

THE HAGUE, 21 AUGUST 2000

CHAIN COMPETENCE: KNOWLEDGE IN AGRI SUPPLY CHAINS

*Conceived and organised by Pim BRASCAMP (Wageningen Institute of
Animal Science, The Netherlands)*



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EAAP Annual Meeting
The Hague, 21 August 2000

Round Table

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

Conceived and organised by **Pim BRASCAMP** (Wageningen Institute of Animal Science, The Netherlands)

Moderator: **Cledwin THOMAS** (Scottish Agricultural College, UK)

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

The panel of the Round Table

It 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)

Synthesis of the Round table

The Dutch organisers of the EAAP Annual Meeting held in The Hague in August 2000 invited the participants to assist a Round Table on the end of the first day, in the largest conference room of the Congress Centre. This initiative was in fact a tentative of reviving a large debate between the various types of specialists in animal production, as it was a tradition in the origin of EAAP. It was a success, with the participation of almost all the people registered to the conference.

« *How is the chain of competence organised and what role does it plays in agri-supply chains? Are the actors of these chains satisfied with the present situation and what are their demand to the research partners ?* », those were the questions introduced by Cledwin Thomas, President of the Commission on Cattle Production, who plays the role of animator of the Round Table. On the scene, personalities from research and universities (various European countries and US, of which Tom Sutherland, University of Colorado) and two directors of Dutch companies, a major retailer group in The Netherlands, and one Dutch Ministry representative. I proposed to the reader of this paper a lot of chosen expressions from the participants, as an illustration of the complexity of the relations between research and agri supply chains.

“Currently science induces a lot of worries”.

The representative of the retailer group opened the Round table in stressing that science is not so desirable than in the past!: “*Currently science induces a lot of worries*”. If a similar Forum could have been organised ten years ago, it should have stressed the need for a better efficiency of the flux of knowledge from research towards the industry for better economic efficiency and human welfare, considering that research and development benefit positively to the food chain. It means a significant changing of the conception. “*If we want to succeed, we should to reverse the perception: we should put the consumer in the fore front and we need to safeguard him. For this retailer group “demand from the consumer is considered as central according to food safety and to environment”*”.

On this basis, we heard a general agreement from the Universities to “*focus on the consumer demand, with a need for “more pro-active research, with more contact with the supply chains which are now very sensitive to consumer demand”*”. And this opinion is shared with the animal production companies. But the consequences for the research approach itself are not very well enlightened. How to design this new line? It is no so clear! “*How back to the scientists?*” asked one director of a research department on “animal science and society”? He explains: “*If one suitable attitude could be to start from the questions of the chains, it could be only a fashion, which could be rejected few time after by the relative great mobility and changes of the consumers habits. And if it is only a fashion, it is not possible to the scientist to follow*”. In other words, how to conceive and to carry out a research programme in the long term, which should provide results after several years when the economic and social issues are begin different within very short term. There is there a true difficulty: “*the real match between scientists and the people in the chain!*” affirms one professor of the Edinburgh University.

How to understand “the demand of the consumers”?

“The gap is increasing between technology and what the consumer can understand. And we have no answer to give!”. “We need a transcription!” asks the representative of the retailer group. Face these questions, the responses of the scientists on the scene expresses their scepticism, as well from US, “The consumer and the market are becoming as schizophrenics: the need for changing is very strong but there is an increasing and strong demand for traceability, and also for saving the traditional methods and nature value! In the society, we can find both people for and people against” or from The Netherlands, “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.”

But the agro-food companies reinforce the pressure! They ask for researches on marketing and on behaviour of the consumer: *“In fact, we don’t know and understand what are the real demands! and it is that we ask to research. We produce, and the market is a response, but we have only a general perception”*. It is why *“marketing research is very important, a research opened to consumers, which aim to understand that they are willing to pay!”*

But is there a demand of the consumer?

At this moment of the Round Table, the reactions from research are discussing on the consistence of that it is called *“demand of the consumer”*. And they are very critical. For instance, *“if we consider the welfare issue, we observe that 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!”*. *“ In fact the consumer demand is expressed by the news papers! In these conditions, how to know and consider the consumer demand is important? ”*.

Continuing along this way, they consider in fact that there is not a lake of knowledge of the demand of the consumer, but a lake of right information of the consumers. On this line, research claims for *“well informed consumers”*... before to know what is the demand: *“One of our major challenge is the need for correct information of the consumer. For instance, a recent inquiry proved that people don’t want genes in tomatoes! ”*. *“Globally, we need to build a new approach to explain ways of food production to the consumer...”*

“We need the research becomes pro-active!”

In contrast to the previous criticisms, the research approach gives privilege to the identification of *“the future of sustainable trends”*, which is set in contrast to that it is considered as only fashion and whatever the diversity of the consumers behaviour. But it needs various skill and competencies and this means for research that it has to be *“organised in a multidisciplinary approach”*.

The companies also support that the right attitude consists in taking into account several scientific disciplines and competencies: *“Not only technological and biological disciplines, but also economic approaches, and of information technologies”*. But they point

out that for a better implementation of the research in the economy and a better efficiency of the chain, *“the scientific approach has to be very practical oriented: the right approach is that which is concerned with the optimisation of animal performances, not only the product, but the production system”*.

These remarks introduce comments about the type of research to support. For the representative of the Dutch Director of Research on Animal Husbandry, *“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!”* From this remark, Tom Sutherland points out that *“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?”*

In fact, there is a large agreement from the scientists on the scene to meet the demand of the industry in involving human disciplines in connection with technical disciplines, classical in animal science. And finally, one of the US colleagues comments: *“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.”*

However, the comments from agro-food companies are not so enthusiastic... *“We cannot give response to the question of the framework for organising the chain 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 in partnership? Yes, but hand by hand. Research needs long term funds, but we need people who are more dynamics in their approach!”*

Building a “quality insurance scheme”

In the last part of the debate, the participants aim to exchange their own experience for organising and securising the chain from the farm to the consumer. The Director of a Dutch agro-food company remarks that *“there is the strong image of “the cow in green pastures”. Changes have permitted to produce in greater quantities at lower prices, but are not adapted for reducing pollution. It means to must pay attention to the ways of production”*.

There is convergence of the analysis from US, The Netherlands and Scotland for building *“a farm quality insurance scheme”*. But this basic level of the insurance scheme has to build *“step by step, all of them being described, with the participation of all the parties, and the contribution of animal scientists”*. It is the case in the US where the University of Minnesota, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, conceived and settled the *“Minnesota certified quality farmer management”*. *“In fact, the retailers have a strong influence on the whole chain, and have a strong contribution to facilitate the construction of the chain.”*. But *« In this building, is the government has to be implied in a facilitating role between the parties? »* asks Cled Thomas. In the US context, *“the natural role of the government is that of facilitator, and it could be have a role of partnership in the chain but not a part of the chain.”* And the representative of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture adds that *“Certainly, it is under the responsibility of the government to provide financial support to research, but the companies and the groups have also to contribute”*.

The representative of the retailers groups was silent during this debate on the insurance scheme. Question of Cled Thomas: *“How interested is the retail sector?”*. Reaction: *“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 themselves”*.

Two final comments for opening the futures debates

It seems it was no so difficult to end the debate with a general agreement about the main lines of organisation of the chain of competence... But may be, we also need to hear different sounds from two participants.

One of the participants points that *“In many Forums, the scientists only talk to the scientists. This Forum does better! However, we also need ecology groups and consumers.”* If we should have associate them to the Round table, may be the agreement should have been more difficult, even impossible to achieve. Because, explains the representative of the Dutch Ministry: *“The policy maker also appreciates the added value of research, in a better dialogue within the society”*

And Tom Sutherland enlarges the perspective to the world issues: *“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.”* And he points out that the debate was focalise on the situation of the must favorised part of the world.

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Minutes of the Round Table

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, 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 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.

2. The reaction from research

Thomas BLAHA

(University of Minnesota, USA)

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 proactive!*

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 WHITEMORE (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!

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 (University of Colorado, 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 (University of 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!

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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.

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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.

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

Cled THOMAS (Moderator)

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

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

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

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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!”

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

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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”.

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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.

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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.

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