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FROM TRUST TO TRUSTWORTHINESS: WHY INFORMATION IS NOT ENOUGH IN THE FOOD SECTOR

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ABSTRACT. The many well-publicized food scandals in recent years have resulted in a general state of vulnerable trust. As a result, building consumer trust has become an important goal in agri-food policy. In their efforts to protect trust in the agricultural and food sector, governments and industries have tended to consider the problem of trust as merely a matter of informing consumers on risks. In this article, we argue that the food sector better addresses the problem of trust from the perspective of the trustworthiness of the food sector itself. This broad idea for changing the focus of trust is the assumption that if you want to be trusted, you should be trustworthy. To provide a clear understanding of what being trustworthy means within the food sector, we elaborate on both the concept of trust and of responsibility. In this way we show that policy focused on enhancing transparency and providing information to consumers is crucial, but not sufficient for dealing with the problem of consumer trust in the current agri-food context.

KEY WORDS: food, food policy, responsibility, trust, trustworthiness

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumer trust has received substantial attention in recent years. Several large EU-funded research projects on consumer trust in food had been executed (cf. Poppe and Kjaernes, 2003; Romano, 2005), national food authorities as well as the European EFSA have prioritized strengthening or rebuilding public trust as one of their core aims (e.g., FSA, 2001), and even global organizations have begun to seriously deal with issues of trust (FAO, 2003). This raises the question of why this issue gets so much attention. If we take the growing expertise in the field of risk analysis and assessment and the increasing reliability of safety studies into account, one would expect the opposite trend. A closer look at the agri-food sector, however, shows three general characteristics that can explain why trust is still an issue in spite of the growing expertise in the field of risk analysis (cf. Brom, 2002).

First, we are confronted with the development and application of new technologies, like biotechnology and more specifically genetic modification.

These advancements yield novel products and ways of production where the criteria of evaluation and acceptability are not clear beforehand. Moreover, technological innovation is related to the blurring of borders between food and medicine and the introduction of health-related novel foods that influences the food sector.

A second development is the growing distance, in both time and space, between production and consumption. This often confronts consumers with the feeling of a loss of control of their ability of choice in food selection. Consumers often feel dependent on practices that are out of their direct control and, yet, are very important to them. The globalizing character of the agricultural and food sector only confirms this feeling: production of food is often a long, anonymous process in which large-scale industry farms, multinational processing industries, and supermarkets are involved.

Third, the food sector has been strongly associated with a number of food-related scandals and affairs, like BSE in beef, dioxins in chicken, salmonella in eggs, and the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. More than once the effect of these incidences on public trust has been mentioned (FAO/WHO, 1998; FSA, 2001, p. 24; FAO, 2003). The FAO, for instance, states that highly publicized food safety problems “have given rise to a general state of distrust among consumers” (2003, p. 3).

Because of these characteristics of the sector, dealing with risk,¹ uncertainty, and ignorance have become part and parcel of everyday life. As a consumer, one has to depend on the expertise of others, the checks and balances within the supply chain, and first and foremost on the goodwill of anonymous people and institutions involved in the agri-food sector. This highlights the importance of trust in this sector, which is a way to deal with uncertainty and lack of personal control. As long as trust exists, the lack of control is often not experienced, or at least not considered as an unpleasant vulnerability. However, the increasing number of food scandals and outbreaks of diseases have made trust vulnerable. This does not imply that there is a crisis of confidence in scientific and technological institutions in Europe – in fact several reputable European surveys (e.g., Gaskell et al., 2003, p. 32) have shown evidence that this is not the case – but it does show that trust has become vulnerable. The focus, therefore, shifts to how to deal with trust in the current agri-food sector.

In this article, we elaborate several steps that are crucial for an account that aims to address the problematic character of trust in the food sector. First, we argue that the concept of trust deserves more elucidation.

¹ Risk defined as the “chance × hazard.” However, in several situations the extent and content of the risk we may face is not clear. In those cases, we have to deal with uncertainty or even with ignorance. At uncertainty, we know that we do not know, in case of ignorance we do not even know that we do not know. See Jasanoff 2001.

However, the current problem regarding consumer trust is, as we will argue, not so much a problem of trust, but one of trustworthiness. Yet even when focus is turned toward trustworthiness, there still remains an incomplete picture of the problem. Since decisions on food-related risks are delegated to responsible authorities, like government agencies and the food industries, responsibility is a key issue in relation to both trust and trustworthiness. At the end of the article, we focus on some implications of our analysis for agri-food policy.

2. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY TRUST?

When one tries to define the concept of trust, the diversity of prior definitions is striking. Shapiro has already mentioned that the considerable attention on trust has resulted in a “confusing potpourri of definitions” (1987, p. 625). For instance, according to Hardin (1993, 1996, 2002), we can define trust as “encapsulated interest” in the sense that one trusts someone if one has adequate reason to believe it will be in that person’s interest to be trustworthy. Trust is encapsulated by one’s judgment of the interests of the trustee. The basic premises of this rational-choice approach are that both the trustor and the trustee are rational agents and that trust is a form of rational calculation based upon available information. Since trust becomes crucial in situations of risk or uncertainty, in this approach trust is seen as a process of rational calculation in which both the trustor and the trustee aim to maximize their interests. If you have reason to believe that it is in the interest of your neighbor to take care of the grapes in your garden during your holidays (he expects receiving some homemade wine at the end of the year), then you may be more willing to trust him for this job than when you expect him to have no personal interest at all.

However, is trust always a matter of rational considerations and interests? Others, like Lahno (2001), convincingly argue that genuine trust also has an emotional character that goes beyond the direct control of reason. They argue that a focus on rationality does not suffice for completely enlightening the concept. Trust is more than accepting a certain risk in the sense that we decide to trust after having weighed all risks and benefits. The risks at stake, the available knowledge, and the assessments of the other’s interest have a very complex relation with trust. On the one hand, more information on the involved risks and interests of the other party will enhance the possibilities of trust. On the other hand, it is the absence or presence of trust itself that strongly colors our perceptions of the information on risks and interests. For instance, someone who trusts the agri-food sector will probably perceive a large-scale recall of a product by a food

company as a confirmation of his trust. While someone who lacks such trust in the sector may presumably have the idea that she just escaped from another food crisis. The same situation with the same level of available information may be perceived completely differently. This does not entail that trust is an intangible concept that lacks any relation to reflective deliberation and reason, yet it shows that dealing with trust cannot be reduced to providing information or decreasing risk levels. Trust requires knowledge and information, but this will not automatically yield an improved trust level, for trust is not something that is decided with a calculator on our desk. Hence, if we would reduce trust to a problem of taking risks or lack of knowledge, we effectively eliminate trust. Trust is not just a matter of risk reduction or dealing with the interests of others, but trust enables us to act in cases of uncertainty and lack of personal control.

3. FROM TRUST TO FORMS OF TRUST

We engage in trusting relations daily, but trust is not the same in all situations. For example, when I trust a complete stranger to stop in front of a stop sign, I have different incentives and different vulnerabilities than when I trust my GP in prescribing me medicine. Nevertheless, in both situations, we speak about trust. To prevent “trust” from becoming an all-embracing concept that will be next to meaningless, it is advisable to differentiate between different types of trust (see Hollis, 1998; Sztompka, 1999). We may separate at least two general types of trust: “anticipatory trust” and “responsive trust.”²

3.1. *Anticipatory Trust*

Anticipatory trust is the kind of trust in which someone trusts the other since one expects him or her to act routinely. It is the normal pattern of behavior that forms the foundation for trust. The main element in the (implicit) decision to trust is the analogy between the present case and former cases in which the other has acted in a trustworthy way. A precondition for this type is that there is a kind of predictive pattern. This predictive element can be based upon specific human relations. For instance, I trust my friend to wear a suit when I invite him to my reception since he

² At this point we use Sztompka (1999, pp. 27–29). Sztompka also speaks about the evocative character of trust. This type is, however, not very illuminating in the field of agriculture and food. All aspects of this evocative trust that apply to our specific field of interest are also covered by responsive trust. For an analogous distinction see also Hollis (1998, pp. 10–11), who distinguishes predictive trust (trust that the other will do the same as usual) and normative trust (trust that the other will do what is right).

always does so. I know his behavior and expect him to act as usual. Such predictable patterns also can explain why one can trust brands even if one is abroad. Although one does not have any relation or experience with a shop in a foreign city, one will enter a supermarket and buy the products of this brand, since one trusts that the safety and quality of the product with this brand is like everywhere else. The consumer's (positive) experiences with this brand elsewhere, provide him with enough ground to trust the products in this shop.

The vulnerability of this kind of trust is that predictable patterns make someone or something reliable, but not automatically trustworthy. One always runs the risk that this is the first time the other will not act in the expected way.

3.2. *Responsive Trust*

The predicative pattern that is presupposed by anticipatory trust is problematic in many situations in the current agri-food sector. First, and obviously, there is a lack of normal patterns. For instance, with the introduction of a new technology in food production, we have to trust others that the products of that technology are safe and meet certain standards of quality. However, in such a situation we cannot rely on the usual way of dealing with these products, since there is not a normal pattern available concerning this new technology. Second, in some situations the normal pattern of behavior is not enough for trust. For instance, the normal clothing of my friend provides me enough ground to rely on him to come in a suit to my reception; yet when there is an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease I do not expect my government to be merely predictable, but also to actively use their competence and take responsibilities for the situation.

Nevertheless, when there is no normal pattern and when the normal pattern is not enough ground for trusting, trust is still possible. Yet, we had then better use the term "responsive trust." With responsive trust, it is no longer predictability that is central in a trusting relation, but it is the so-called "tacit demand of trust" (Løgstrup, 1959; Lagerspetz, 1998). The trustor presupposes that the trustee has not merely the ability to accept responsibility, but the trustee feels an obligation to respond to the trust placed in her. In this case, the trustor not only expects *that* the trustee respond in her acting on the object entrusted her, but also expects it *of* him (Hollis, 1998). She expects the trustee not to act routinely, but to respect and respond to the expectations the other has of us. Therefore, when one is trusted, the trustee should not merely act the same as usual, but should recognize the tacit demand of trust and do what is expected *of* him. This expectation often has a moral dimension. For instance, regarding

government, I do not only expect *that* they take care for an adequate food system, I also expect it of them. I believe that they have a moral duty to do so and that I am entitled to expect this. In this case, trust entails a moral notion, namely an obligation to respond in the entrusted way.

The main vulnerability of responsive trust is that presupposed shared moral values do not necessarily lead to trust. Shared values do not lead automatically to the same norms. For instance, all participants in the food chain, the government included, share the values of human health and well-being. However, this does not solve all of the problems concerning trust in relation to the health and safety impact of genetically engineered food immediately. The problems do not start in the complete absence of shared values, but in the uncertainty concerning the way of tailoring the shared values to specific standards concerning the safety and health impact of GM-foods. Responsive trust remains problematic and vulnerable as long as it is not clear what the implication of the shared values will be. Therefore, building responsive trust is not only a matter of transparency concerning the values at stake, but it also implies a clear discussion of how these shared values are applied in relation to the object of trust.

Anticipatory and responsive trust may coincide in specific trusting relationships. However, this distinction may serve as a step in mapping the important aspects of trust. Moreover, the distinction between these two aspects of trust seems to be useful for exploring the role and content of trustworthiness.

4. FROM TRUST TO TRUSTWORTHINESS

Returning to the food-safety debate, consumer trust seems a necessity for a well-operating agri-food sector. This could lead one to believe that one has to start at the point of the consumer: he seems the one who should change in one way or another before he can trust. If we approach the problem from this point, regaining consumer trust turns into something next to a mission impossible. You cannot make others trust you. This, however, does not imply that consumer trust is an unmanageable problem. It shows that we had better approach the issue from the question of why a consumer would trust someone else. If we do so, we notice that trust raises the question whether the other person is worth being trusted. This emphasizes that lack of trust is a problem of the one who wants to be trusted rather than of the trustor. The problem of consumer trust is at least partly caused by the uncertainty regarding the trustworthiness of other stakeholders in the sector and by the lack of clarity regarding what one may reasonably expect from those others.

This highlights the importance of trustworthiness. Consumer trust should not merely be addressed as a problem related to consumer behavior, but as one of trustworthiness: he who wants to be trusted should be trustworthy. Enhancing trustworthiness, therefore, seems a more promising starting point in the process of regaining consumer trust.

This raises the question of how to be trustworthy. Transparency and traceability are often seen as key terms for being trustworthy (e.g., FSA, 2001). When we apply the above analysis of trust this seems, at least to a certain extent, reasonable. In a situation of anticipatory trust being trustworthy is mainly a matter of acting predictably. One has proved oneself trustworthy in former cases and now has to maintain the actual situation. And here transparency and traceability are necessary characteristics for proving oneself trustworthy. You aim to enable the other person to anticipate based on your former actions in order to show yourself as trustworthy in this case as well. Showing what you are doing and the way in which you are acting are of the utmost importance. For instance, as long as a consumer trusts the government to have appropriate food-safety legislation, being trustworthy for a government requires no more than continually showing in legislation and policy that this trust is justified.

However, being transparent is not always enough to be trustworthy. Even immoral persons can be predictable and hence can be very transparent, yet not trustworthy. For instance, a totalitarian regime may be very transparent towards their subjects and follow clear patterns, yet this will not make them trustworthy. This shows that sheer predictability and transparency are insufficient for trustworthiness in cases where a trust relationship has to be started. If trust is under pressure or even lost, being trustworthy becomes a matter of building and obtaining trust.

In the discussion of responsive trust, we have seen that building trust also requires a clear discussion of one's own values and the application of these values in relation to the object of trust. Being trustworthy in this context is not merely showing what you are doing and how you are acting, but also clarifying why you are doing it: what are the values upon which you act and what does acting on these values mean in this situation? For both government and companies this implies that one has to explicate one's own norms and values and explain what acting on these values means in a certain context.

In short, being trustworthy cannot be limited to increasing transparency and providing information to consumers. Taken together, the complex character of interactions in the agri-food sector and the relative quickness of the developments result in a situation in which being trustworthy requires something beyond transparency. Hence, dealing with consumer trust in the case of food also requires the explication of values upon which one acts.

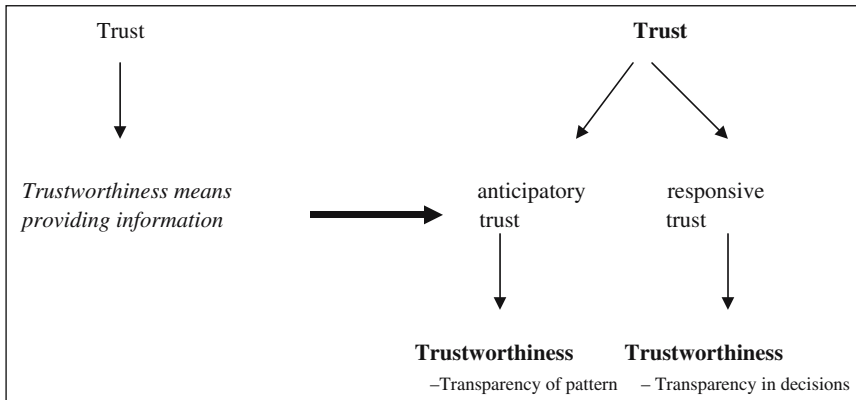


Figure 1. Shift from trustworthiness as providing information to a more multilayered analysis of trustworthiness.

This enables the trustor to get a clear indication of what one can reasonably expect of the other. Clarity regarding these expectations is crucial for trust, for trusting implies that the one who trusts expects the other to take her responsibilities seriously. This highlights the importance of another aspect related to trustworthiness: responsibility (Figure 1).

5. RESPONSIBILITY: MORE THAN THE QUESTION “WHO IS TO BLAME?”

A food scandal, a case of BSE, or an occurrence of foot-and-mouth disease are all cases in which trust surfaces as a possible problem. However, they have more in common. These are all also situations in which one of the first questions is “Who is responsible?” The answer to this question is often less obvious. In analyzing debates on the distribution of responsibilities in the agri-food chain, it is striking that each part of the food chain tries to lay responsibility on another part of the chain. Producers justify disputable methods of production, for instance regarding animal welfare, by pointing towards economic pressure and towards the consumers that still buy the products. Consumers point to the difference in prices and the responsibility of the government. Politicians emphasize the responsibility of producers, and so on, until a deadlock is reached.

This begging of responsibilities does not contribute to any form of trustworthiness. Trusting implies that the trustor expects that the trustee

takes her responsibilities seriously. As long as the content, the distribution, and the limits of these responsibilities remain unclear, trust will become vulnerable and trustworthiness will remain rare. Therefore, an elaboration of responsibilities is necessary at this point, especially since there is a tendency to equate the question “Who is responsible?” automatically with the very specific question “Who is to blame?” It is, of course, legitimate to use responsibility in referring to liability; in the case that a certain food product is poisoned, there will be someone or some institution that can be held morally or legally responsible and can be blamed or even legally punished for what happened.

Responsibility in the context of trustworthiness, however, is much richer than liability. Responsibility in this richer sense is not limited to a causal relationship between a certain act and the result thereof. In the case that consumers fall ill through consuming poisoned food, the one who is responsible is not only the person that makes the actual mistake in the production system that poisons the food, but also many other participants in the chain, including the government. For instance, a National Food Standards agency may not have caused the poisoned food in this case, but nevertheless they may be held responsible. This highlights that we may have reasonable expectations towards others even when they are not responsible in the sense that they have caused the undesirable situation. We can hold someone responsible by referring to a certain role or agreement that the person has accepted. In the agri-food sector, this plays a crucial role. For instance, agreements have been made concerning the reduction of nitrates in animal husbandry. Due to these agreements, we have reasonable expectations of farmers that they take responsibility to cope with maximum limits of environmental pollution.

This distinction between causal responsibility and role responsibility fit the two types of responsibility that are distinguished by Jonas (1984). He distinguishes between “ex-post-facto” responsibility (reactive responsibility) and “pro-active responsibility.” Next to reactive responsibility, which is closely related to the question regarding blameworthiness, we can distinguish a pro-active responsibility. Both types of responsibility are definable by starting point, direction, and perspective.

5.1. *Starting Point*

Reactive responsibility has its starting point in a certain state of affairs; something, usually unpleasant, that has happened. The question “Who is responsible?” is then often equal to the question “Who is to blame?” Pro-active responsibility, in contrast, starts from the actor himself. An actor might make a commitment to the realization of some valued state of affairs.

Consequently, she will adapt her behavior to such an ideal.³ For instance, a farmer may make a commitment to the welfare of her animals and treat them in accordance to this commitment. In such a case, she is not merely responsible when something happens regarding the health of her livestock, but she also wants to be held responsible regarding her commitment.

5.2. *Direction*

The differences between both types of responsibility can also be recognized at the level of the direction of responsibility. Reactive responsibility is backward looking. After something has happened, actions are evaluated in order to figure out who is to blame. Pro-active responsibility, on the other hand, is forward directed. The responsibility an actor feels for an ideal influences his future actions, the actor uses an ideal as a compass to choose between alternative actions. The responsibility is directed towards the future and strives towards a state of affairs that is considered as valuable. Those values or ideals can be linked to fundamental questions such as “In what kind of world would we like to live?” or “How do we want to treat each other, animals, and nature?” Having these ideals and views on the good life directly influences one’s view on what one considers as one’s responsibility.

5.3. *Perspective*

A third difference is the perspective. The concept of reactive responsibility goes together with the outside perspective. After something has happened, people try to find out who is to be held responsible; the responsibility is ascribed to an actor from the outside. The inner perspective is central to the concept of pro-active responsibility: the actor himself determines his values, aims, and responsibilities. Therefore, responsibility is not just what is at stake when something has gone wrong, it can equally be based upon an ideal or value that someone thinks to be worth striving for.

With these distinctions, we have made a first step. However, it is still unclear how responsibilities should be explicated and distributed. By including pro-active responsibility in the analysis of what one can reasonably expect of others, it becomes clear that responsibility is more than a backward-looking concept. This is crucial in approaching the questions regarding trust and trustworthiness. Backward looking or reactive responsibility suffices as long as the predictability of a situation provides enough ground for trust. If not, backward-looking responsibility does not suffice, since the moment that the question “Who is responsible?” is asked, trust

³ Ideals are defined as values (often latent and implicit) in the law or the public and moral culture of a society or group. Mostly those values cannot be fully realized and they partly extend any rules that can be formulated and formalized, see Burg and Taekema, 2004.

might have already been harmed. The information about someone's proactive responsibility and the values that underlie this responsibility provide possibilities to trust, and consequently to be trustworthy even in situations when one cannot rely on predictability.

6. RESPONSIBILITY: MINIMAL OR IDEAL?

Enhancing trustworthiness requires a clear distribution of responsibility. Without aiming to determine exactly what the responsibility of each actor in the food chain should be, it is possible to provide a tool to facilitate discussion and agreement about the distribution of responsibilities. Following the distinction between the reactive and proactive perspective, we can distinguish between two standards of responsibility: a minimal and an ideal one.

Minimal responsibility implies that taking one's responsibility seriously means that one does no more than obeying the minimal standards that have been set as obligatory by law, a code of practice, or social convention. Seen from the reactive perspective, one is only to blame when one has not obeyed the minimal standards. This interpretation of responsibility is often a necessary first step if someone is to be valued as a trustworthy partner in the sector. One can count on the behavior of the other, since he will at least comply with the minimal standard. An example of this minimal responsibility is the case in which a farmer has a responsibility towards the environment in the sense that she should comply with the legally fixed level of ammonia emission. She has taken her responsibility seriously as long as she does not exceed the maximum emission level.

Responsibility can also be addressed from an ideal view. This goes beyond what is strictly necessary in order to avoid moral or legal blame. In this interpretation, the question whether or not one is responsible is not just answered by a third party or an external standard, but by one's own ideals or values. Responsibility in this sense is related to a state of affairs that one regards as valuable and worth striving for. This makes responsibility ideal in the sense that it is action-guiding without becoming utopian. It is not utopian, since the ideals can be a motivation to move in a certain direction (Figure 2). The attainability of ideals might differ, but at least they can serve as a compass that helps to move in the preferred direction. This does not mean that each member of the food chain has to do everything possible in order to enhance his ideal. Thoreau (1983, p. 32) describes the limits of responsibility accurately when he states, "It is not a man's duty as a matter of course to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong (...) but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he

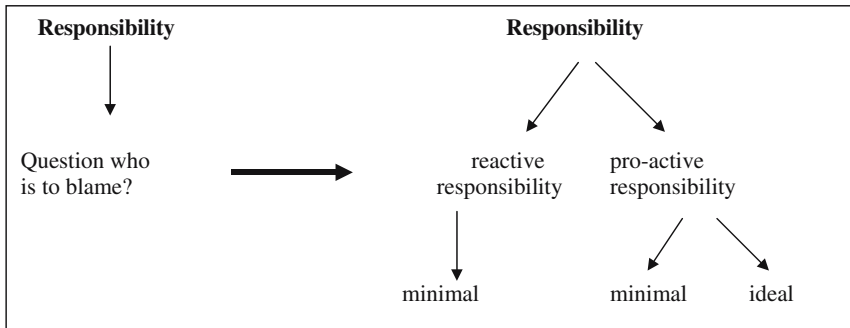


Figure 2. Responsibility shifts to a view where both reactive responsibility and pro-active responsibility are introduced.

gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support.” That means that from all the choices the actors in the food chain have to make anyway, they avoid the choices that have bad consequences for the cause they consider valuable. For instance, a farmer striving for trustworthiness should explicate his ideals on how to treat animals and should avoid actions that are contrary to that ideal, even if these actions are not legally imposed.

This distinction provides us with an instrument for dealing with questions concerning the distribution of responsibilities in the food chain. It can help in clarifying what one may reasonably expect of the other, which is crucial for any possibility of trust. Moreover, the distinction has normative power. Ideal responsibility shows that we sometimes have expectations towards others that are appropriate and justified, yet go beyond the minimal standard. In spite of the fact that the demanding character of such an expectation gets weaker the further we are removed from the minimal standard, it remains possible and appropriate to hold someone responsible. Even when one has taken one’s responsibility in a minimal sense, one can argue that he should have chosen to act in another, more desirable way. From the perspective of trustworthiness, this can be helpful, since taking one’s responsibility only in a minimal sense is not enough to be trustworthy in a changing food sector. Just doing what is legally obliged offers not enough ground to trust someone in a changing and complex situation.

7. TRUST AND TRUSTWORTHINESS IN FOOD POLICY

Now we may turn to the implications of the above-mentioned steps for governmental food policy. Suppose government is confronted with consumer distrust regarding the safety and quality of pork after a case of swine fever. Applying the above analysis implies that the first question is not

“How can we convince consumers to trust the proven safety of this meat?” but “Why would the consumer trust us in this situation?” The first step is the recognition that dealing with this problem means dealing with questions regarding trustworthiness. A government cannot change consumer trust, yet has a direct influence on its own trustworthiness as well as an indirect influence on the trustworthiness of the sector in its entirety.

The second step is addressing the question regarding the status of trust in this specific situation: Is it a situation of anticipatory trust that should be protected, or has trust a rather vulnerable position, implying that it should be earned? The answer to this question in the above case is quite clear. Trust seems to be in a vulnerable position and the predictability of the case fails to serve as its ground. This means that transparency and traceability regarding the food safety and food quality are in this case only the first preliminary steps. One should not only explicate what one is doing regarding safety and quality, but also clarifying why one is doing it: What are the values upon which one acts and what does acting on these values mean in this situation? For both government and companies, this implies that one has to explicate one's own norms and values and what acting on these values means in certain contexts. Consumers are not only concerned about safety in terms of risk to public health, but equally about the way in which both government and the food sector formulate a policy to prevent this from happening again, about the consequences for animal welfare, and the future of intensive husbandry systems and so on. In the practice of the above case, explicating values and norms can mean that a government has to explicate its norms and values regarding animal welfare or certain food-production systems. These explications may have a spin-off in elaborating good corporate governance and in furthering open and critical discussion with all who are involved in the food chain.

Based upon the analysis of the status of trust and a further explication of the underlying values upon which one acts, it should become clear what the citizen/consumer may reasonably expect of government and the sector. The issue of responsibility comes in at this moment. Concerning this issue, government has a double role. First, government has a responsibility concerning its own actions and, second, it has a task in stimulating others, like producers and consumers, to take responsibilities. In a minimal sense, this means, in the above case, that the government develops and enforces standards concerning food safety that provide the basic quality of standards. Further, a government provides clarity concerning what the minimal responsibility of, for instance, producers is. Policies and laws strictly clarify what is necessary in order to avoid legal blame. Responsibility in an ideal sense implies that a government expresses and reflects on its values and ideals. When, for instance, sustainable development in agriculture and food

supply is a target of governmental policy, this should also influence governmental responsibility in dealing with the above-sketched case of food safety. Further, a government can stimulate other partners, e.g., companies, to take their ideal responsibility.

At this point, the distinction between “corporate social responsibility” and “corporate social responsiveness” (see Wood, 1991, p. 694; Pierick et al., 2004) is clarifying. Corporate responsibility – in the sense of explicating ethical principles and values or underscoring an ethical code – is an essential condition for being trustworthy, yet it is not a sufficient one. Considering a partner in the agri-food sector trustworthy requires not only some kind of reflection and explication of one’s norms and values, but also the deliberative attitude to explain and engage in critical discussion on these principles and their impact: i.e., responsiveness. The combination of responsibility and responsiveness is necessary and prevents us from a situation in which either principled commitments remain only words, or apparently responsive partners remain irresponsible and consequently are still untrustworthy. Therefore, taking one’s responsibility seriously only leads to trustworthiness if it is a combination of both reflection and responsiveness. It is part of a government’s ideal responsibility to stimulate this combination of responsibility and responsiveness.

Stating that trustworthiness means explicating responsibilities does not imply that governments should take all responsibilities that are forced on it by others. Even in taking ideal responsibility, a government can reasonably argue that there are limits to its responsibility. Only in this way can a government live up to the expectations and remain a trustworthy partner.

Returning to the above case, a trustworthy government is not just a transparent government that only gives information regarding the involved risks, but it is one that is able to formulate and explicate what a consumer/citizen may reasonably expect of a government in this situation and why. This is not an all-problem-solving strategy. Due to the evident moral pluralism in most Western societies, a discussion of the values, and of the distribution and interpretation of responsibilities will not automatically lead to trust. Yet, clarity about what a consumer/citizen may reasonably expect of a government shows how trustworthy a government is and provides a better ground for trusting.

8. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have argued that a fruitful approach of the current discussion regarding consumer trust is not one that considers the problem as related to consumer behavior, but one that starts from the trustworthiness

of the food sector itself, including the government. The above analysis of trust shows that if you want to be trusted, you should be trustworthy. We have argued that trustworthiness is more than being transparent and implies more than providing information. Both are necessary, but are not sufficient. Since trust is an emotional attitude, providing information is often only half the story of coming to be trusted. Moreover, because of the dynamism in the agri-food sector, trust is not the same in every situation. Hence, an analysis of the status of trust is required: Is it to be protected or to be earned? Especially in the last case, people do not merely want to know what one is doing, but also why. It is at this stage that the need for explication of the values and ideals that underlie one's acting will become apparent and the importance of a clear distribution and interpretation of responsibilities surface.

This leads us to the over-all conclusion that being trustworthy in the current agri-food context cannot be without reflection on and explication of one's values. This process of reflection and the subsequent discussion should not be considered as a simple tool that provides us with a situation in which trust is completely unproblematic, yet it certainly helps in providing trust with a less vulnerable position in the current agri-food sector.

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