

EurSafe News

European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics



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5th EurSafe Congress

Knowledge and money-making: Next item on the ethical agenda

Intellectual property rights are expanding. Money-making is essential to today's universities. Has knowledge ceased to be a common good? Should it? What are the consequences for society, for agriculture and for food-production? The 5th EurSafe congress had a difficult time, facing questions like these.

by Gitte Meyer

What is the purpose of producing knowledge that, in the end, only a very limited group of persons get access to? The question is posed by Sigrid Sterckx who is a professor of ethics at the universities of Gent and Antwerpen in Belgium, and who has specialised in ethical and legal aspects of intellectual property rights. Her question happens to be the very last remark before the official closing of the 5th congress of the European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics, EurSafe, taking place in Leuven, Belgium, on 2-4 September. At the same time, the question encapsulates what turned out to be a persistent theme of the congress: the tension between ideas of, on the one hand, science as

tied to commerce, and on the other hand, knowledge as a common good.

About 180 participants from 22 countries gathered to discuss under the headline of Science, Ethics & Society. It appeared to be a headline that easily translates into Knowledge, Ethics & the Marketplace. The theme kept popping up, providing the academic participants with food for thought, not only on ethical aspects of decisions made by politicians, and not only on courses of action taken by producers within agriculture and food production, but also on the academics' own practices. It was made an item on the agenda of agricultural and food ethics.

The relationship between bio-patents and traditional knowledge represents one aspect of the theme, taken to the discussion by Sigrid Sterckx. She pointed at the expansion of the system of intellectual property rights, intensified during the last decade. Today, she said, "more or less anything can be patented", including biological resources and knowledge of biological resources. Thus, the international society is now confronted with the question of how to reconcile the idea of knowledge as private property with traditional ideas of communities to whom that idea does not make sense. Strong voices have called for justice, arguing that 'bio-pirates' should not be allowed to patent the products of local breeding: indigenous communities should have access to do so themselves, or, as a very minimum, their informed consent should be a precondition for the granting of patents, and they should be entitled to a share of the economic benefits of patents. In order to do so, however, Sigrid Sterckx argued, one would have to identify 'original suppliers' of the local knowledge – thereby in effect undermining traditional ways of thinking about knowledge. She presented this dilemma to the congress as an open-ended take-home-problem to ponder, together with related questions that had been raised during two and a half days of intense discussions.

Universities: in it for money?

In a paper to the congress Christoph Baumgartner from the Interdepartmental Center for Ethics in the Sciences and Humanities at the University of Tübingen, Germany (Baumgartner has recently moved to Utrecht University, the Netherlands), also

focused on bio-patents. He claimed that aspects of social ethics have been neglected in the long-lasting decision-making process on bio-patenting in the European Union. The – still controversial – EU-directive on the subject matter contains a morality-clause that allows considerations on intrinsic values of animals and human beings to enter the decision-making on bio-patents. Other concerns that have been central to the public debate on bio-patents are effectively ignored. They are, for instance, concerns that small farmers would become dependent on big seed companies; that an oligarchic agribusiness system will evolve; that bio-patents will be used to exploit developing countries; and that such patents may, at the end of the day, prove to impede rather than to drive further research and development.

In his keynote speech to the congress Riccardo Petrella, professor of political economy at Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium, brought the theme home to scientists and scholars themselves, urging them to deliberate on academic lust for money versus academic and public obligations to preserve the idea of knowledge as a public good. Riccardo Petrella, who formerly worked with UNESCO and in the EU Commission, (and who was invited as a substitute for the EU Commissioner) carefully underlined that he was speaking in his double capacity of being a professor and a citizen, stating that "I'm no commissioner. I'm just a professor. And a citizen."

He pointed to the fact that the EU is moving towards a situation where more than half of the research is financed by private money, and he commented: "Scientific expertise is not free. It is tied to economic interests to a very high degree. It is not a shame, but we have to be aware of it. Companies have an interest in accumulating evidence that fits their own purposes. Who are going to set the standards? Unilever? Procter & Gamble?"

There was even less mercy in Riccardo Petrella's criticism of the way European universities have reacted to the formulation of the official EU goal that the EU should become the most competitive, knowledge-based economy in the world: "In order to accomplish this, the competitiveness of European companies has been made the guiding principle of all activity, including

research policy, and all official documents place universities in a key position. Universities have reacted to this by clapping their hands: now we will get money. But you should fight against this. You should fight for knowledge as a common good”, Riccardo Petrella appealed.

But what about usefulness?

Closer to home it becomes even more difficult; that is, to the individual scientist who does not want to return to the ivory tower and who has to make her own choices, as part of her working life as a scientist, on how to ensure that results from her research are taken into practice in today’s society. Marian Dawkins who is a professor of biology at the University of Oxford, provided the congress with an illustration of this.

How do we know whether non-human animals suffer, given that we are not able to ask them directly by way of language? For years and years Marian Dawkins has directed her research at finding ways to ask animals welfare questions. There exists a whole range of methods by which the physical health of animals can be measured. At the same time, few would deny that there is more to animal welfare than physical health, but we cannot ask them directly: Is this unpleasant? Would you prefer not to do this? Would you like that instead? Marian Dawkins’ and some of her colleagues’ research has taken the shape of experiments that actually ask animals such questions and enable them to answer by

providing opportunities to do this and to avoid that. Do chickens want bales – how much time will they spend at bales if provided with them? Do broiler chickens suffer from fragile legs – do those chickens prefer food containing pain reliever? How important is access to water for mink – how much trouble are they willing to take to get a swim? Does loneliness produce sadness in rats – how eager are they to get access to the company of other rats?

Marian Dawkins readily admits that the relationship is far from straightforward between physical health and what animals appear to find pleasure or displeasure in. Cautiously she talks about ”investigating” and ”looking at” rather than about actually knowing. Nevertheless, she thinks that her results – if taken into practice – are likely to be instrumental in relieving some animal suffering: ”We have a commercial farm. If we want our research to be used we must convince industry that there is money in it”, Marian Dawkins says.

Thus, she points – like Sigrid Sterckx in the question that became the closing remark of the congress and the opening remark of the present text – at the moral principle that knowledge must be used to do good. But what is the relationship between this – widely agreed upon – moral principle on the one hand, and property rights, money-making and the marketplace on the other? That appears to be the next item on the agenda, urging itself upon discussions of the relationship between science and society.

Research Project:

Ethical Traceability and Informed Choice in Food Ethical Issues

The research project Ethical Traceability and Informed Choice in Food Ethical Issues is developed within the EU Sixth Framework Programme, FP6-2003 - Science and Society - 4: Deepening the Understanding of Ethical Issues. The project is running from May 2004 – October 2006.

by Christian Coff

Food chains are not very well equipped in addressing ethical issues that are raised by consumers/citizens, and consumers are left without assistance in their ethical food choice because of lack of information, lack of instruments that can facilitate their choices, and clear certification that gives reliable information.

The main objective of the project is to develop the concept of ethical traceability as the basis for consumers informed choice.

This will be done by mapping relevant food ethical issues (philosophically and sociologically) for the consumers, producers and retailers and investigating how food ethical issues can be developed and used within food producing companies and retailers to assure effective communication strategies and the informed choice by consumers.

The project consists of the following four parts:

1. Ethical Traceability: the Basic Frame of Food Ethics

This part is a mapping and an investigation of selected philosophical concepts relevant for the common food ethical concerns. Traceability is at the core of food ethical issues as it refers to information and knowledge about the food production chain. Ethical traceability will be investigated by identifying and examining a range of ethical concepts (e.g. ethics of communication, consumer integrity). These concepts will establish a coherent philosophical understanding of the ethical problems on the food market today. The aim of the investigation is to define the principles, the information and the conditions under which the consumers can act on the food market according to her or his ethical vision. This is developed into a concept of ethical traceability.

2. Sociological Investigation and Description of the Consumers' and Producers' Needs/Wishes for Information Concerning Food Ethical Issues

This empirical study will reflect selected theoretical and philosophical perspectives from part 1. To examine the ethical dimensions the empirical work is focusing on a whole chain perspective. This will be examined in case studies based on specific products in the participatory countries.

In order to establish the existing and the future ethics related to the food stuff, qualitative interviews and case studies with relevant actors on the food market will be conducted.

3. Documentation on Food Ethical Principles and Concepts of Traceability in EU

Where the former two parts set the formal frames for the consumer's food ethics based on traceability, this part documents the ethical dimension of food research, production, processing and distribution. The aim is to gather documentation of existing ethical

principles in the food. Information is being collected in a web based database, food-ethics.net, as an online resource and function as a capacity building for the network and more generally within the food ethics area, that is for researchers, producers, retailers, consumers and policy makers.

4. Knowledge Management and Communication Strategies on Food Ethics

This part looks into how food ethical issues should be communicated. The project deals with the development of methods for selecting the information (from farm to store) to be communicated. How can the flow of reliable information from food research, producers and retailers to the consumers be ensured? This part of the project also deals with ways of communication. How information on food ethics is best turned into consumer knowledge? And what are the factors that stimulate consumer and retailers to search for information?

Participants

- Centre for Ethics and Law, Copenhagen, Denmark
- The Applied Philosophy Group, Wageningen University, the Netherlands
- Dipartimento de Filosofia "A. Aliotta", Italy
- The Department of Manufacturing and Management (IPL), Technical University of Denmark, Lyngby, Denmark
- National Agricultural Research Foundation (NAGREF), Crete and Athens, Greece
- Department of Health Management and Food Policy, City University of London, United Kingdom

More information

More information is available at:

<http://www.food-ethics.net/page.php?PageID=17>

or from the head coordinator:

coff@ethiclaw.dk

Conferences & Courses

2004

Oct 11-12

Ecological stock-raising: The present and the future (Lithuania)

Lithuania Veterinary Academy, Department of Social Sciences

E-mail: zoohigh@lva.lt or socmok@lva.lt

Tel: +370 37363722 (Laima Matulienė)

Oct 14-16

American Embryo Transfer Association Annual Meeting (Tampa, FL - USA)

Oct 15-17

12th Congress on Alternatives to Animal Testing (Linz - Austria)

The Centre for Alternatives and Complementary Methods to Animal Testing (ZET). The congress topics include: Ethical and Legal Aspects in Animal Experimentation and Research Funding on Alternatives within the 6th Framework Programme of the EU and Free Communications

www.zet.or.at/kongress/Linz2004/english/index_e.html

Oct 20-22

Policies against Hunger III: Liberalisation of Agricultural Trade - a Solution? (Berlin - Germany)

Workshop organised by the German Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture

E-mail: a.kochs@media-consulta.com

Oct 20-23

Biotechnologies for Quality. Aquaculture Europe 2004 (Barcelona - Spain)

Organised by the European Aquaculture Society

www.easonline.org/agenda/en/AquaEuro2004/default.asp

Oct 20-24

Agro-Environ 2004. The Role of Multi-Purpose Agriculture in Sustaining Global Environment (Udine - Italy)

Organised by the University of Udine

www.dpvta.uniud.it/Eventi.htm

Oct 22-24

Ethics and the Life Sciences. (Delaware - USA)

Sponsored by the American Philosophical Association, the University of Delaware, and the Delaware Biotechnology Institute

www.apa.udel.edu/apa/opportunities/conferences/2004/oct/ethics.html

Oct 27-28

Up-dating concepts and languages in relation to the 3Rs model: reasons for recommendations (Brussels)

The INeMM-CNR (Istituto di Neurobiologia e Medicina Molecolare-Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche), in collaboration with the European Commission, DG Research, Directorate E, is organising this conference in order to discuss the outcome of the work performed under the EU Project QLRT-2001-00028, *Anim.AI. See - Alternative methods in animal experimentation: evaluating scientific, ethical and social issues in the 3Rs context.*

Flavia Zucco, f.zucco@inemm.cnr.it

Oct 27-29

Integrating Safety and Nutrition Research along the Food Chain: the New Challenge (Lille - France)

The aim is to review the results obtained during the Fifth and the beginning of the Sixth Framework Programme in the field of Food Quality and Safety and to contribute to the preparation of the next call for proposals of the Sixth Framework Programme and to provide recommendations for the building up of the Seventh.

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/agriculture/event/s/conferences.html>

contact: convention@lilletravel.com

Nov 2-5

Ninth DISCOVER Conference on Food Animal Agriculture: Protecting and Managing Animal Genetic Resources for Future Generations: The Next Steps (Cheyenne, Wyoming - USA)

<http://www.adsa.org/discover/>

Nov 9 -12

7th World Congress of Bioethics (Sydney - Australia)

The International Association of Bioethics (IAB), University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

The theme of the Congress is 'Deep Listening: Bridging Divides in Local and Global Ethics'

www.bioethicsworldcongress.com/

Event Coordinator, tel: +61 9385 3503;

info@bioethicsworldcongress.com

Nov 30 – Dec 3

Nutrition in the Next Decade: Nutraceutical / Functional Food; Product Performance in Health, Disease and Safety (Phuket - Thailand)

10th World Congress on Clinical Nutrition (WCCN)

www.psu.ac.th/wccn/

Dec 6-7

Scientists Center for Animal Welfare (SCAW) Winter Conference (San Antonio, Texas - USA)

www.scaw.com/winter%20conference.htm

2005

Jan 18-19

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

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

Feb 24-27

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

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

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

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

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

Abstracts should be submitted by **December 15th
2004**

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

Announcing the Joint 2005 Annual
Meetings of the
**AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND
HUMAN VALUES SOCIETY (AFHVS)**
and the
**ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF
FOOD AND SOCIETY (ASFS)**

Theme: Visualizing Food and Farm

June 9 - June 12, 2005

The Benson Hotel, Portland, Oregon

Contributed Paper Abstracts or
Proposals for Sessions/Panels are due
February 18, 2005.

For information about AFHVS or ASFS
and past meetings and future
announcements, visit their respective
websites:

[http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/rhaynes/a
fhvs](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/rhaynes/afhvs)

[http://www.nyu.edu/education/nutrition
/NFSR/ASFS.htm](http://www.nyu.edu/education/nutrition/NFSR/ASFS.htm)

2006

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

Books, Reports & Journals

New books

WAAP Book of the year - 2003. A Review on Developments and Research in Livestock Systems edited by A. Rosati, A. Tewolde and C. Mosconi; World Association for Animal Production & Wageningen Academic Publishers; 2004 - 336 pages - ISBN 9076998477
www.wageningenacademic.com/WAAP2003

Functional Foods by R. Chadwick, S. Henson, B. Moseley, G. Koenen, M. Liakopoulos, G. Koenen Springer-Verlag; (February 12, 2004) ISBN: 3540201203

Report on the Welfare Implications of Animal Breeding and Breeding Technologies in Commercial Agriculture; Farm Animal Welfare Council, London; 2004.
www.fawc.org.uk/pdf/breedingreport.pdf

Previously published

Pragmatist Ethics for a Technological Culture (Library of Environmental, Agricultural, and Food Ethics) by Jozef Keulartz, Michiel Korthals, Maarje Schermer, Tsjalling Swierstra Kluwer Academic Publishers; (February 1, 2003) ISBN: 1402009879

Food, Morals and Meaning by John Coveney Brunner-Routledge; 1st edition (May 15, 2000) ISBN: 0415207487

We Are What We Ate: 24 Memories of Food, A Share Our Strength Book by Mark Winegardner Harvest Books; (October 1, 1998) ISBN: 0156006235

Research Funding Calls

EU – 6th framework programme calls

FP6-2004-Energy-3

Thematic call in the area of:

'Sustainable development, global change and ecosystems, 1) Sustainable Energy Systems, ii) Research activities having an impact in the medium and longer term'.

Specific program: Integrating and Strengthening the European Research Area

Activity area(s): Sustainable development, global change and ecosystems

Budget: EUR 190 million

Closing Date: 08 December 2004 at 17.00

Areas addressed: Socio-economic tools and concepts for energy strategy

Applicable instruments : STREP; CA

More information: http://fp6.cordis.lu/fp6/call_details.cfm?CALL_ID=167

FP6-2004-FOOD-3-B

Thematic call in the area of:

Food quality and safety

Specific programme: Integrating and Strengthening the European Research Area

Activity area(s):[Food quality and safety

Budget: EUR 59 million

Closing Date: 08 February 2005 at 17.00

Areas addressed: Safer and environmentally friendly production and healthier foodstuffs
Environmental health risks

Total Food Chain

Realising ERA objectives - Promotion of SME participation - Stimulating international cooperation - Linking with Candidate Countries - Supporting Policy Development - Stimulating exploitation - Contributing to the EU strategy for Life Sciences and Biotechnology

More information: http://fp6.cordis.lu/fp6/call_details.cfm?CALL_ID=152

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Deadline for next issue: 20 November 2004