

EAAP ROUND TABLE, UPPSALA, SWEDEN

SLU UPPSALA - ASSEMBLY HALL

Tuesday June 7, 2005; at 14.00 – 15.30

”Ethical Values and Economic Goals: Conflicts or Complementarities in Animal Production”

1. Participants

Mrs. Annika Åhnberg, Independent consultant often publicly debating issues related to sustainable food and agriculture, in a society context. She was previously Swedish Minister of Agriculture.

Dr. Unni Kjaernes, Sociologist at The National Institute for Consumer Research (Norway). She has coordinated the European programme on the “Trust in Food in Europe”.

Dr. Pieter Knap, Genetic strategy manager of PIC (Pig Improvement Company). He has a broad international experience of animal production systems.

Dr. Frans Stafleu, Veterinarian from The Ethics Institute of Utrecht University. He has worked with the industry to develop ethical codes in relation to animal production.

2. Moderator

Prof. Peter Sylwan, Science journalist with an animal science background, presently Associate Professor, Institute of Communication, University of Lund, Sweden, and experienced discussion leader

3. Organisation and preparation of the Round Table

Prof. Jan Philipsson (SLU Uppsala)

Distrust or confidence, information or communication?

Peter Sylvan

Public opinion surveys are unanimous for considering that consumers seem mostly concerned with agriculture in relation to its consequences on the environment and with food safety, independently of the price level. Those issues are effectively transferred in the public rulings during the last years. They are though considered by the farmers as new constraints and additional expenses without financial returns. They can analyse the globalisation process as a menacing factor for them, and they now doubt about the evolution of Europe in relation to uncertainties for the future of the Agricultural Common Policy. Farmers consider having a very uncomfortable situation in the society. They feel they are understood. They say “We are victims”. But they have their own ethics even if they have difficulty to find words to explain and contacts with the other parts of the society. Crisis such as BSE, foot-and-mouth disease, avian flu... are contributing to the feeling that they have no more possibility to control their own destiny. A situation to which the politics cannot be aware. Annika, what is the place of animal welfare issues in this situation?

Annika Åhnberg

Animal welfare plays a specific role in this situation. For the public opinion the conditions of animal welfare are a mean to contest the modernisation process. In fact a lot of people look to themselves as victims. They are feeling as if they are. May be globalisation increases this feeling that you, as an individual, is very small entity in this enormously large world and you have very little possibility to bring changes about. But, if you go a hundred years backwards in time, for other reasons you would also find many individuals having the feeling that they were without any power. But, looking at a modern society such as Sweden, which is the society I know best, you can see. It is an industrialized society that we still have the feeling we are living in today... It was very much built upon movements of people, large movements – you have the movements against drinking habits, all the religious movements, the movements which aim to increasing knowledge of the people – popular learning - and of course you had the political movements, the left and the liberals - and in Sweden, they were carried by very strong action, were many people came together. I don't know if that is just a short unique period of time or if that is something that we can see many times happening in a development context.

Peter Sylwan

Frans? What is your experience when you talk to people, the consumer or the farmer or the different action groups? Do people really see themselves as victims? How do people react when all these discussions come up about how animals are treated and the way we produce our foods?

Frans Stafleu

The concept of “victim” is not very important with the type of people I have dealt with in the last couple of years. I see three groups with whom I am involved in discussion on sustainability of agriculture. In the first place farmers and industry – the “agribusiness” so to speak. I think they are confused because they used to think that they did a very good job in Europe after the Second World War. The main goal was to produce a lot of food to give everyone enough to eat. I think that something like 20 years ago the whole European agribusiness was very proud for having achieved that. And then, suddenly, other things became important – more important – and are put on the table. And I think that a lot of agribusinesses are still very confused about that as it has not been communicated to them very clearly.

Another group is a very small part of society – a couple of thousand people maybe – but they are very “loud” and active – let us call them “the Movement”, ranging from political parties to groups such as Green Peace, and everything else in between. These people are usually very well informed, and usually highly politically oriented. They try to move the “agribusiness” in some kind of direction, increasingly through influencing politics.

Then I see a fairly large group of “everyone else”, the general public, and I see all the confusion there too, because agribusiness has changed I think faster than they have been able to follow. I think that the main thing that we are discussing right now is mis-communication. There is an enormous amount of communicating in at least three different directions and that is difficult to solve. The fact that we have this debate is acknowledging that we have this mis-communication. And I think that what we need to do is solve the mis-communication problem first.

Peter Sylwan

And that turns us over to Unni Kjaernes who has looked a lot on consumers' attitudes. What are your findings when it comes to the consumers' ideas about the food industry and the food system?

Unni Kjaernes

The belief in the modernisation of the food sector is not actually quite meaning full. It is not that everybody distrusts everything, but of course, there are people distrustful in the food industry, in the retailer sector and also in the authorities. But, there are big differences between countries.

I have done a comparative study of "trusting food" in Europe. So, in Scandinavia we find the majority of the people who are quite trustful especially in their authorities: Scandinavians love their authorities, people are quite trustful in general. If you come to Germany or Southern Europe or Eastern Europe, there are many more who are quite sceptical and or uncertain. In fact, it is very important to understand consumers within the context of where they are living - what the market looks like and how the authorities take their responsibility - whether people feel they are protected or taken seriously, whether market actors do what they promise or they don't always do that? The most surprising finding concerns Britain where now consumers are very trustful, they are really enthusiastic about their food compared to other countries.

Peter Sylwan

This is a dramatic change I mean because when the BSE crisis was at its pick, politicians and institutions in Britain ranked lowest in all trustworthy calculations made. How come? What happened?

Unni Kjaernes

They have obviously succeeded in something. First we have to look at what the authorities did. They established a new Food Authority which was not only emphasising consumers, transparency - that kind of thing - but it was also independent from the producers and also from the running political agenda. I want to stress that the food market in Britain is special. Not in reference to the market shares of the retailers but in terms of how they can operate within a highly integrated market where they are really powerful controlling the successive steps in the food chains. They compete, not only on price, but they also compete and emphasise on quality, on ethical issues, etc. And all of that together seems to have had an impact.

Peter Sylwan

But it seems that the market mechanisms are solving the problem or is that not sufficient?

Unni Kjaernes

We need both. We need markets that work but we also need an independent party involved. People would not, and do not believe only the market actors.

Peter Sylwan

Would you say that the public in England got more involved in the discussion? Is that part of it? So, you need a crisis, after the crisis the public is involved and then all the people are on the same level of discussion and then the right solution happens.

Unni Kjaernes

I would say that this is an example to look at. Nobody in Britain would say that the BSE crisis and everything else was acceptable, but I think you are partly right. I think consumers in Britain - to a large degree - see themselves as involved, as taken seriously, and because of that they also take on more responsibility. But that is not because other parties have said they should take responsibility but because they are naturally more involved.

Frans Staleu

You said there was trust... It is a dangerous thing if trust is in combination with mis-communication. I did a little survey with consumers about embryo transplantation in pigs. I had to ask them what they thought of that experiment. I told them what embryo transplantation was like and they said: "Oh well, maybe embryo transplantation was a good thing - but now that you are this far, acknowledge that is not natural"; and they were really scared. That can be a danger because then they can say: "Hey what has happened in the

meantime? We thought you were still farmers, and now you are high technology; we don't like it, because we want more natural products, more naturalness in what we want to eat". And there goes the trust and then you get the crisis.

Peter Sylwan

But is it possible to be very very unnatural to exercise very extreme technologies but still be very careful about animal welfare and still be acceptable if you keep the trust?

Unni Kjaernes

I think that this is the major point. We find the most distrustful consumers in the context of systems where the level of processing is very low, for example where people buy food in the open markets and at the butcher shop. People in Northern Europe where there is food is more processed food and where, generally, more advanced technologies are being applied, consumers are also more trustful. It is not that technology generates distrust. But of course if people feel that in the development of technologies like GM food their concerns are not always being taken care and basic moral problems appear, then they will become distrustful. Or if this is a closed process where they are not informed, and where there are no parties that they can trust to monitor this process, then they get distrustful too.

Peter Sylwan

You have had a very interesting discussion merely from the scientific societies' point of view where you had said – "Well if we just inform the consumers then they will accept our values" - and what you are saying now is not a question of information; is it a question of trust?

Unni Kjaernes

Yes, I think sometimes even more information generates more distrust. Information is important but not alone. So it is how the whole system is built up that counts. Information can be very efficient or it can just generate more skepticism and distrust.

Pieter Knap

This way of thinking – *"It is sufficient to bring good information..."* - can also be seen as very arrogant. Because if you say: *"It is only mis-communication, we only have to tell what we do and then the public will think it is fine..."* that means that you are so confident that you are right, that you allow the public to think: *"It is not right"*.

Frans Stafleu

But that is not communication! Communication is a two ways-traffic!

Pieter Knap

I know, but what they say is not communication but information. We tell the public that we are so fantastic, we always do the right things. We believe the public doesn't know it yet but we do the right things!

Frans Stafleu

Once we informed they will be happy! It doesn't work like that.

Animal welfare values

Annika Åhnberg

In Sweden we have on one hand a debate where the consumers' food discussion for the moment is very focused on price. On the other hand you have the Swedish farmers and they have the idea that if they just could make Swedish consumers understand that the level of quality - when it comes for example to animal welfare - is so much higher in Sweden than else ever, then you must pay much more for the food products that have been produced in Sweden. And I think that this information from Swedish farmers to consumers has been going on for decades but obviously it doesn't have the impact that Swedish farmers wanted it to have. So, I think they have to start to understand that improving animal welfare is not something

that you do for the consumers. It is something that you do because you, yourself as an individual, want to take responsibility for having “a good production”. If you think that this is improvement that you do only in order to get more paid from the consumer, I don’t think it matters how much you improve. I try to get this message through because price only is the wrong idea. I think we have to bring about a change in why we are doing this.

Unni Kjaernes

It is very important. I think we should move away from accusing people from not taking responsibility, and for not being willing to pay more. This is the wrong question, we should rather think why are they not willing? What is the background for that? One reason is probably that they think that all animals should be treated well and this should not be a matter of market differentiation. Perhaps we should have improved the regulations, perhaps the farmers should really take care of it themselves, not depending on “people control”. This is not something that people know very much about.

Peter Sylwan

But, how shall this be done? How will you then safeguard that animals are treated according to the consumers’ value? By the way can I show you a small overhead which is maybe the vision of the absolute bottom line of this discussion. It is in Swedish though but can you see what it is? Human bodies packed in there, it says: “Human meat”. Animal right activist groups compared meat eating with cannibalism in a demonstration in Philadelphia, USA. Three persons let themselves be packed in as meat pieces and covered with plastic, weighted and price stamped. Is this a reflection of just a small extremist group or is there something running on in the society where people’s values really change?

Unni Kjaernes

They are obviously a small extremist group, because most people in the western world do eat meat, but they picked the paradigm of breeding and killing animals for food. This paradigm dilemma is a dilemma, something that people is dislike to think of and want to keep it away. When we bring up animal welfare issues we think they should bear concern in their homes and their kitchens. Then we combine live animals and eating patterns and that is not an easy question, although it is a basic question. When people have little experience of animals in their own lives or curing animals as they use to do when they lived closer to farms then this dilemma becomes only an ethical dilemma. But we should not over estimate this because the number of vegetarians, for example, has not increased very much and in Scandinavia it is quite low; it is higher in Germany and Britain.

Frans Stafleu

Thus we eat too much and so became too fat. You said : “Don’t look only at the consumers, at what the consumers want, but at the sector, what we in agriculture want”. If you look here at posters and you read the booklet of abstracts - and I did this – you find that: “The consumer wants more welfare...The consumer wants this... The consumer wants that...”. It is never: “We want more welfare”, or “We think that welfare is important”. Now welfare is only important because we want it to be so. And what we are saying I believe, is that this has to change to a certain extent! Of course what the consumer wants is important but you get the real strength, the real environment in the discussion if you put in your own opinion also in there. And, I think we have a conviction about welfare and about good care etc., and we have to put that in so that we don’t read in all the posters: “The consumer thinks that!”

Peter Sylwan

Now welfare is important, we think, but how do we achieve it? Annika maybe you can answer that question? I mean you want to have welfare if you equal that with higher and higher living standards, less and less prices on food? The farmer should upgrade to welfare, the animal should upgrade to welfare... Everyone upgrade to welfare! Is it possible to combine all these things in one development thinking and action?

Annika Åhnberg

I think to start with the basic question should be: “Is it right to kill and eat animals?” I think if you come to this question from a very theoretical point of view, then you might end up stop eating meat. I think it

has something to do with the development of the societies and with the fact that religious beliefs that humans always are superior to animals are not as strong anymore as they used to be, and our knowledge about genetic relationships between humans and animals are much bigger today. Thus I think that an increasing amount of people will ask themselves these questions. So even if it is at a very low level I think it will continue and it will perhaps grow. But I feel it is much more constructive to come to this question from an other point of view which is that the society we have today, where the vast majority eat meat and fish and other animal products, still has a lot of farmers. Then the simple question the farmer has to ask himself of herself is: *“What kind of animal improvement can be done that is compatible to economic goals?”* Just walking around amongst those posters, I found some that were not related to consumers but you can see many examples to what could be done. I found one that I thought was very interesting on milking cows and the fact that you can increase milk production by having the calves grazing with the cows – so you get increased milk production and this did not lead to more work with the calves than what you have with other feeding systems; that was very interesting. I think that the limit of this kind of change is much more a matter of traditions and just the unwillingness to change – *“We have done this for generations”* - and it is difficult to change habits now.

How to have “happy animals”?

Peter Sylwan

We have in Sweden a law on animal welfare, on the basis of a report edited by the Ministry of Agriculture: “Happy and Healthy Animals – ethical and moral perspectives on keeping animals”¹. But could you say what are “happy animals”? What is your opinion about what we call “good animal welfare”?

Annika Åhnberg

We need more research on what actually is *“good animal welfare”*, because we very often tend to think about animals as some kind of humans: because we want to live in houses, they want to live in houses... So the simple question for the farmer must be: *“What kind of animal improvement can be done that is compatible to economic goals?”* And then you will find a lot of things that can be done to ameliorate our existing systems today.

Peter Sylwan

We have a small film here. It might be an example of what you are saying and maybe you could comment on it. Look... it is a sow. It is an open housing system. The sows have a one room where they can build a nest for their piglets. The piglets are kept in this one room for 3 weeks and then they are let loose in a big space and the interesting thing with this system is that it is very agreeable to walk around in it. I spent the whole day – Annika was also there – and there was no smell on our clothes afterwards at all – the ventilation was perfect. In this system, the pig keeper, a girl, has 140 sows and they breed up to 3.500 piglets a year. That is more than 25 per sow per year. She has halved her building costs. She is producing much cheaper and earning much more money and it is much more ethically acceptable than ordinary pig production systems. This seems to be a symbol of making everything come together.

Frans Stafleu

It looks suspicious! This morning there was a paper presented which showed that keeping pigs free ranging – not inside with the straw but outdoors - was from an environmental point of view bad and the one who gave the lecture said : *“Well we have to change that”*. So maybe that is a typical example of what we generally think is “good welfare”. We had research in Holland that showed for the population an “icon” of good welfare which is an animal kept outside. But that is not always true. So you have to be careful. For me that is an example – it looks very nice, with the straw, maybe it functions – I saw it also in Holland. But those sows outside, maybe it is after all not good from an environmental point of view, maybe also not from a welfare point of view, I don’t know.

¹ On the website of the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture:
<http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/02/60/62/0107e1c6.pdf>

Peter Sylwan

The interesting thing with this example is that the breeder here said exactly what you said: "Having pigs outdoor is an "icon". So, I would not have them outdoors because I want to know what I am doing with the pigs"... Annika gave an example of cows having their calves with them in the barns. It seems to be an example of having more and more "loose" systems somehow. Farmers are trying to do that to meet the animal welfare demands. Does genetics play a role in this discussion on animal behaviour and how the system should be developed in the future?

Pieter Knap

I think so. Most behavior traits are highly heritable. In the European Union we are rapidly moving towards the situation where intensive housing of poultry and pigs will be illegal, which means that we will be facing a situation where animals are housed in groups under control, so to speak. And it is going to create a lot of trouble in terms of aggression between animals: suddenly they can do that because they can reach each other. I know a lot of farmers who have big difficulties with that and would very much like to go back. I also know a lot of farmers - probably as many - who are very happy with the situation.

Very shortly, there is a breeding component here: it is perfectly feasible from a technical point of view to select pigs that are much better able to function in a group by selecting for particular behaviour patterns. Whether that is something that you want to do, that is a question of demand. In general, I think it is fair to say that the breeding industry will supply anything that farmers are prepared to pay for. For example if farmers are prepared to pay for pigs that function properly in a group then "we will make them".

Frans Stafleu

That is an interesting point as it is a perfectly a natural, normal behavior for these animals to fight. In mice, first we had the mice in small cages and they didn't fight and then we thought small cages were not good. We put them in bigger cages and they started fighting. The cage was big enough for fighting but not big enough to escape. And the question is - from an ethical point of view it is a very interesting question - whether you should adapt the animal to this kind of condition we have because we adapt the animal to a non-natural situation. Of course natural is a difficult thing but we have to choose whether we want to adapt the animal to the situation we want to keep them in or the other way around.

Pieter Knap

That is the Dutch central point. We are talking about farm animals here and farm animals are by definition managed in a non-natural environment. Which means, that, in a situation where there is aggression in a group, the aggressed will not be able to escape - which means that the farmer has a problem and needs to deal, with it somehow. We are not talking about natural situations here.

Annika Åhnberg

I think there was an interesting comment also from another perspective because you said we can produce what the farmers want, but I think also within the breeding industry you have to reflect ethically. You do not have the right to just say that we can produce whatever they are asking for, whatever the demand is, because you have also to use your knowledge and your research to find out about what is animal welfare.

Pieter Knap

No, I didn't say that. I said we can produce - I am pretty sure of that from a technical point of view - we can produce practically everything that people request. I didn't say we want to do that. Don't put those words into my mouth! We can do this... It is very different from what we want to do! For example, if you must keep animals in a situation where they cannot escape from each other; it could be useful to eliminate their extreme parts of aggression. I am not saying that it *is* desirable, it *could be* desirable. I am pretty sure we can do it: you can select against aggression. That has been done for 6.000 years in pigs. The domestication of wild boar is to a very large extent, equivalent to making these animals stop attacking people, and that can be done. I regard this as something that would enter the ethical discussion because at some point in time someone is going to ask the question "*Is it ethically justified to do so?*". In fact that is the debate we are in the middle of since three years now. But from a genetic point of view it is perfectly feasible to do all these things. It has been done for the last couple of thousand years and it is still continuing.

Frans Stafleu

Well a short comment... If it has been done for the last couple of thousands of years, it doesn't mean we have to go on doing it.

Pieter Knap

I didn't say that!

Frans Stafleu

I know you didn't say that. But many people use this argument in that way.

Unni Kjaernes

I would just like to introduce a more optimistic point in this discussion. This looks as if it is so bad and that everybody is only thinking of money and there is so much uncertainty and confusion. The new thing here is that it is brought out into the open and all actors are asked to justify what they are doing. And that is a very important thing. There are no simple solutions to this obviously and there is no fixed way of doing it. But you can call for negotiations or try and fail; the important thing is that it is being discussed and we are looking for different types of justifications. The more I learn about this, I realise that free-range chicken is not an easy thing. Still, I think that this debate shows that something is actually going on: the actors are asked to justify what they are doing.

Frans Stafleu

When I started being in contact with the breeding companies, they asked me to give some papers on ethics and breeding and then they came to me and said: *"Well, yes you know, can we go further with this because we are planning the cow for 2008?"* There is something wrong, we think that there are ethical considerations. Now the public wants something from us. They came to me and said: *"Hey! There is something we think is wrong or there are problems, etc."* This is positive. The industry itself comes and says: *"Hey we have to do something about ethics, and not only because the consumer wants it"*.

Globalisation and animal welfare

Peter Sylwan

Finally before we open up for the audience to react I would like you to try to say something about what is happening in Europe today and how you think it will affect the animal welfare systems. We have more and more open market – globalisation – people are eating food from all parts of the world: how does that affect animal welfare? Do you have any ideas about this? Annika?

Annika Åhnberg

It seems the change is the opening up of the borders; this is not only an economic issue. It requires that you also look at more moral and social issues. That has happened with food safety and food quality and it happens now with animal welfare. As this is quite market oriented people in their roles and capacities as consumers have become more important. I believe what we will see more focus on these issues in the years to come, but not as fast as we think. increasing. For food safety we have had a lot of focus and now it seems we need to calm down because some issues have been settled, we have some solutions and the same thing might happen with animal welfare.

Peter Sylwan

But are there forces going around here that can drive producers to slaughter and process where it is cheap and where the animal standards are lowest and then transported the meat to other parts where you can better sell? Are those issues in the growing European market?

Pieter Knap

If you look around you can see it is happening. Personally I know a lot of 30/35 year old Dutchmen who are not allowed to do the things that they want to do in pig production at home and they move out; they go to Canada, to Australia, to Eastern Europe, to Southern Europe, anywhere and do there what they want to do. We must not have the illusion that we can act on this on a national level or on the EU level. Maybe the most significant development as a result of this is that the things just move on and continue; this is a global

thing. If there is a conflict between ethics and economy, then it has to be tackled on a world-wide scale, otherwise it will just move to another area. This is happening right now, pig production is moving out of Western Europe.

Frans Stafleu

Be careful, don't say it. Some people would translate it in: "Nothing can be done, it has to be global so I sit and do nothing". I often hear this kind of thinking and people conclude: "I cannot do anything". So we cannot do it on a national scale or on an EU scale. Of course you can start on a national scale. It will not be the last word, but it will be first word one.

Pieter Knap

But do not have the illusion that it will solve anything, apart from the fact that you do not see it anymore happening in your own country.

Peter Sylwan

Annika Åhnberg you had the experience from the political field. How do you tackle this? What would you suggest? The globalisation of the economy and the market and the welfare question...

Annika Åhnberg

I think that in the development of societies you have many processes going on at the same time. I mean you have technical development, you have legislation and regulations and you have public debate and you have trade. There are always many driving forces and I must say I find it a bit hard to define where all these processes are leading us today at the European level. I think that the enlargement of the European Union itself has had a lot of impact when it comes to changes of regulations and legislations; what I think maybe the most important driving force from now on, will be what is taking place in the farming community itself. It will be important if farmers really focus more on their own wish and need for change and not only on what they think are consumer values. I see a risk in a sort of separation of the debates, that you have the sort of debate that does not relate to what is going on in reality, where you have these extreme movements and that this will be the focus, the main focus in the public debate. I think these is a risk and I would hope that we could put more energy into the other kind of more pragmatic low voice debate on the changes that can be done. But I don't really know what is going on.

Pieter Knap

I will support that. I think the sustainability problems that we are talking about are not going to be solved by actions like the one you showed us. What we need is a political debate, we need legislation, regulations and we need that ultimately on a world-wide level. Action groups do not solve anything. They only make people aware of things that are not really happening. My personal impression is that it is not helpful.

Frans Stafleu

And the questions are left to the politicians and the scientists to solve.

Pieter Knap

No, not to the scientists... scientists don't solve problems. They only suggest a possible route to the people who need to solve the problems.

Frans Stafleu

Being at a University of Agriculture, what is the role of science in this discussion?

Pieter Knap

To advise society, politics, governments, legislators, who ever makes the decisions. Different people in different countries to advise these groups how things can possibly be done. And, most importantly, what are the true costs and the true benefits of these alternatives; the benefits should include everything that is important.

Frans Stafleu

But maybe also find out what the animals really want.

Pieter Knap

Yes that is part of it. It is part of the benefits.

Peter Sylwan

It is also what we saw in the film. The farmers themselves are trying things out.

Pieter Knap

Oh it is fantastic! Without that you never get anywhere! You need innovation. Without innovation it does not happen. Governments cannot change anything like that. What you need is farmers who believe in something; often it is high-tech, because you need chipping of the sows.

Peter Sylwan

The interesting thing with that example is that it is science-based. It is top biological knowledge. Everything that is done there has been evaluated at the University of Agriculture in Sweden.

Annika Åhnberg

But I still think we have to remember that all these processes have to be put in place and that in different periods of time, of course; one thing could be more important than another. I mean you could have a time when it is very important that you come up with some political decisions or you could have a time when what is happening at the base it is more important. But you cannot say that it is only this or only that because in society development you have to have many things moving along, hopefully together.

Questions from the audience

Are consumers willing to pay for animal welfare?

Jan Philipsson

A couple of questions collected from the audience are on the same field. I would say that people expressed that there might be other society needs, other weights for traits in breeding or traits to consider as welfare traits, and so on. That it is really paid for, by the market or that the agricultural policies really take care of. How should farmers act to cope with that because it doesn't pay? That is one of the questions that is coming up. The other one is how do we monitor the progress of these different issues when we consider not only production – which is probably easy to monitor – but the ethics of production and the environmental aspects of the production. How can we monitor these things so that we know we are on the right track with our animal production systems?

Annika Åhnberg

I would like to try to say something on the first of these two questions and that is that we have been saying now that probably the farmer cannot get paid by the consumer for improving animal welfare and then I think the next question must be: “*What can the farmer get paid for?*” Because obviously when you look at all kinds of products that you have in society you can find that consumers are willing to pay enormous sums of money for things that aren't really more expensive to produce. I mean you can pay for a “name-tag” pair of jeans much more than another pair of jeans although the cost of production is exactly the same. And there, I think farmers, retailers and food producers have to improve their ways of understanding what the consumers are willing to pay for. Consumers are prepared to pay but perhaps they are not prepared to pay for what is really the higher level costs of the producer. They are prepared to pay for “branding” of products that make them feel in a specific way. So like you do it with other kinds of products, you try to find “*the weak points*” of the consumers – what is it that he or she is willing to pay for? You have to do the same thing with food and I still think that very few producers really understand that they need to be very skilled also when it comes to marketing. They have to understand the difference of the costs involved and what the consumer is prepared to pay for; it doesn't necessarily fit together.

Peter Sylwan

People are not prepared to pay more for the handling of animals. So if it should be paying for the farmer, he has to achieve it through lowering his costs.

Annika Åhnberg

Or by marketing his products in another way: *“It’s healthy for you”*. I mean people are very interested in their own health issues and think of a happier life.

Frans Stafleu

But if it is not healthier but you only say so, is it honest? There is a problem!

Annika Åhnberg

You can’t lie - I am not saying that you should lie to people - I think there is a difference between clever marketing and lying to the consumers. You can have something in your product that really brings about healthier life for people. I think that milk and milk products can be good for you. I know that some people think they don’t, but I think they do. It is not interesting if they are as healthy today as they were yesterday, the important thing is that they are still healthy. So you can use that in your marketing.

I just want to check. I am not talking about the animal welfare issue or organic production or conventional production. At this moment I am talking about the pricing issue. How do you get a higher price for your product? And that has definitely something to do with marketing. Not necessarily advertising but it has something to do with how you market your products. I am saying that you have to separate things – animal welfare is not an advertising or selling argument, this is a totally different discussion.

By the way one of the hard discount retailers in Sweden and Scandinavia - which is NETO - is very closely co-operating with the organic farmers and increasing their amounts of organic products in their hard discount retailers units. So it is not necessarily a question of pricing.

Unni Kjaernes

I think we can learn a lot about the organic sector. The emergence of the organic sector in Europe emerged both from initiatives on the agricultural side and from people wanting alternatives. So that has been a kind of involvement where people are willing to pay more for that.

Better knowledge for minimizing risks?

Jan Philipsson

I have a couple of questions that come up on the production systems related to organic production. One is related to the tentative advantage of organic products, mainly they are reputed to contain less residues from drugs, pesticides, etc., but is this true? Do we need to have better controls? We know what kind of residues we have but are we sure that small residues also may interact in humans to damage health? Do we need better analytical methods to get better facts on these issues?

The other question is about when you have free-range sort of systems: it might be good for the whole population but a number of animals might suffer. I think that you already touched that issue. The survival of the fittest we used to say; is that something that we should live with or should we prevent that problem to happen? Do we recognize that problem?

Frans Stafleu

I always like questions about the point: *“Should we know more better?”* I have the impression that more knowledge is not always better. Because if we can detect some toxic substance better then we lower the threshold a lot which doesn’t have any real value anymore as it doesn’t harm you but as we can measure it we want it out. The point here is that we must think as society better about the risks and what risks we will take with foods. We tend to say that food has to be safe and we have to give a guarantee that it is safe. But you cannot really give a “zero risk” guarantee. The only thing you can do is make a calculation and accept some risks. I think it is dangerous to measure more than that. Of course there is room for it, but where are the limits? The limits must not be a goal in itself.

Unni Kjaernes

As a scientist I would also say that we need more knowledge but more knowledge cannot solve the political and ethical dilemmas involved.

Peter Sylwan

Are there situations where people are prepared to accept very high risks because they get something else out of it?

Frans Stafleu

Driving a car!

Annika Åhnberg

Smoking!

Frans Stafleu

Smoking! Eating!

Annika Åhnberg

In fact if they can control it themselves it might be acceptable for them.

Peter Sylwan

Thus, when Annika talked about prices... I mean if there is a high stage on food they are willing to accept a lot of risk eating it, oysters for example. You can pay for a lot of things – high price for something that is very risky because it gives you higher social value or something else.

Frans Stafleu

You have the feeling that you want to have control over it yourself and of course with the long food chains we now have, you don't have the idea that you control it yourself; "they" control it. So you say "You are responsible for my safe food" - to an idiotic extend. If you buy your meat and your fish in the market yourself you are more responsible because you can choose between this one and the other one; and you have more knowledge, so you take responsibility and that is very important. At the moment we see that long food chains that take all the responsibility are in control is and the consumer doesn't have much to say.

The consumers, the citizens and the politicians

Michel Marie from France and EAAP Ethics Group.

You focused the discussion on the ethical aspects of animal welfare but I think that there are also ethical aspects concerning our food and more generally about the responsibility of the profession in the long term or with a broader view: what are the equity questions in the food chain and what are their consequences and the economic sector. I would think that it is important to emphasize these aspects and put them in the debate with the professional community but also with the society, at large. It is just to say that we have to broaden our view about the ethical problem.

Caspar Wenk from Switzerland.

The question debated in this Round Table is highly stimulating. Thanks a lot! But in one thing you were not very precise: that is the word consumer used so many times. Pieter gave the frame from the pressure group or the opinion of the silent majority. My question would be indeed who is the consumer who can say something? Is it the retailer? Is it the politician? Who is actually really the consumer? I give you one example: in Switzerland, organic farming is driven by government first of all and secondly by the marketing of the food retailers as a marketing tool and that is so for the last 10 years.

Peter Sylwan

Who is the consumer? And maybe where is the power of consumption?

Frans Stafleu

The consumer is the one who buys. But the important point is that we want to talk with him and that is difficult. I did some research on consumer concerns about embryo transplantation and the point was that it was a case of public concern. “*Who is the public?*” The public who participates in the debate is not the one who buys. The public who participates in the debates is the NGOs and the stakeholders. The real public doesn’t debate. So it is for us researchers very difficult to talk to and get a meaning from the public. So, we always try to find out from “involved” parties like NGOs etc. Another point is that the public can change. You can have some kind of focus discussion with the public and then the public discussion will move on in a few years time... and it goes the other way because the involved persons say something else and influence the one who buys.

Peter Sylwan

You are pinpointing a very difficult problem for the scientists, especially the social scientists. You ask people questions and they are answering one way and immediately they go and do something else.

Unni Kjaernes

Yes I think it is a very relevant question. But you also point another important question: “the consumers” who are they? Are they the retailers? The marketing agencies? Often that is presented as what consumers want because there is demand but perhaps the demand depends on what is available on the market and what people have learned to buy and what are their habits. So, certainly these are not always the consumers... Then we can have public opinion surveys or focus group interviews which tell a bit more about what consumers think and want. This increases knowledge a little bit but I think we should not – we cannot – disregard consumer groups, animal welfare groups, and the public agenda. It is there! We may like it or not but we cannot take away the legitimacy of those groups. I think it is a very important good question to keep in mind: “*Who are the consumers in general?*”

Annika Åhnberg

I just think the consumer is a part of each and everyone of us and I think one problem is that we very often talk about “The consumer” as if it was a mass of people having the same ideas. Of course it is not that way. There are very many different groups and individuals that together become the consumers and that is why perhaps, as I understand it, you are right that we shouldn’t just talk about the consumer or the consumers in a very vague way but we should try to be more precise: who are we talking about when we use the word?

Peter Sylwan

And when we are talking I suppose that the same consumer can take one stand if he is in this position and then he moves to another position and take a totally different stand. I mean that if you stay there choosing between two pieces of meat and you have your children back home and you are responsible for your money... there, you have another stand. Then you turn out to be a politician or NGO you could change your point of view. Right?

Frans Stafleu

We often make a distinction between the citizen and the consumer. The consumer is the one who buys now at this moment and the citizen is the one who thinks in general about how things should have to be in the society. It is not always self evident that it is the same role. There are different roles and they can produce different behaviours.

Pieter Knap

So does that mean you will stop asking people what they think? And just study their buying patterns?

Frans Stafleu

What you see are people who make a rule at the end, but sometimes they make rules with which individuals would not want to live. I would buy the cheaper gasoline but I am glad the government and “democracy” – the people – have said no it has to be more expensive. So sometimes I take the responsibility a little bit at a higher level.

Peter Sylwan

But what do the politicians decide about what people say or what they do? What is more important for a politician? What people say or what they do?

Annika Åhnberg

I think that politicians are interested in what citizens think and want from society in general. When you ask people what they think, they answer as citizens what they think society would be like. That would be the base for political decisions. But if you are a consumer you act on the market and perhaps politicians should leave more of the consumer activities also to the markets within this sort of framework. Very often the word “consumer” is being used by politicians as: *“We can’t decide on this or that because the consumer doesn’t want it!”* We can’t do that. That is when you use the word “consumer” as a way to hide behind. With the farmer you can do the same. You can say: *“I have to produce this because the consumers want it”*. So, I think that for me this distinction was very interesting: as a citizen we act on what we want from society in general and we have to accept that we have different opinions being citizens.

Peter Sylwan

We live by double standards and we have to accept it.

Pieter Knap

Oh yes, that is human nature. I think that it is very important that the agribusiness does not produce what consumers want, but that it helps produce what consumers are prepared to pay for. Those are very different things.

Unni Kjaernes

My point now is that people act in many different roles. They also act as caretakers and media users, etc. One thing that has happened over the past years is the mixing of all these roles – not only by politicians but also the people themselves. They bring up social, ethical and political issues when acting in the market. And in their role as citizens they more and more bring up consumer issues. So it is an important distinction as these are different arenas – the market and politics – but these roles are not kept completely apart.

Animal welfare in animal breeding programs

Hans Stålhammar from Sweden.

I have lately been involved in a project called “Code of good practice for animal breeding and reproduction”. This is an initiative taken by the breeding industry. The aim of this project was to show ways to be introduced to the general public as well as towards the farmers that are our customers about things that are of great concern for us. These would be covered by the breeding programs that we are aiming for. It is a sustainable breeding system that will be there for many generations to come, but also a discussion about what kind of breeding techniques are we using and which techniques are not going to be used. That is also an important distinction to retain. I would like now in this audience to take the opportunity to recommend that all the breeding organizations and breeding companies should sign up for the adoption of this code and you can find more information about it at the web homepage of the “European Forum of Farm Animal Breeders”². What do you think about industrial initiatives like this one, to try to be a bit pro-active for this kind of discussion?

Pieter Knap

The initiative is, as Hans said, pro-active. It is a code of good practice, a description of things that happen in European farm animal breeding across species. The idea is that breeding organisations declare publicly the way in which they adopted these regulations. The main thing behind it is that we noticed in the animal breeding sector that many European governments are trying to put this kind of regulation framework together. The pro-active part is that it is an industry initiative where we hope that by communicating what we are doing, to however wants to know it we will increase trust for the things that we started with.

² <http://www.effab.org/>

Peter Sylwan

Any comments on this? Making ethical codes?

Pieter Knap

Maybe a fair question to an ex-minister of agriculture would be: *“Do you think this is a good thing to do?”*

Annika Åhnberg

In principle, I think this is a good thing to do but not having seen what is really the content it is very hard to say. It is very good that this kind of initiative is taken but then you have always a fear that it might be more words than contents. I hope from what I hear from you it is something that could be an initiative that becomes a driving force.

Peter Sylwan

But is there a risk by this corporate social responsibility discussion that is going on constantly that people see this as just a way of trying to get away with things. It raises more suspicions than confidence.

Unni Kjaernes

In general if this is part of the opening up process then it is positive. If it is just a sort of “*surface phenomenon*” and then we do again what we always did or what we would anyway like. Then it would increase suspicion. Opening up is not an easy thing to do because that will not mean consensus that will mean skepticism, criticism, conflict... So that is not an easy thing to handle. But if this is an indication that there is a real opening up, then I would say it would be absolutely a positive thing.

Peter Sylwan

So, surface and depth have to go together.

Frans Stafleu

And will have to go in depth as in a few years' time one ask will first of the breeding industry to say yes to these rules. Within a few years time they will ask “*How do you implement it*” and “*Show me what you did*”. That is the interesting point of this project. It is not only words. In a few years time they will ask more details and ask to incorporate it in a quality assurance programme etc.

Pieter Knap

It has to be very visible, otherwise it is an empty packet!

Peter Sylwan

What will happen to the companies that write down a code and then are not able to live up to it?

Pieter Knap

Look what happened to Bill Clinton. He lied, he confessed that he had lied and he stayed where he was.

What future for farming industry and commodity chains?

Alistair Stott from Scotland

Thank you for a very interesting and provoking debate. There is one issue that has been touched on but is quite important and might be worth an extra question, that is the question of power. I think one reason why the farming industry feels himself it is a victim is because it has lost power in recent years, compared to other groups. I think the interesting question then is how will change, how much more or less dependent will the farming industry be in the future - given all the things that are happening at the moment - particularly with regard to policy reforms and the exposure of the farmers to the global market?

Peter Sylwan

Where will be the market in the future? The power in the future?

Pieter Knap

I would just say that the problem was in my view that the farming industry – at least in Holland – had too much power and misused it. They have insisted for a long time that there is nothing wrong; and now they have lost power, you are right. So we have to go on to another kind of power, like we said trusting your own moral convictions, opening up and participating in the public debate. That is a different kind of power.

Peter Sylwan

But this is the power going over to the retailers, own branding, multi-national corporations. Is that where the power will be in the future?

Unni Kjaernes

There is certainly a tendency now for retailers - some big retailers – to become more powerful. This is particularly evident in some countries but it is increasing in all countries and not only the retailers becoming powerful, the supermarket chains are becoming powerful too at the retailing level, but integrate the whole food chain. So that means that they are becoming more important as decision makers. I would never say that this is the only tendency but that is the major tendency in Europe at the moment.

Peter Sylwan

Is that good or bad for animal welfare?

Frans Stafleu

It could be good, it could be bad... The problem is with the retailers - certainly the retailers who are international - they get the power for themselves, which is not democratically controlled. So, one can say: *“This is not good or this is bad, and this is not what I want”*

Pieter Knap

But let's remember that the best thing that ever happened to animal welfare in the United States of America in the last 10 years was that groups like “McDonald's” and “Kentucky Fried Chicken” and “Burger King” etc., got themselves involved in demanding from suppliers and farmers, to adopt certain management strategies. Of course that is the way it works in America. It is market regulated!

Annika Åhnberg

It could go both ways. I think that in Sweden where we have such a focus on pricing, it would be a problem, because I think that retailers believe that the only way they can create their own brands is by low pricing. But in other countries, retailers' own brands could also be high quality, they could even be superior and then you have a kind of retailers' own brand. It could mean that you also have contracting on improved animal welfare. Thus it depends on how it all develops in general.