



European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (EurSafe)

Newsletter

Volume 5, No.1-2, June 2003

“Science, Ethics and Society” ***2-4 September 2004***

Themes and dates are set for the 5th EurSafe Congress in Leuven, Belgium

The congress will have four main themes:

- Ethics as a dimension of animal production and consumption
- Ethics and sustainability: food production, environmental policies and future generations
- Ethics, world food security and development
- Ethics and the biobased economy of the twenty-first century: agriculture expanding into health, energy, chemicals and materials

The deadline for submitting abstracts is **15 January 2004**. More information can be obtained at

<http://www.kuleuven.ac.be/cabme/page.php?LAN=E&TID=4&ID=35&FILE=agendadetail>

or from Johan De Tavernier, johan.detavernier@agr.kuleuven.ac.be

New Editors

Geir Tveit (Denmark) has taken over from Volkert Beekman as the editor-in-chief of the EurSafe Newsletter at the 4th EurSafe Congress in Toulouse, March 2003. Kate Millar (UK) and Silke Schicktanz (Germany) continue their editorial tasks and in addition, the board of editors has been strengthened with Vonne Lund (Sweden/Norway), Tassos Michalopoulos (The Netherlands) and Assya Pascalev (USA).

Due to the lack of response from EurSafe members, the planned special issue for the 4th Congress was cancelled. Therefore, this issue is numbered 1-2.

Table of Contents

Pharma-foods are queuing up for approval (from the 4 th EurSafe Congress in Toulouse)	2
Conferences & Courses	5
Books & Journals	7
Open Forum	8
EurSafe Information	9
Newsletter Information	10
Membership Application Form	12

From the 4th EurSafe Congress in Toulouse:

Pharma-foods are queuing up for approval

by Gitte Meyer

Is the fusion of food and medicine a solution to a problem or a problem to be solved? Hesitating European food authorities are presented with a growing number of applications regarding pharma-foods - a variety of fusion-cookery breaded with a host of new concerns, stretching from safety to social and cultural aspects.

Hungry? Have a sausage and a slice of bread. Cover the bread with a yellow fat spread, and add some cold cuts. Thirsty? Have a soft drink or a glass of milk to go with the meal. Afterwards you can treat yourself to an ice-cream or a yoghurt. Or perhaps you prefer a portion of snacks or just a couple of pastilles to clear the throat. Any other needs? What about prevention of heart disease? In an unregulated European market you would be able to acquire all these products in a fortified version: Pharma-foods with added phytosterols intended to decrease the level of cholesterol in your blood and to diminish the risk of heart disease. During the last five years food authorities in Europe have received applications from different producers for the marketing of bread, cold cuts, ice-cream, milk, pastilles, sausages, snacks, yellow fat spread and yoghurt with added phytosterols, derived from plant oil.

The European food market is, however, far from unregulated. So far, only the yellow fat spread has been allowed entrance to the market. It is

likely that milk and yoghurt with added phytosterols will appear in the supermarkets as well, presupposing that they are not sold as 'milk' and 'yoghurt'. Authorities have responded in the negative to the other applications. While dealing with these and other applications of pharma-foods a host of new, public concerns has been uncovered, relating to the fusion of food and medicine. A discussion on these issues was opened at the fourth congress of the European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (EurSafe) in Toulouse 20-22 March.

The concerns span from safety issues - relating, for instance, to cumulative effects - to political and cultural concerns like: How heavy burdens of responsibility should be placed upon consumers? What will happen to the meal as a meeting point for friends and families, if the common meal becomes split into separate dishes engineered to support or suppress specific bodily functions of the teen-age boy, the middle-aged mother and the grandfather?

Fragmentation

The routines for dealing with proposals about pharma-foods appear to mirror the thinking behind such products. The products are intended to work on one or the other function of the mechanics of the body. The policy processes concentrate on the products one by one. This became clear from the keynote-speech to the EurSafe-

Congress by Ruth Chadwick, professor of bioethics at Lancaster University. She is also a member of the British Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes, and in this capacity she has taken part in evaluations of food products fortified with phytosterols.

In evaluating such applications one cannot rely on a product-by-product approach, she argued, because all the products - if marketed - will become available to everybody, although they have been designed for persons with special needs. One has to consider the possible cumulative effects resulting from the intake of a host of products of this sort by persons - children for instance - without these special needs.

The same kind of features showed in the evaluation of an application about iodine-fortified eggs, stemming from iodine-enriched chicken fodder. The levels of iodine found in the eggs were deemed to be so high that consumers easily could exceed the safe upper level for intake of iodine, as eggs are used in all sorts of foods. It would be impossible to control the intake of iodine from these eggs. Furthermore, iodine-deficiency is not a general health problem, but rather the contrary. The response was negative, but not because of lack of safety of the product itself. An isolated evaluation would not have led to the conclusion that the product was harmful, but questions of context, of need and of controllability had to be taken into account, and this changed the picture.

Ruth Chadwick told the congress that she is sceptical as to the way the questions, the policy process and the consumer at present are being

framed in evaluations of pharma-foods.

Applications are presented to committees one by one. There are separate committees on safety, and there is a tendency in this context to focus on risk. Said Ruth Chadwick: "But safety is a much richer concept than risk. It is about integrity and about feeling safe. It is not only about the probability of something."

Other committees focus on other aspects, and "where there are gaps in the system there is a reliance on the ideology of giving people information and letting them choose", said Ruth Chadwick, adding that "to resort to put the responsibility on the consumer is hardly acceptable. Labelling is not an adequate ethical response. We need much broader reflection on autonomy and on what it is to make a choice, and we need connections rather than fragmentation."

She also called for broader reflection on the consumer. There is, she said, "a thin conception of the person behind. The present process assumes the person to be no more than a utility maximiser, but there is more to autonomy. There are considerations on what it means to make responsible decisions, and there are aspects of identity."

Ruth Chadwick foresaw that the complexity related to novel foods will become even greater when attempts to prescribe individual diets by means of genetic testing - 'nutriogenomics' - are taken into practice, and that in these cases "even more of the burden of responsibility is likely to end up with the individual consumer".

Out of touch?

The increasing fuzziness between foods and drugs was also central to the keynote-speech by the sociologist Lotte Holm from the Department of Human Nutrition at the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University in Denmark: "It is traditional wisdom", she said, "that there are no such things as good foods or bad foods, only good or bad diets". She described this conception as the basis of daily dietary routines where families use the notion of food groups - cereals, vegetables, meat etc. - when trying to compose varied and balanced diets.

Lotte Holm and her colleagues encountered this everyday strategy in a series of recent, qualitative interviews with families around Europe. The strategy is, she said, at odds with the thinking behind pharma-foods, which focuses on single elements and single outcomes and on single products rather than on groups of food. A pharmaceutical fortification of some brands of bread, some brands of meat and some kinds of dairy products means that families no longer can rely on the notion of food groups when meals are composed. The order of food groups becomes blurred,. Thus, the population is being deprived of an important practical tool.

Furthermore, she said, the technical rationality of nutrition science to maximise health does not go well with other rationalities in relation to eating. The technical rationality is not only at odds with practical everyday routines but also with symbolic and relational aspects of meals. People use meals to mark season, to celebrate, and to express identity: "There is a tradition for having meals and having them together, rather than simply

consuming food products on our own, designed and chosen to fit individual profiles of risk", Lotte Holm said, adding that a growing amount of health screenings is likely to be seen in the wake of a wave of pharma-foods on the market.

Whether such screenings and dietary advice would result in improved public health is an open question. It might as well lead to the kind of confusion and the general feeling of powerlessness encountered by sociologists in the aforementioned interviews when they asked about the concept of food safety. Said Lotte Holm:

"We found different attitudes to food safety and to nutritional qualities. Whereas the food groups are in use as a practical tool regarding nutrition, people tend to regard the concept of food safety as abstract and as referring to invisible and unknown elements in the food. Food additives are conceived of as impure and people use different strategies to avoid E-numbers. Such strategies appear, however, not to be accompanied by a feeling of being in control. Rather, there is a tendency to feel dependent on experts of biomedicine. There is also a tendency to criticise such experts of being unstable in their advice about nutrition, of being limited to a narrow focus on health, of being out of touch with the realities of life, and of having double agendas because of links to commercial interests."

There is a call for independent expertise, Lotte Holm concluded, adding this comment: "I think it is the responsibility of researchers to respond to this call."

Conferences & Courses

2003

- Jul 7–9** ***Technology and Global Society (USA)***
13th Meeting of the Society for Philosophy and Technology, Park City Utah.
More information, e-mail: pault@purdue.edu, website: <http://www.spt.org>
- Jul 14–27** ***Vienna International Summer University (Austria)***
Biological and Cosmological Evolution, Wien. Organised by the University of Vienna and Institut Wiener Kreis
- Jul 16-18** ***Challenges and risks of GMOs - What risk analysis is appropriate? (The Netherlands)***
Course in Maastricht organised by the European Institute of Public Administration and the Amsterdam-Maastricht Summer University in cooperation with OECD. More information:
<http://www.amsu.edu/courses/law/publ12003.htm>
- Jul 16-20** ***Feeding the World: Opportunities without Boundaries (USA)***
12th World Congress of Food Science and Technology (IUFoST Congress XII), Chicago, Illinois. More information:
<http://www.worldfoodscience.org/worldcongress/>
- Aug 10-17** ***XXst 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/>
- Aug 24-29** ***11th European Congress on Biotechnology: Building Bridges between Biosciences and Bioengineering (Switzerland)***
Switzerland Convention Center Basel. More information: <http://www.ecb11.ch/>
- Sep 2-4** ***Real World - Real People: what are the ethical challenges for tomorrow's graduates and how can Higher Education respond? (UK)***
First International Conference on Teaching Applied and Professional Ethics in Higher Education, University of Surrey Roehampton, London. More information: <http://www.federalsurrey.ac.uk/fuscape/conference.asp>
- Sep 4–7** ***Food Quality Products in the Advent of the 21st Century: Production, Demand and Public Policy (Greece)***
83rd EAAE Seminar, Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAICh), Crete. More information: George Baourakis, baouraki@maich.gr or at <http://eaae.maich.gr>

- Sep 5-7 ***Socio-economic aspects of health in organic livestock (Italy)***
Workshop in Florence. For more information contact Vonne Lund:
vonne.lund@hnh.sl.se
- Sep 25-26 ***Biotech Nantes 2003 (France)***
7th European Biotech Crossroads, Nantes. More information:
<http://www.biotech-nantes.com>
- Oct 23-25 ***Euro - Aliment 2003 (Romania)***
International symposium organised by Faculty of Food Science and Engineering, the 'Dunarea de Jos' University, Galati. More information:
Maria Turtoi, maria.turtoi@ugal.ro
- Nov 13-14 ***1st European Conference on the Co-existence of Genetically Modified Crops with Conventional and Organic Crops (Denmark)***
Conference addressing the scientific aspects of co-existence in agricultural crop production at a European level. More information:
<http://www.agrsci.dk/GMCC-03/>
- Nov 13-14 ***FEAST 4 - networking for excellence (Australia)***
Forum for European-Australian Science and Technology Cooperation organises a conference in Canberra. Among the themes are 'The Social Responsibility of Science - what is it and who is responsible?' and 'Innovative solutions to drive agricultural sustainable development'. More information:
<http://www.feast.org/feast4>
- Dec 4-5 ***Perceptions and evaluations of gene technology (Sweden)***
Conference focused on ethical, communicative and sociological issues in relation to individual and public perceptions of gene technology. Organised by ELSA-National Research Program in cooperation with Dept. of Health and Society and Dept. of Communication Studies at Linköping University. More information: http://infoweb.unit.liu.se/ihs/filarkiv/call_for_abstracts.pdf

2004

- Sep 2-4 ***EurSafe 2004: Science, Ethics and Society (Belgium)***
5th EurSafe Congress, Leuven. More information:
http://www.kuleuven.ac.be/cabme/page.php?LAN=E&TID=4&ID=35&FILE=agenda_detail

Websites

The Cardiff Centre for Ethics, Law and Society (CCELS):
<http://www.ccels.cardiff.ac.uk>

The Center for Bioethics at Pennsylvania University:
<http://www.med.upenn.edu/bioethic/>

An introduction to bioethics:
<http://www.bioethics.net/beginners.php>

Books & Journals

Donnellan, Craig (ed): *The GM Food Debate (Issues)*. Independence Educational Publishers, 2002.

Düwell, Marcus & Klaus Steigleder: *Bioethik. Eine Einführung*. Suhrkamp. Frankfurt a.M., 2003. EUR 13,00. (in German)

Düwell, Marcus, Christoph Hübenthal & Micha H. Werner: *Handbuch Ethik*. Metzler. Stuttgart, Weimar, 2002. 576 pp. EUR 49,90
This handbook (in German) provides a structured insight in ethics in general, ethics theories, important terms of ethics and a broad overview of applied ethics, e.g. bioethics, animal ethics, genetics and ethics and environmental ethics.

Hart, Kathleen: *Eating in the Dark: America's Experiment With Engineered Food*. Pantheon Books, May 2002.

Heaf, David & Johannes Wirz (eds.): *Genetic Engineering and the Intrinsic Value and Integrity of Animals and Plants*. Proceedings of a Workshop at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, UK, 18-21 September 2002. Ifgene - International Forum for Genetic Engineering, 2002. 116 pp. ISBN 0-9541035-1-3. Summary and full details of how to order are at:
<http://www.anth.org/ifgene/2002.htm>

Holm, Lotte (ed.): *Mad, mennesker og måltider - samfundsvidenskabelige perspektiver*. Munksgaard, 2003. 312 pp. ISBN 87-628-0322-0. (in Danish)

Joss, Simon, & Sergio Bellucci (Eds.): *Participatory Technology Assessment*. Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD) at University of Westminster in association with TA Swiss. London, 2002. ISBN 0-85374-803-9. 320 pp. GBP 15 (paperback).
<http://www.oeaw.ac.at/ita/ebene4/e2-3c5.htm>

Küpper, Georg: *Recht und Ethik im Umwelt- und Tierschutz*. Nomos. Baden-Baden, 2002. EUR 10,50. (in German)

Lambrecht, Bill: *Dinner at the New Gene Cafe: How Genetic Engineering Is Changing What We Eat, How We Live, and the Global Politics of Food*. St. Martin's Press, 2001.

Pence, Gregory E. (ed.): *The Ethics of Food: A Reader for the 21st Century*. Rowman & Littlefield. 2002.

Pence, Gregory E.: *Designer Food*. Rowman & Littlefield. 2002.

Rowlands, Mark: *Animals like us*. Verso. London, New York, 2002. 194 pp. USD 60,00.

Scully, Mathew: *Dominion: The Power of Man, The Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy*. St.Martin's Press. New York, 2002. USD 20,00.

Williams, Howard and Carol J. Adams: *The Ethics of Diet: A Catena of Authorities Deprecatory of the*

Practice of Flesh-Eating. University of Illinois Press, May 2003.

Open forum

Are some legally sold foods not good for us?

.... and if so why are they being promoted and sold to us?

It is widely suggested that many animal products should not be regarded as healthy food. And if there is an unhealthy component in these foods it's not difficult to imagine that it's connected with the animals' barren living conditions. Humans who use them, as they do in vast numbers, probably risk their own health by eating and overeating them.

Without doubt most humans, once informed and who still can't alter their eating habits, also suffer from guilt concerning current husbandry methods. The dilemma facing people today is whether it's conscience or chemicals causing Society's widespread health problems.

By looking at the ethics behind our various lifestyles and eating patterns, we judge how things are; by having ethical dialogue about husbandry issues, it gets us thinking about things we've tried to sweep under the carpet. Discussion of the horror of factory farming, in terms of ethics-in-agriculture, will certainly initiate the first stages of dismantling intensive farming. As individuals we can be inspired by the simplicity of approach in all this, namely that "I" can simply bring about change by boycotting unethical produce ... and the more who do this the quicker the changes will occur.

By not practising ethical constraint there's nothing to prevent further

animal exploitation in agriculture, nor make the practice of animal-eating any less hazardous than it is already. If we aren't made ill by the product itself we're sure to be laid low by the shame of it all.

As we protest heartless husbandry we slow the market, but we have a long way to go to close down the diabolical henhouses. A half century of battery-caged hens has taught us nothing, resulting simply in half dead animals producing half dead food, all subsidised by government, all sponsored by the spending public. The consumer chooses to believe that if there is any cruelty-in-agriculture then it's something too complex to understand.

As the land becomes degraded and the welfare of animals forgotten, we seem to slip into shadowland. All because of a casual acceptance of shortsighted inhumane policies. Society decays before our very eyes. These days animal-sourced foods might well be regarded as degraded food, whereas the alternative plant-based foods are associated with optimum energy, and yet animal-foods are the ones to be promoted by Society. It appears that the subject of animal husbandry and nutrition is being purposely sabotaged, or at least not being addressed wisely. To bring some sort of order to the chaos which is today's animal-food production, the most valuable first step would be the appointment of a government minister to oversee ethics in agriculture.

EurSafe is professionally set up to keep such a minister well informed in

respect to the rights and welfare of domestic animals. It can initiate dialogue between the experts and other interested parties, and promote a better relationship between animals and farmers and consumers. Ultimately, it can generate an impulse in Society for bringing peace into the countryside and for restoring friendly feelings between the people of the city and the country.

Even though agriculture is associated with ugliness today, there will surely come a day when its reputation will be restored, and we will resolve never to forget the importance of ethics in agriculture.

*written by David Horton for Vegans
Australia Network*

EurSafe Information

News

EurSafe has accepted to become a member of the advisory board of a European feasibility study, should the study be funded by the European Commission. The proposed study is coordinated by Dirk Lanzerath at the German Reference Centre for Ethics in the Life Sciences (DRZE), and the proposal for a Specific Support Action under Science and Society was submitted late May. The full title of the proposal is '*a feasibility study for an advanced systematic documentation, information and communication tool in the field of ethical issues in science, research and technology*'. The acronym of the proposal is FASTER. More information: Frans W.A. Brom, fbrom@theo.uu.nl

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The EurSafe Newsletter

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the EurSafe Newsletter should be sent to editor-in-chief, Geir Tveit, get@kvl.dk The deadlines for the next issues are:

- No.3: 1 September 2003
- No.4: 10 November 2003

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Application Form

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

Family Name
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I would like to apply for membership:

- Individual membership Euro 25
- Individual membership including subscription to the
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