the food chain is the point at which trust comes into the story. You cannot but trust others in the chain in order to produce and consume. However, these same long lines make it often rather difficult to trust. There are hardly any personal relations and often one even doesn't know the other party. Hence there is a growing need to trust and less opportunities to come to trust.

A second development that is related to trust is the increasing use of technology in food production. Although technology can in itself contribute to the trustworthiness of a sector, the use of technology also raises new uncertainties. For instance the threat of antibiotic resistance because of the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry or the negative effects of the use of growth hormones in meat production. These risk issues are often difficult to assess. A short look at the debate on the safety of genetically modified foods shows the striking tensions between the opinions of experts on the risks for human, animals and environment of biotechnology. It is not without reason that I mention the experts. The increasing role technology plays in the production and processing of food makes discussing on issues like safety, quality and health a mat-

ter of highly qualified experts. You often cannot but trust the experts.

Hence the use of technology causes situations of new uncertainties: i.e. trust is necessary. Yet, these are also situations in which there is little or no familiarity of a situation that can serve as ground for confidence. Finally, technology raises new and complex uncertainties that are so complex that consumers cannot do anything but trusting experts: you do not have an alternative.

The third influential development that is often used to explain the growing attention for consumer trust is the different food scandals during the last decade(s). In Europe there have been a number of food-related scandals and affaires, like BSE in beef, dioxins in chicken, salmonella in eggs, and the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease. Hence most considerations on trust are highly influenced by the various food crises since the mid nineties. These scandals quite easily underline the importance of trust in the current situation. First, these affaires all are a direct and explicit confrontation with the risk and uncertainty that normally are only implicitly present in the food sector. Moreover, the food scares are a direct confrontation with the fact that trust is mainly trust in experts. And that makes trustworthiness a crucial issue. Third, these situations, sometimes painfully, shows that these experts/ other partners in the food chain proved to be not as trustworthy as they were considered to be.

In summary: The recent food scandals are not the only reason why trust is at the public agenda. The vulnerability of trust is also the result of the other two developments. Therefore, I conclude that:

1. We cannot consume food without trust;
2. The current developments in the agro-food sector make trust even more crucial;
3. By the same developments, trust has become more complex to achieve.

The concept of trust

Given this conclusion we are more strongly confronted with the question: What do we actually mean with trust? To trust your car is something different from trusting your wife. Trusting that the bus driver will bring you to the station is certainly not the same as entrusting the care of your house to your neighbours when you are on holidays. So it is rather confusing what we mean with trust. A promi-

sing strategy to discuss the concept is in terms of interest. According to James Coleman, trust is “nothing more or less than the considerations a rational actor applies in deciding to place a bet” (1990, p. 99). Hence trust can be best analysed as a strategy of a rational agent in order to promote optimally his interests. The question whether or not to trust someone is a matter of rational calculation of the involved risks and benefits, and the trustworthiness of the other. However, this raises an epistemological question: How do I know I can trust you, since we mostly trust in situations of lack of full information, otherwise we do not need to trust.

Therefore, Hardin modified the interest account into an encapsulated interest account. Interests cannot only be considered as governing human action apart from any level of trust. They can also “act on trust itself by making behaviour more predictable” (Gambetta, 1988, p. 222). This characteristic of interests underlies Hardin’s approach. Not only my own interests are important, but your interests play a crucial role in trusting you as well. I trust you because “I think it is in your interest to take my interests in the relevant matter seriously” (Hardin, 2002, p. 1). This does not imply that both persons necessarily have the same interests. Trust as encapsulated interest presupposes only that the other person will reckon with your interests, because it is in his interest to do so, e.g. because he has good reasons to remain your colleague.

This form of rational choice account is one of the most consequent and serious attempts to get more grip on what we mean by trust and has attractiveness because of its clarity and the apparent universal applicability. Example: I trust Coca-Cola in Denmark as well as in Peru just because I consider it to be in their interest to take my interest for food safety into account.

Yet in order to come to such a general theory, Hardin, like most of the Rational Choice accounts, makes reductions that keep him from providing an account of trust that addresses the nuances and the richness of the concept. Therefore, the main problem with the rational choice approach is not that it is not correct at all. It acknowledges the importance of trust, but in dealing with its complexity it underestimates the richness or comprehensiveness of trust. Hence its problem is that it is not enough for conceptualising trust.

Confidence and trust

It is not my aim to play a kind of word game with the concepts of trust and confidence, yet a better distinction of both may help.

Confidence can be based upon routine and normal patterns. The trustor trusts the other since one expects him or her to act routinely. This is the case when you have confidence in a product you regularly buy. You do not expect they will change the quality and safety of the product.

Moreover, confidence can be based upon social roles. I may trust my local greengrocer as a person since he is a relative, but mostly we do not have such a close relation with our retailers. Nevertheless you can have trust in the greengrocer in his role as a greengrocer, who has some expertise in and experience with fruit and vegetables.

Finally, confidence is the case when we speak about systems. You have trust in the sense of confidence in a food safety authority. In distinction with this confidence, trust is a position that has extra characteristics that are not related to confidence. First, trust entails a personal or emotional commitment either to the subject or the object of trust. Trust in animal friendly or sustainable ways of production might be good cases in which it seems to be appropriate to speak about trust. Even when there would be unclear patterns or roles in relation to the production of these products you still may trust them since you are personally committed to animal welfare or sustainability.

Moreover, trust has, more than confidence, a responsive character. Trust entails an implicit demand to response. When animal welfare is considered as important by both parties in a trusting relation between consumer and butcher, then this will influence the way they trust. The butcher may expect this consumer not to buy the cheapest steak, but to come to his shop to buy the animal friendly products. On the other hand the consumer can reasonably expect that the butcher can be trusted to sell animal friendly produced products only.

Finally, trust presupposes a certain kind of choice. Not only the choice whether or not to trust, but also the alternative to trust someone else (e.g. trusting one greengrocer instead of another).

Yet the choice is also relevant for the trustee. He or she also has the ability either to accept the trust or not. You can order someone to give you something, but you can't order someone to trust you, nor to accept your trust. Trust supposes that both you and the other have a choice.

Confidence as default position, but trust as indispensable

I want to argue that confidence is the default position for the food sector. Normally we have confidence in retailers, in government, in all experts we have to trust in cases of complexity and uncertainty. As long as there are routines and clear patterns of behaviour this is sufficient for a well-operating sector. However, confidence will not suffice in situations in which

- there are no patterns or when these patterns show not to be enough for confidence
- there are serious role conflicts
- the system(s) is/ are not (yet) able to cope with a situation.

In these situations trust is indispensable. This has direct implications for maintaining and building trust. In the case of confidence providing information and enhancing transparency are most crucial. It entails showing what you are doing and how you are doing it. However, in the case of trust these are only one part of the story. Not merely information, but also values and norms colour the way both parties may trust each other. This implies an explication of and a discussion on values that

underlie expectations in the trusting relation and a discussion on responsibilities within the chain.

Any account of trust in the food sector should keep in mind that:

- Being trustworthy requires an analysis of the status of trust.
- Being trustworthy is more than providing information.
- In cases of confidence trustworthiness means being transparent. In the case of trust it implies that underlying values & responsibilities (why) should be further explicated.

Therefore, being trustworthy in the current agrofood context cannot be without: (a) reflection on the concept of trust and (b) reflection on and explication of one's values.

References

- Coleman, J., 1990, *Foundations of Social Theory*, Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Gambetta, D. (ed.), 1988, *Trust: Making and breaking cooperative relations*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Giddens, A., 1990, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hardin, R., 2002, *Trust and Trustworthiness*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kjærnes, U., 2004, *Press Note, Final Conference, Consumer Trust in Food, A European Research Project on Social and Institutional Conditions for the Production of Trust*, www.trustinfood.org.

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Research Project:

Cloning in Public

Cloning in Public is a research project coordinated by the Danish Centre for Bioethics and Risk Assessment and financed by the European Commission. It aims to uncover the ethical and legal aspects of farm animal cloning and put forth recommendations on possible regulation and guidelines on research and applications of the technology. At the same time the project shall inspire a

European public debate on farm animal cloning.

by Mickey Gjerris

Since the announcement of the cloned sheep Dolly in 1997 the word cloning has become a household word in the public sphere. However, the debate Dolly created mostly concentrated on the possibilities of cloning humans.

Meanwhile, the development of nucleus transfer cloning of mammals has continued and so far the successful cloning of mice, rats, rabbits, sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, cats, mules and horses using the nucleus transfer technology have been reported. Although the technology still has a rather low success-rate, measured as live-born individuals in relation to the number of fertilized eggs, the results of the research since the birth of Dolly represent a significant progress in the understanding of how and why the nucleus transfer process affects the fertilized egg and its development from embryo to born individual.

So far expectations to the technology have mostly been directed towards the development of research animals and the so-called bio-reactors or pharm animals which have been genetically modified and cloned to be able to produce certain specific proteins to be utilized in the production of pharmaceuticals. But as the understanding of the technology improves and the costs connected to cloning are reduced, the perspectives within the agricultural sector widen. And as perspectives widen and prospects multiply the need for answering public concerns about cloning of farm animals becomes more and more urgent. To be able to comprehensively identify those concerns, that move beyond the traditional concept of risk and animal welfare concerns, encompassing what can broadly be described as ethical concerns about the integrity of the cloned animals, a thorough public debate must be facilitated.

The project Cloning in Public is a response to the growing perspectives of and concerns about farm animal cloning. It has two

main objectives. The first is to facilitate a comprehensive public debate about the ethical and societal consequences of farm animal cloning across Europe and the second is to make recommendations on regulation and on guidelines for research and applications of farm animal cloning. To reach the objectives a study including three main focus points is carried out. The first focus involves identifying the state-of-the-art of farm animal cloning and possible applications of the technology as it is currently evaluated by scientists within the field. Secondly the legislation on farm animal cloning in the EU countries and internationally is evaluated and finally ethical concerns that the technology gives rise to both from an academic perspective and from the perspective of the general public are identified.

The results of the project will be disseminated through reports on all focus points as well as through articles aimed at leading European newspapers, magazines etc.

Participants

- Danish Centre for Bioethics and Risk Assessment (including researchers from Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University and the University of Copenhagen)
- Cardiff Law School, University of Wales
- Institute of Animal Physiology and Genetics, Czech Republic
- Institute for Molecular and Cell Biology, Porto, Portugal

More information

More information is available at:

<http://www.bioethics.kvl.dk/cloninginpublic.htm>

Conferences & Courses

2005

Jan 18-19

**European Forests in Ethical Discourse
International Scientific Symposium (Berlin –
Germany)**

www.forest.iogensuu.fi/silva/gfen/berlin/Home.htm

Jan 28 – 29

**Learning about Risk: ESRC Social Contexts and
Responses to Risk Network conference
(University of Kent, UK)**

www.kent.ac.uk/scarr/events/events.htm

Mary Mustafa: M.Mustafa@kent.ac.uk

Jan 29

**Behavioural Genetics: Has Nature Won?
(University of Edinburgh - UK)**

Jayne Richards: mail@genetics.org.uk

www.genetics.org.uk/?page=january_2005

Feb 24-27

**Fourteenth Annual Meeting Association for
Practical and Professional Ethics (San Antonio,
Texas – USA)**

www.indiana.edu/%7Eappe/program.html

Mar 4-5

**Stem Cell 2005 - Progress to Therapy?
(Edinburgh – UK)**

Email: info@trianglethree.com
www.stemcell2005.co.uk/

Mar 17

**Second International Conference on Ethics
Consultation (Basel - Switzerland)**

www.iaeme.ch/

Mar 17-18

**From Darwin to Dawkins: the Science and
Implications of Animal Sentience. Compassion
in World Farming (CIWF) International
Conference on Animal Sentience (London –
UK)**

www.ciwf.org.uk/education/international.html

Mar 26 - 28

**International Congress of Bioethics (Tehran
– Iran)**

Email: bioethic@nrcgeb.ac.ir
<http://bioethics2005.nrcgeb.ac.ir>

Apr 4 – 6

**British Society of Animal Science (BSAS)
Annual Meeting (Scotland – UK)**

Email: BSAS@ed.sac.ac.uk
www.bsas.org.uk/meetings/meetings.htm

Apr 8 –13

**Biomedicine within the Limits of Human
Existence. Biomedical Technology and Practice
Reconsidered (Doorn, The Netherlands)**

2005 European Science Foundation (ESF)
Research Conferences Scheme
Corinne Le Moal, Publicity Officer
Tel +33 (0)388 76 71 35
e-mail: clemoal@esf.org
www.esf.org/conferences/hc05175

Apr 12 -14 April 2005

**CESAGen (ESRC Centre for Economic and
Social Aspects of Genomics) 2nd International
Conference (London – UK)**

Email: CESAGen@cardiff.ac.uk
www.cesagen.lancs.ac.uk/

Apr 15-17

**Science for Sale? The public communication of
science in a corporate world (Ithaca, NY - USA)**

Department of Science & Technology Studies and
the Department of Communication, Cornell
University
<http://www.sts.cornell.edu/conferences/stscomm/index.php>

Jun 5 – 8

**56th Annual Meeting of the European
Association for Animal Production (EAAP)
(Uppsala, Sweden)**

Email: EAAP2005@slu.se
www.conference.slu.se/EAAP2005/

Jun 9-12

**Visualizing Food and Farm (Portland, Oregon -
USA)**

Joint Annual Meeting of the Agriculture, Food and
Human Values Society (AFHVS) and the
Association for the Study of Food and Society
(ASFS)

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/rhaynes/afhvs/NextMeeting.htm>

Aug 5-9

**Aquaculture Europe 2005. Lessons from the
Past to optimise the Future (Trondheim –
Norway)**

www.easonline.org/agenda/en/description.asp?id=216

14th Annual
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY
FOR ANTHROZOOLOGY
CONFERENCE



EXPLORING
HUMAN-ANIMAL
RELATIONS

July 11-12, 2005
Niagara Falls, NY
U.S.A.

Photo Provided by Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation



Keynote Addresses will be presented by:

David Favre – *Transforming Social Attitudes Toward Animals Into Law*,
Editor-in-Chief, Animal Legal & Historical Web Center, Michigan State
University College of Law.

Clif Flynn – *Women, Children, and Animals Last: Connections between
Animal Abuse and Family Violence*, Department of Sociology, University
of South Carolina.

Ádám Miklósi – *Research on Canine-Human Relationships*, Eötvös
Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary.

Irene Pepperberg – *In Search of King Solomon's Ring: Cognitive and
Communicative Studies on Grey Parrots*, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced
Studies and Brandeis University.

ISAZ Members and others are invited to submit proposals for presenta-
tions and posters. Suggested topics include (but are not limited to):
animal cruelty, human-animal communication, animals and human
health, human-animal bond, attitudes toward animals, humane educa-
tion, alternatives to animal use in research and education. Additional
topics (both on and off conference theme) are also welcome. Groups of
presenters are encouraged to submit proposals for themed sessions.

**The deadline for both abstract submission
and early bird registration is March 4, 2005.**

Registration forms and submission guidelines are available on the ISAZ
website, <http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/CCAB/ISAZ.htm>.

You may contact the conference organizer,
Kathy Gerbasi (kcgerbasiphd@earthlink.net) for additional information.

**The generous conference sponsorship of People, Animals, Nature,
Inc. www.pan-inc.org is gratefully acknowledged.**

Aug 20-24

**39th International Congress of International
Society for Applied Ethology (ISAE)
(Sagamihara- Japan)**

www.applied-ethology.org/isaameetings.htm

Aug 21-24

Bringing Genomes to Life. ECB12: 12th European Congress on Biotechnology (Copenhagen - Denmark)

Organisers: the Danish Biotechnology Forum and the Danish Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology on behalf of the European Federation of Biotechnology

www.ecb12.dk/

Lars Haastrup Pedersen: lh@bio.auc.dk

Aug 21-25

5th World Congress on Alternatives & Animal Use in the Life Sciences (Berlin – Germany)

www.ctw-congress.de/act2005

Sep 21-23

Researching Sustainable Systems: International Scientific Conference on Organic Agriculture (Adelaide - Australia)

Organiser: ISOFAR - International Society of Organic Agriculture Research

<http://www.isofar.org/adelaide2005/index.html>

2006

The 6th EurSafe Congress will be organised in Oslo, Norway 21-24 June 2006

Aug 6 - 10

11th International Congress of Human Genetics (Brisbane – Australia)

John C MacMillan: ichg2006@icms.com.au

www.ichg2006.com/index.cfm?MenuID=0

Books, Reports & Journals

New books

Foot and Mouth Disease - New values, innovative research agendas and policies.

Report from a workshop by A.J. van der Zijpp, M.J.E. Braker, C.H.A.M. Eilers, H. Kieft, T.A. Vogelzang and S.J. Oosting; EAAP Technical Series No. 5. Wageningen Academic Publishers; 2004 - 77 pages - ISBN 9076998337

www.wageningenacademic.com

How to best teach bioethics. Report from a workshop March 2003 organised by the Nordic Committee on Bioethics and NorFA, edited by Jakob Elster and Helena von Troil. TemaNord 2004:519. Norden, Nordic Council of Ministers; 189 pages - ISBN 92-893-1005-7

www.norden.org

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Deadline for the next issue: 20 March 2005

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Membership Administration News

Until recently EurSafe membership and financial administration was run by the Eursafe executive secretariat at the University of Utrecht. This situation has now been changed. The growing number of members and the complications of international payments asked for another approach. So it was with the financial administration, where the use of specific software systems can improve efficiency and ease reporting and control.

Now, De Beek Group in The Hague, an office specialized in carrying out organization and business administration has taken over the tasks of both membership and financial administration of EurSafe. It started 1 December 2004. All membership affairs, including subscriptions, renewals and handling fees are taken care of by De Beek Group. It also takes care of the Eur-Safe members' subscriptions to JAEE (Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics) and the members' need of information, addresses, etc. The contact address is:

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In the new situation the membership fee has to be paid directly to the Eursafe administration. It will no longer be connected with the EurSafe Congress fees, as was the case earlier. In January 2005 all members will get an invoice for the 2005 fees. Payment will be possible by bank transfer and by credit card (Visa or MasterCard). Dutch members can also give a permission for yearly cashing of the fee.

The aim is to keep the membership administration as clear and simple as possible for the members and at the same time give the executive committee better opportunities to control the costs.

Jos Metz, Treasurer