

**Round Table**  
**EAAP Meeting, The Hague, 21 August 2000**

***“Chain competence: Knowledge in agri supply chains”***

organised by Pim Brascamp (The Netherlands)

minutes coordinated by J.C. FLAMANT  
(Mission d'Animation des Agrobiosciences, Toulouse, France)  
with the contribution of Jean BOYAZOGLU, Pim BRASCAMP, Cledwin THOMAS

The pannel included people from research, ministry and companies, and from US, NL and other European countries

Prof Th. B. (Thomas) BLAHA, University of Minnesota, USA (epidemiology, quality insurance)  
Prof. E.H. (Ederhard) von BORELL, Germany (animal ecology, animal welfare)  
Ir Dr. C.A.G. (Anco) SNEEP, Royal Cebeco Group, The Netherlands (poultry production and potatoes selection)  
A.L. (Fons) SCHMID, Royal Ahold, The Netherlands (retail sector, food legislation, consumer protection)  
Prof. T.S. (Tom) SUTHERLAND, University of Colorado, USA  
Prof. B. (Bobby) MOSER, University of Ohio, USA  
C.J. (Chris) KALDEN, Director, Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Preservation and Fisheries, The Netherlands (fisheries policy, research and education)  
Prof. A.A. (Aalt) DIJKHUIZEN, Director Nutreco, The Netherlands (animal feed and business platform ; salmon, pork and poultry production)  
Dr. L.A. (Leo) den HARTOG, Director Research Animal Husbandry, The Netherlands  
Dr. L.A. (Aimé) AUMAITRE, INRA Rennes, France (research on pig production)  
Prof. C.T. (Colin) WHITTEMORE, Edinburgh University (animal science and society)

Moderator :

Prof. C. (Cledwyn) THOMAS, SAC, Auchincruive, Ayr (President of the EAAP Commission on Cattle Production)

The issue of the Round Table :

***How is the chain competence organised and what role does it play in agri supply chains ?  
Are the actors of these chains satisfied with the present situation and what are there demand to the research partners ?***

The questions of the moderator:

- *What are the issues of research, and how are the contacts with the chains?*
- *Could we identify examples of best practices?*
- *What are the research needs?*
- *What should EAAP do next?*

## **1. The research needs expressed by the companies**

Fons SCHMIDT (Royal Ahold, NL)

Preliminary: The strong evolution towards globalisation and concentration of the companies (Nestlé, Continent-Carrefour).

Demand from the consumer is considered as central: food safety and environment.

In this context what is the place for technology? The major function of the technology is to introduce modifications in the food chain. Currently science induces “a lot of worries”. If we want to succeed, we should to reverse the perception: we should put the consumer in the forefront and we need to safeguard him.

Aalt DIJKHUIZEN (Nutreco, NL)

What is the meaning for us the research potential and how do we consider it?

Firstly, we don't identify research to one discipline. The right attitude is taking into account several scientific disciplines and competences. Not only technological and biological disciplines. We stress the interest of economic approaches, and of information technologies.

Secondly, the scientific approach, “*to have a chance to be implemented has to be very practical oriented*”. In this respect, the right approach is that which is concerned with the optimisation of animal

performances: “*not only the product, but the production system*”

### Anco SNEEP (Royal Cebeco Group, NL)

In the field of poultry production, in which Cebeco is very intensively involved, our aim is to put in practice the demand from the retailer groups, which we are supplying. It means that our line is to identify the demand of the consumers as much as

## **2. The reaction from research**

### Thomas BLAHA (US)

I cannot but agree with these expressions. It means for research to be more reactive. The changes coming from the consumers, from the chains, are so rapid! “*We need to become pro-active!*”. In fact the consumer and the market are becoming as schizophrenics: the need for changing is very strong but also the demand for traceability, and for saving the traditional methods and nature value! In society, we can find both people for and people against!

Another new aspect for the research approach: I am convinced that we need to organise in a multidisciplinary approach

### Leo den HARTOG (NL)

If we consider the need to satisfy the demand of the market, we have to pay attention to the fact that there are individuals consumers, not One Type consumer. We have to face various types of consumers and consequently adapt to various types of demands.

It means that there is need for more integrated research, more “*pro-active*” research, with more contact with the supply chains which are now very sensitive to consumer demand.

### Colin WHITTEMORE (Scotland)

We accept to take into consideration the demands of the chain, of the retailers, of the industry, of the consumer boards. OK but how back to the scientists? What is the responsibility of these economic actors? One attitude could be to start from the questions of the chains, and to go back to scientists. But it could be only a fashion! And if it is only a fashion, it is not possible for the scientists to follow!

possible and as far in upstream to integrate it in the production chain. Our attitude: listening and understanding. Our purpose: animal welfare, food safety, product specification, economic efficient.

In this context how do we consider research? Three main points: we need information, we need people who should analyse “*the future of sustainability trends*”, we need various skills and competence.

There is here a true difficulty: “*the real match between scientists and the people in the chains*”.

### Aimé AUMAITRE (INRA, F)

How to know and consider the consumer demand is important? How is the consumer demand expressed? By the news papers?

For instance, a recent inquiry proved that people don't want genes in tomatoes! And Green Peace now speaks about “*Frankenstein food*”!

One of our major challenge is the need for correct information of the consumer.

### Chris KALDEN (Ministry of Agriculture, NL)

The Ministry of Agriculture has to take into consideration the public concern and the consumer concern. In this respect for one part, fundamental research needs money to continue “*knowledge production*”. But the policy maker also appreciates the added value of research, in a better dialogue within the society

### Tom SUTHERLAND (USA)

Two remarks:

Firstly, it is really necessary to put the question: what is the “*basic research*”? Only research of which we cannot know what is its practical purpose?

Secondly, we also have to put in mind that at the world level there are two types of populations, with two different types of needs. For one it is the need to “*just food*”. For the second “*best kind of food*”.

Bobby MOSER (Ohio, USA)

From these insights we could design what should be an optimal team approach for research: firstly, disciplines to maintain (it is as a routine), and in another step, mixing the disciplines in also involving sociologists and technologists.

Cled THOMAS (moderator)

*We could conclude from this first part of the discussion that there is a large agreement to consider that in the research approach “more disciplines have to be involved” and they need to have more involvement with the food chain.*

### 3. The contacts with the chain: how to do?

Eberhard Von BORELL (G)

If we consider the welfare issue, we observe that the problems do not come from the consumer demand. The demand comes from the retailers, not from the consumers themselves! And it does not come from the industry. The questions only come from specific pressure groups!

KHALDEN (Ministry of Agriculture, NL)

Government can provide financial support to research, but the companies and the groups have also to contribute.

Thomas BLAHA (USA)

In fact, the retailers have a strong influence on the whole chain, and have a strong contribution to facilitate the construction of the chain. In this context, the natural role of the government is that of facilitator. Government could be have a role of partnership in the chain but not a part of the chain.

Cled THOMAS (Moderator)

*But in which kind of framework these contacts could be stimulated and organised?*

Colin WHITTEMORE (Edinburgh)

We need to build “a farm quality insurance scheme”, step by step, all of them being described, with the participation of all the parties, and the contribution of animal scientists.

Aalt DIJKHUIZEN (Nutreco, NL)

We cannot give response to the question of the framework without considering “Why? For what purpose?” Scientists appear to be opened for more active relations with the companies, but at the same time they claim they have to be involved in long term questions!

To organise a framework? “Yes, but hand by hand”.

“Research needs long term funds, but there is a need for people who are more dynamics in their approach!”

Leo den HARTOG (NL)

The basic level is “the insurance scheme”. In building which actor has specific contact with research and specific demand.

Cled THOMAS (Moderator)

*The frameworks could generate trust between the partners. But may be there is another the question of the standards which increase the costs?*

Cled THOMAS (Moderator)

*In this building, is the government has to be implied in a facilitating role between the parties?*

Fons SCHMID (Royal Ahold, NL)

I stress that “the gap is increasing between technology and what the consumer can understand. And we have no answer to give!”. In respect to this situation, we need to have a common approach.

A second aspect is concerned with the evolution of agriculture. There is a political size of the adaptation of agriculture to Agenda 2000.

Globally, we need to build a new approach to explain ways of food production to the consumer, by taking into account "*the emotion*".

### Anco SNEEP (Royal Cebeco Group, NL)

1. We need researches on marketing and on behaviour of the consumer. In fact, we have only a general perception and we don't know and understand what are the real demands! "*We need a transcription!*" and it is that we ask to research. We produce, and the market is a response.

Marketing research is very important, "*a research opened to consumers, which aim to understand that they are willing to pay!*"

2. There is the strong image of "*the cow in green pastures*". This means to must pay attention to the ways of production. Changes have permitted to produce in greater quantities at lower prices, but are not adapted for reducing pollution. There are other efficient ways for it, in operating, but communication is a very important factor.

### Thomas BLAHA (Univ. Minnesota, US)

The University of Minnesota, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture,

conceived and settled the "*Minnesota certified quality farmer management*"

### Aimé AUMAITRE (INRA, F)

Products from organic agriculture are sought by consumers, but there are no organised chains, and there is no specific research. Is it a new issue, or only a fashion, a limited attitude from a part of the population? What is there the responsibility of the government and of the consumers?

### Fons SCHMID (Royal Ahold, NL)

How interested is the retail sector? Two months ago, 29 retail organisations met in Dublin, in order to organise a "*global food safety initiative*". A task force, within the food supply chains! Our analysis is that it is really difficult to create a food safety organisation. So many organisations are involved! It is really too complex. This is the reason of the initiative by retailers groups.

### Colin WHITTEMORE (Edinburgh)

In many Forums, the scientists talk to the scientists. This Forum does better!

However, we also need ecology groups and consumers.

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