Sustainable consumption

Back to Work

Stassart P. Louviaux M., Mormont M.
SEED, Liège University, Belgium
p.stassart@ulg.ac.be

Most research into sustainable consumption, *i.e.*, the consumer's role and place in the development of sustainable production and consumption systems, tackle this issue by treating the consumer as a "chooser", that is, an individual likely or able to make choices when confronted with product ranges. The focus is thus on the act of buying, which is considered to be the possible driver of change via market mechanisms into which the consumer's new (cognitive and ethical) abilities would be incorporated. Incorporating these competencies into market mechanisms depends in part on *the voluntary initiatives of associations* or coalitions of associations on which community stakes are riding, in a word, of collective players capable of representing such collective interests as the environment, animal welfare, safety, even social or international equity. It also depends in part on *government actions* aimed at controlling risk; government actions that tend to avoid the economic and political risks of health crises. These actions[1] are based on other forms of collective action in which other collective players (consumers' organisations, media, and experts) carry the sustainability demands.

These two forms of collective action are currently converging towards a growing standardisation of production activities. As organic agriculture, initiatives founded in the beginning on a narrowing of the gap between producers and consumers – become more successful commercially (as seen notably by his entry into the supermarket sector), this success is leading to this standardisation as a result of the lengthening of the supply chains, greater independence of certification and inspection activities, and increased competition even within these sectors. As for government policies aimed at health safety, they tend to shift responsibility for health safety to the farmers and are also reflected in schemes to standardise practices. In both cases, sustainable food is thus defined increasingly as a process of rationalising standardisation of production activities.

All of this constitutes a sustainable consumption model that focuses first and foremost on the technical changes in production systems. This model is consistent with a model of ecological modernisation and considers, at least implicitly, buying and selling (market relationships) to be the rational system of trade that one needs simply modernise by various regulatory measures. The challenge of this approach is effectively to adopt corrective measures in markets that are not correctly informed of these stakes, that is to say, of the environmental and social impacts of production and consumption patterns. This approach thus means that the

[1] These two ways of constructing sustainable consumption "standards" interfere with each other. Indeed, the voluntary initiatives often call for official recognition, as was the case in Europe with the European legislation that creates a normative framework for organic agriculture or as is the case now with fair trade, the forces of which are demanding legal recognition by the EU States. As for the government standards, they also tend to be incorporated in "voluntary" branch initiatives, as is the case for the Eurepgap standards, for example.

knowledge of these impacts or stakes must be translated into pertinent signals for consumers and corresponding standards for producers. And this knowledge is exactly what defines sustainability through criteria and indicators that consequently form expert systems on sustainability and its translation in consumption choices.

The point of view adopted here is rather different. In this article, sustainability is not defined positively by knowledge that is more or less assured and can be translated into signals. Starting with the idea that sustainability development is too malleable a fact, the question is to know how we could have forgotten (Stengers, 1999) the obvious demands that it comprises. This leads us to consider sustainable development as a question that can be stated as follows: How have our consumption practices and systems managed to make us forget that which must be taken into account in the environment or social conditions? We shall avoid the overly simple answer that would refer such oblivion solely to the market's rationale or the erasure of externalities.

In the cases mentioned, and to which we shall come back in greater detail, procedures and protocols for taking these considerations into account in market circuits are taking shape. The idea is allegedly to take account of environmental constraints and the concerns for fairness that are forgotten by a blind market, and thus to reintroduce these "demands" via standards and procedures. Sustainable consumption would then be defined as consumption practices in which taking account of such factors is done and is necessary for producers. However, these procedures and standards and those that they are trying to correct have a fundamental oversight in common, an effacement that appears to us to be crucial for sustainable development. We effectively hypothesise that these normalising schemes, rooted in market rationales, contribute to, even accentuate, a tendency to forget, to erase, work, and that this erasure is at the heart of a sustainability gap. In other words, we hypothesise that only by putting work back – by unprecedented procedures – at the heart of the sustainability issue and thus of the relationship between production and consumption that it will be possible to construct sustainable production and consumption systems.

This contribution draws upon the results of a series of studies[2], each one of which focuses on a specific topic in the field of sustainable consumption. It queries the transformation of production and consumption systems across the board, taking as its starting point the matter of taking work into account.

Here the anthropological concept of work is taken, that is, an institution comprising three dimensions: that of an activity confronted with material reality, that of a collective of action, and that of the shared representations of this activity (Pécaud, 2005, p. 187). What characterises work thus is not only the fact that it is a "production" activity, but also the simultaneous production of an identity within a trading relationship organised around this activity. The individual at work is a creator and self-creator in a significant relationship with

[2] *Sustainability of certified production systems : the case of labels in the food sector*, 2003-2005, Federal Scientific Services – SPSD II; *How can organic farming contribute to sustainable production and consumption patterns?*, 2003-2005, Federal Scientific Services – SPSD II; *New trade challenges facing fair trade: evolution of the actors' dynamics*, 2003-2005, Federal Scientific Services – SPSD II *Managment of natural and rural space* , FEDER N°3103 (2004 - 2007), *Sustainable consumption: which role for consumers?*, Cluster OA/20, Federal Scientific Services; *Platform for scientific concertation: Food Safety*, Cluster OA/22, 2004-2006; *Federal Scientific Services, Sustainable agriculture: an integrated approach for communication between scientists and stakeholders*, 2003-2006, Cluster OA/12, Federal Scientific Services; *Feasability of a participatory modeling process for pesticides risk assessment*, Cluster OA/27, 2004-2006, Federal Scientific Services.

the real and the other. Contrary to an ergonomic vision centred on reducing the variability of human work, we, on the contrary, emphasise this variability as a central factor, as defining the very essence of human work, that is, human beings' abilities to adapt to contingencies, to vary their strategies, and, in particular, to carry out action at a distance from rules (Desjours, 2003). From this point of view, which is radically different from an industrial notion of work, work is not defined as the implementation of procedures and application of standards, but on the contrary as an activity to solve the problems that arise within the procedures and standards, in the many gaps that necessarily develop between the activity and the way that it is organised, or even as a departure from routine. From this angle, negotiability is a second crucial dimension of work in the sense that work is done only in a give-and-take relationship that involves negotiations with others as well as negotiation with the "non-human" objects that people the world of work.

So, the variability and negotiability of practices are not posed here as straying from standards and organisation, but, on the contrary, as that which defines the very content of the activity of work. Instead of considering routines to be work, they are the necessary backdrop against which work takes place. Routines, rules, and standards are thus a sort of substrate on which work is done and with regard to which work is defined and the worker constructs himself as a being at work and author of this work. This conception of work also enlarges this definition of work to include a whole series of activities that are "outside of work", such as cooking meals or driving a vehicle[3], *i.e.*, activities that are usually placed on the consumption side of the fence. This anthropological conception of work will effectively make it possible to connect production and consumption practices differently.

Variability and negotiability are crucial to the link that can be established between sustainability and production/consumption systems, because this variability and negotiability of practices play with the times/spaces that create the border between work as an activity and the impacts of this activity on the relationships (of fairness) with others, with the environment, and with collective stakes such as safety. Indeed, we hypothesise that all work activity is located precisely in the very actions that make a break with or differ from routines and rules in line with the extent to which the facts, people, and events that escape rules and routines because they connect "systems" that are outside the work that is defined by routine or rules (this can be another's behaviour, be it that of a human or non-human (animals, bacteria, etc.), as well as the failures of objects or machines, or even variabilities stemming from the environment) are taken into account.

1. Erasing work

1.1. How safe is it?

The regulation of pesticide use in agriculture is currently taking several strategic pathways that give or do not give a place to work. We should like here to compare the status of work and production/consumption relationships in two managerial strategies.

In Belgium, unlike other countries such as Denmark, which has chosen an ambitious objective of *reducing the quantities* of pesticides used, the choice has been to *reduce the risks* that derive from pesticide use. This option entails risk assessment. The operation of assessing risks across an entire country is hugely complex. Indeed, there are some 800 pesticidal

[3] So, an airplane pilot defines piloting a commercial craft as being an extremely routine activity, the chief attraction of which is always being ready to take on the unexpected, the incident, and to cope appropriately.

products on the market, some of which combine several active ingredients. Knowledge of these products and their effects is only partial. There are several reasons for that: First of all, knowledge of the dangers involved is limited. First, the risk assessments that are conducted for each product before its market release are based largely on laboratory studies that focus on acute toxicity (and not on chronic toxicity). Second, the rare environmental toxicology studies that can be found in the scientific literature do not form a unified body of knowledge. Now risk assessment requires knowledge of how these products are used in time and space, that is to say, the temporal and spatial distributions of their use. Yet, the data need to piece together the types of production, territories, and agricultural practices are very patchy. Finally, a third major uncertainty lies in pesticides' cumulative and synergistic effects (in time and space). As for the risk itself, it is multidimensional, for it must be evaluated in a dozen environmental compartments to allow for its impacts on the entire chain, from workers to worker bees, with aquatic environments and fields' neighbours in between.

To cope with this complexity, the Belgian choice was to develop a pesticide risk assessment model. Schematically, this model proceeds in several steps. First, it takes the toxicological data available for each active ingredient and about the compartments for which the danger has been assessed. Then, using quantitative data about the amounts sold, presumed uses of each product for a given crop, and finally the crops' spatial distributions (on the scale of the municipality), the model maps each product's applications over the territory, with these applications being events that carry a risk. The assessment then consists of developing a risk index that allows for the combination of these events for each space and the national territory. This last operation involves choices, for example, giving priority to high-risk events or, on the contrary, the cumulative effects of low-risk events, and doing so for the various compartments of the environment.

This method must lead to branch negotiations over risk-reduction strategies that can only, when seen from this angle, lead to banning products that are deemed dangerous in favour of substitutes that are deemed less dangerous. The strategy is thus a regulatory strategy in that it culminates in rules. We can understand that the chemical industry subscribes to this strategy, which provides an incentive for technological innovation, the research costs of which are conducive to concentration and in any event are passed on to farmers, who fear these rising costs. We are indeed in an ecological modernisation movement.

However, this trend is also strongly rooted in a movement to erase the actual conditions of use and practices of consumers and producers alike. It contrasts greatly with that adopted by a small group of orchard farmers who are trying to carry out integrated pest management in their orchards. Having come up against problems of insect resistance to the insecticides that were available already some twenty years ago, then set up a complex system of gradual pesticide use reduction. This scheme consists of three strands:

- First, it draws upon biological pest control techniques that slowly adapt the principles of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to local conditions.
- Second, the fine-tuning and use of these techniques requires a complex system of supervision involving scientists (experiments at research stations), agricultural extension workers (field experiments), and a warning system.
- Third, the crop's value is increased by selling it exclusively in a specific distribution network with a quality label.

This three-part scheme's fundamental feature, in our eyes, is to place the orchard farmer's work at the centre of things. It effectively give a central position to the orchard farmer's work

and ability to adapt to climatic and environmental variations and ability to negotiate – locally and on a one-off basis – over the ecological risks of pesticide applications and the economic risks of the uncontrolled proliferation of pests. It thus places "abilities at work" at the centre of the scheme, which functions like a collective ability to choose the right practices. This strategy can be called a risk managerial strategy because it has three characteristics: it defines the action as bargaining over the risk by the produce who arbitrates amongst several risks in the framework of a practice that is both technical and economic, which means that it situates the risk on the risk-taking plane; next, practice is defined in a field of interactions among the producer, scientific and technical supervisory staff, and distribution chain to which the producer is committed; and finally, the practice mobilises the technical and scientific knowledge but also the player's ability to make judgements concerning the diagnosis of an orchard's situation and which also is part of farmer's practical, intimate knowledge of a specific orchard, which is both unique and contingent on other factors. The variability of local conditions and individual abilities are both recognised components of managing negotiable situations. Work – comprising observation and judgement as well as manipulating things – is thus at the heart of action.

The contrast between these two pesticide management strategies reveals the conditions whereby work is effaced in risk regulation.

- In the regulatory strategy, the risk is objective, that is to say, it is defined by cause-and-effect relationships founded exclusively on scientific data. The fact that the model is incomplete and contains (great) uncertainty does not prevent modelling on a scale (be it national or local) that excludes agricultural practices. The latter are naturalised in that they are considered to be data that can be included in chains of cause-and-effect (or probabilistic) relationships that exclude the players' practical choices and subjectivity or competencies.
- In this regulatory strategy, the site of arbitration is located on the level of the technical options (production selection) between the institutional players and thus between the collective players' strategies. The individual players and their practical work show up as simple relations on which one can act, but the action that derives from the regulation depends above all on the strategic players (companies, trade associations, and the state).
- Finally, this regulatory strategy institutes or confirms the institutional divide between producers and consumers, with the latter being defined as the passive "beneficiaries" of regulation through the guarantees of safety. In other words, neither the specific actions of the consumers nor communication between producers and consumers are taken into account.

The regulatory strategy is thus one that "desubjectivises" risk management, that reduces work to a (statistically graspable) "mean" work and the work of carrying out orders and applying rules. Implicitly, it recognises only one role for producers and consumers alike, that of a rational "doer" who implements the rules.

It is very significant for us that the managerial strategy – in contrast to the regulatory strategy – is a strategy that is continually trying to involve the work of other players in its scheme. On the one hand, the producers' group tries to include consumers in its scheme not only through communication about the quality label, but although through the mediation of the IPM orchard chain's workers. So it is that this group is trying to include the distribution company's workers in quality management by organising training sessions aimed at better

physical and communicational treatment (handling the fruit and informing consumers) of the fruit produced by IPM orchards.

1.2 How to breed organically?

Organic farming is marked by an international standardisation movement. The general principles (IFOAM) are translated into specific practices and inputs that are recommended or banned. In Europe in particular, this standardisation has been bolstered by certification inspections, which in turn are anchored in the organic premiums and CAP premiums[4] schemes (Seppanen & Helenius, 2004).

This standardisation process tends to do away with work, although it is at the heart of organic farming, in which it is seen as the production of a balance amongst human beings, the soil, plants, and animals (IFOAM, 2004). Organic farming effective sprouted in opposition to certain principles of agriculture's modernisation, notably against the principle of specialisation and the increasing artificialisation of animal husbandry. From organic farming's point of view, the notions of "animal production" and animals seen as machines to churn out products that have been developed at the faculties of "zootechnics" are refuted in the name of a holistic vision in which the animal is both a key element that enables the "farm system" to strike a balance with plant crops through the production of manure (crop science principle) and a social element, since it spends its life in a flock or herd in which different generations co-exist (ethological principle). Finally, through grazing, the animal acts as a mediator with nature, for it maintains open spaces and biodiversity (ecological principle). Seen from this angle, milk and meat production are not the primary objective of animal husbandry, but initially the by-products of these activities (Council Regulation (EC) No 1804/1999 of 19 July 1999), for the animal is first and foremost a resource or vector of sustainability.

We posit that the translation of these different principle in an organic standard (Council Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 of 24 June 1991, Council Regulation (EC) No 1804/1999 of 19 July 1999 and the Belgian Royal Decree ...) has made things doubly opaque: 1) It erases the variability of the work that people and animals do as ways to solve the problems that arise inside the standard through the gaps that they produce, and 2) it erases the permanent work of negotiation that stock farmers and cattle do to cope with the practical tensions that are spawned by linking up the aforementioned principles.

In our research into organic cattle farming, we identified five points of tension in the ways in which the regulations are enforced in which precisely the work that the stock farmers do with regard to the organic standard come into play (Stassart & Jamar, 2005). We shall take up two of them below, namely, the grazing obligation and parasite management.

The pasturing obligation, whereby cattle intended for beef production may be finished indoors, as long as the period spent indoors does not exceed one-fifth of the animal's life and, in all cases, a maximum period of three months (excluding in-wintering) (Council Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91, point 8.3.4), tries to strike a balance amongst the ethological, zootechnical, and ecological demands. In Belgium, the meat of young two-year-old bulls makes up the bulk of the organic and conventional beef cuts consumed in Belgium, because

[4] So, for example, organic farmers (that is to say, those with certification) have the right to use fallows set up under the CAP set-aside scheme for other purposes, *e.g.*, mowing and harvesting.

these young bulls offer the regularity and tenderness that consumers want, "according to the market". The conventional bulls are fattened in special finishing yards that are disconnected from the ground and far from farms, but the pasturing obligation that is contained in the organic specifications makes this system obsolete. In organic farming, the bulls are fattened on the farms where they were born. From this point of view, organic stock farming achieves its ideal of equilibrium. Moreover, the image of the grazing herd is particularly eloquent for consumers.

From the breeder's point of view, however, turning the bulls out to pasture for their second season raises a very serious problem, for, upon reaching sexual maturity, they become edgy in the presence of cows. If they smell a cow, they become nervous and "heat up", and their meat can become unfit for consumption. Complying with this standard thus forces the breeders to diversify their strategies. They can take one of two routes. The first one is to create the necessary conditions to turn the yearling bulls out to pasture for their second year of life:

- Some breeders negotiate amongst themselves, on the local level, arrangements whereby cows are released on some pastures and bulls on others. They thus search for a solution by raising the problem within the breeders' group.
- Other breeders create edgings that are about twenty metres wide between bull pastures and cow pastures. They make use of these edgings as grassy headlands, for which they get an agri-environmental premium.

It then remains for the breeders to synchronise the grazing phase with the fattening and finishing phase, which calls for very young, high-energy grass. The first route, which combines organising and mowing on the one hand and agri-environmental measures on the other, is a minor option. Most of the breeders prefer to take a second path that allows them to skip this second year of grazing, namely, shortening the bulls' life cycles to avoid a second year out to pasture. This practice is based on a concept of fattening in which the bulls are supplemented with feed concentrates very early, as of the first year of life, even before they are weaned. This has two consequences:

- The growth period is stopped early, as the high-energy concentrates effectively make the bulls switch very quickly from growth (increasing in size) to fattening (increasing muscle mass). The breeding and fattening cycle is thus reduced from 24 to 18 months.
- Pasturing loses all its attraction, given its low energy inputs. The breeder effectively prefers to keep his bulls in the stable to maximise their daily weight gain (DWG).

In conformity with the specifications, if one combines the overwintering period and three months that are authorised, the organic bulls spend two-thirds of their lives penned up in the stable. This scheme remains theoretical. In practice, it is not rare to find bulls that have spent one or two months more in the barn than what is allowed by the standard, which is tolerated by the certifying bodies. The latter, like the standard itself, are blind to the variability of practices and convinced of its incompatibility with the animals' ethological and zootechnical requirements. As we shall see in the second part of this article, this is because the certifiers are caught in the chain's logic and adapt to the demand for young bulls that is imposed by the Belgian market. They are thus caught in an adaptive logic[5] in which some deviation from the standard is tolerated. This attitude contributes to the non-discussion of the standard and thus prevents revelation of the contradictions in which the breeders and their bulls have engaged

[5] There are two "gray" areas in the standard's enforcement, to wit: the lack of cut-off dates for the in-wintering period and the ambiguity around the notion of the pasturing obligation, which allows the work of negotiation between breeder and certifier (Point 8.3.3. effectively stipulates that the bulls must have access to a pasture or an open-air exercise area or an outdoor enclosure).

by taking the concentrates path. The intensive use of concentrates in turn makes compliance with another standard increasingly problematic, namely, the requirement that roughage make up at least 60% of the animals' daily feed ration (Council Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91, point 4.4).

Our argument is thus that the standard as it is interpreted and enforced masks the diversity of breeders' practices as well as the variability of the representations and configurations of the work being done that it generates. It aligns itself with a dominant practice, the concentrates route, that it considers non-negotiable. This leads to a break between the image that the organic standard generates (pastured livestock) and actual practice (stock that spends two-thirds of its life in the barn), and this carries a risk of being challenged by outside players. However, it also keeps all of the work of certain breeders concerning the pasturing obligation in the shadows. By erasing the work in the barn-pasture-herd space and first-second year time, the standard erases the variability of the breeders' trajectories and identities: Whether they choose the concentrates or pasturing pathway, in negotiating over their choices, the farmers produce themselves, construct their own identities, over which they are constantly negotiating and that refer, as we shall see in the second section, to the relationship that they have with the very concept of "stock productions" and which ranges from a machine to produce kilos of meat at one end of the scale to animal husbandry that is paced by the cycle of seasons at the other end of the scale, to describe things very simply.

2. How can consumers and producers communicate?

The usual images of the consumer that are used in economics, marketing, and the sociology of consumption choices accept the instituted definition of the consumer as an agent of consumption choices, as a "chooser". In contrast to the traditional vision of the consumer as the sole author of a choice, the anthropological perspective that we have adopted posits the consumer as a "negotiator", that is to say, an active consumer able to make judgements and arbitrate when faced with complex practical choices. The anthropological perspective defines the consumer as an agent (producer) who must solve problems, arbitrate amongst constraints, and bring in humans and non-humans to produce a (domestic) world that is organised and meaningful for himself and for others. We thus see the consumer as a practitioner who produces and organises a world.

The aim of the research mentioned below was not to analyse consumption practices, but to study consumers' abilities to make judgements when faced with production system management or regulation systems. We thus hypothesise that, starting with their own consumption practices, consumers are able to judge products and production practices and these skills or abilities are rooted in their consumption practices seen as work.

The schemes (panel of citizens and deliberative focus groups[6] (Louviaux, 2006)) set up under this research are of course artefacts in that they are constructions that diverge[7] from the usual

[6] In one case we set up a panel of citizens to rule on the validity of the pesticide risk assessment model. In another case we organised two series of focus groups in which a group of consumers was called upon to pass judgment on the value quality labels as regards their ability to allow for the aim of reducing pesticide use in one hand and in the other and consumers were called to explore a project of ox production taking into account environmental issue (Reg. Natura 2000). In both cases the consumers had to deal with expert knowledge, agricultural producers, and institutional representatives.

[7] The construction of situations that stray from the usual situations in which consumers find themselves in daily life also reveals that these usual situations are also constructed, in this case by the market. These constructed situations tend to reduce consumers to simple choosers or "doers". They thus erase the constant work of

(institutional) situations in which consumers find themselves in their daily lives. However, these schemes' merits and productivity stem precisely from the fact that they create a situation in which each player's subjectivity must be made explicit (in contexts in which consumption remains in the background) and communication (between consumers and with producers) makes it possible to explore shared representations of dietary practices rather than of consumption. These schemes enable one to understand that shared representations of food can be built from an understanding of food as an institution and as work.

2.1 Commune concerns around pesticides

The exchanges among consumers first bring to the fore two aspects of food consumption. First of all, it is a series of activities (buying, preparing meals, etc.) that are social activities, that is, that take place in a context of relationships and meanings, as well as material constraints (financial, temporal, etc. constraints), that are oriented by various principles (principles of pleasure, self-preservation, preservation of others, etc.), rather than being a one-dimensional activity governed only by the perspective of risk. Second, the fact that these practical activities are largely dependent on the available information and skilful marketing ploys (Dubuisson, 2003) that orient choices and preferences allows consumers to draw parallels with the producers' choices, which, as practical choices, are likewise oriented by their customers and suppliers' incitements. The result is the creation of a shared representation (usually to the detriment of mass distribution) of a certain continuity between producers' practices and consumers' practices. This continuity is threefold, as follows:

- First, these practices have meaning, for they are oriented by underlying concerns that are mutually understandable:

  Here we can single out two concerns that were gradually shared in the course of the interactions between consumers and producers. Unlike a vision focused on risk and its minimisation, consumers pay a great deal of attention to the conservation practices that they may share with farmers, especially those that concern the soil's health. This concern places the issue in a long-term view in which pesticides are feared for their persistence and long-term effects, in a word, for their build-up in the environment. Similarly, the concern for fairness appears to be shared by consumers, who understand, from their personal experiences, the weight of economic inequality vis-à-vis food, and producers, for whom technical modernisation is also tantamount to the disappearance of small farms. Two lines of tension thus emerge, one between preserving one's independence versus state regulation limiting such independence, and the other that pits the concern for cheap food against preserving a rural and agricultural fabric.

- Second, they are extremely variable practices that force their authors to make trade-offs and negotiate:

  The deliberations that take place among consumers are not divorced from daily life. They simply make it possible, through the play of interactions and time for thinking, to reveal reflexively how consumers make their choices, to wit: The consumer is continually arbitrating among price, ease of use, perceived quality, and the family members' diverse demands. When these multiple negotiations and trade-offs are seen by the consumers to be both an area of independence and an area for the constitution of a group (in this case a family group), their practices appear homologous to those of producers: They are practices governed by constraints but having meaning, balancing acts between contradictory demands, differentiated practices.

- Third, they are institutionalised practices that cannot be completely technically rationalised but suppose, on the contrary, forms of mutual commitment in taking action.

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arbitration in which consumers engage, the work of working out positions between their own ambivalence and their complex relations with food and dietary practices.

> When confronted with farmers' experiences, consumers wonder in particular about the dependent relationships in which the various parties are entangled. So it is that they wonder simultaneously about the connections between their consumption choices on the one hand and producers' choices on the other hand as to the way these choices are influenced by industry and mass distribution. Consequently, the consumers institute, for example, great differences between labels, depending on whether they reflect the producers' simple attitude of following the rules or, on the contrary, a commitment in terms of their practices. They see this difference in terms of being subjected to inspections versus making a collective effort as well as in terms of the producers' efforts to be autonomous. The consumers thus situate the relevant risk reduction effort on the level of the producers' trade associations and the constitution of organised groups of producers as collective players.

We thus hypothesise that, because of their interactions and exchanges, consumers and producers construct for themselves, through this vestigial approach, a common area of values and evaluation criteria. This common area is not, however, one of spontaneous agreement. Rather, it is an area of tension between representations and values. This common area can arise only out of shared attention to the work of the various parties, work to feed the debate. Common schemes can emerge if the variability and negotiability of this work is acknowledged.

A second example dealing with the pasturing obligation brings more grist to the mill, for it shows in particular how reconnecting the consumers' work with that of producers pushes the pasturing alternative (which we touched upon regarding the standard's explicit pasturing obligation in Section 1) towards greater sustainability.

2.2 From certified to organic beef

The pasturing standard creates a distance vis-à-vis production work, but it also creates a distance vis-à-vis consumption work. The production work described in the first section because it is disconnected from consumption work remains adaptive: It ties in with the reduction of consumers to a few simple attributes defining a consumption standard. In Belgium, this standard is defined by two criteria, namely, meat that is both lean (without fat) and tender, and the consumer's judgement is reduced to competence by default, *i.e.*, the rejection of meat that tough, but also the rejection of fat. This rejection of fat has consequences when it comes to taste, for like alcohol in wine, fat is a key storer and carrier of flavour. Without fat, meat has little taste (Stassart, 2005).

Leanness is a simple criterion, of an industrial type, but is accompanied by a series of artificialising stock farming practices, ranging from systematic caesarean sections to the use of concentrates and the "off-soil" production of young bulls that are characterised as "hypermuscular". This is the model that leads to the production of meat from double-muscled Belgian Blue bulls, which makes up 95% of the market. Consumers characterise this production as "forced production", but the market offers them no other choice: either forced and tender, or unforced and tough.

Some consumers who preferred the logic of "or" as affording more connections than that of "and" were put in a position to work out a new category with a small organic meat production chain that would restore the links among tenderness, flavour, and unforced husbandry. Together they redesigned this "technological" criterion of tenderness by creating the category of firmness. This criterion looks more at the meat's behaviour under the knife: meat that falls apart when it is cut is considered not firm (or "mushy"), whereas meat that can be cut easily but does not fall apart is considered firm.

The creation of the firmness category has three consequences, as follows:

- First, the category is linked to situational practices: Firmness is judged at cutting (does the piece of meat bear up well on the butcher's block?), in the skillet (does the meat lose its juice, its thickness?), on the plate (is the piece of meat "sloppy" or firm?), and in the mouth (does the piece of meat disintegrate in the mouth or gradually give way as it is chewed?).
- Next, the category complexifies the judgement of meat as a product: Firmness makes it possible to strike a satisfactory balance between tenderness and taste: Firm meat is a product that gradually releases its flavour in the mouth, that remains intact in the mouth. The firmness category strikes a balance between the concern to have meat that is not tough and meat that is tasty.
- Finally, the category complexifies the work of consumption, by connecting it to the work of production: The firmness criterion makes it possible to have meat that is firm and tender and the sign of a less forced, slower, production pattern. The "firmness" criterion opens new possibilities of link-ups for the product that the artificialising practices aimed at producing tenderness ruled out.

So, the "firmness" category opens up, alongside and in conjunction with taste, the issue that the obligatory pasturing standard had closed, that of challenging the forced nature of stock farming operations.

Taking the shift that this criterion of "firmness" triggers as our starting point, we shall see how, within a deliberative focus group, these consumers will enter into a logic of mutual comprehension with breeders concerning the problem brought up in Section 1, namely, the problem of pasturing sexually mature bulls.

To answer this question, a few innovative farmers resurrected a traditional practice, that of castrating young bull calves to turn them into steers (oxen). Castration was used formerly to have calm oxen for pulling carts and ploughs. Another consequence of castration is that the steers can be put out to graze without problems in the second year of life, even next to cows, in whom they lose all interest. Moreover, in taking the "pasturing route", the steers acquire the ability to ingurgitate large amounts of unprocessed forage, unlike bulls. They have no need for concentrates. On the other hand, they need time to put on weight (to produce meat), 6 to 12 more months than bulls to reach the right size for slaughtering. They produce over the long run, rather than intensively, and their growth and fattening vary with the seasonal changes in the grass's growth[8]. While this production is not forced, it is slow.

In following the steers' paths with regard to the two points that interest us, namely, the pasturing obligation and castration, we shall see how consumers truly understand the other

[8] The concept of slow stock farming generates two questions about the regularity and model of consumption. The seasonality of the output creates tension between the consumer's demand for a constant supply and the seasonality of the steer's fattening, which is linked to period of rich pastures. This seasonality thus makes the consumer as buyer work on the tension between seasonal purchases and constant purchases. Slow production also creates a culinary tension that makes the cook and eater work, as follows: Bull meat corresponds to the minute steak culinary model, *i.e.*, quick cooking, meat seared in the pan, and the predominance of the roasted or grilled taste. This model rests upon the hierarchy that is imposed by the idea of "prime" cuts, *i.e.*, rib steak/filet/steak. Almost every bit on the Belgian Blue bull's body can be turned into prime steak. In contrast, the steer and its slow pasturing mode produces a carcass with a greater proportion of second choice cuts (for stews, chopped meat, etc.) that take longer to cook but are tastier than the meat from bulls. The tensions that are created around time frames and flavours in the various consumption models thus force cooks and eaters to include some variability in their practices. This means reviving traditional recipes and giving them a modern touch (*carbonades flamandes* or boeuf bourguignon), discovering ethnic dishes that make use of the less prized cuts (*tajines*, Swedish meatballs), and so on.

party's point of view and how this mutual understanding leads them to change their representations of the problem and their identities in relation to the problems at hand.

Consumers have their own localised knowledge: For example, some of them observed that the pasturing obligation did not guarantee more nature or biodiversity. So, one of them told how his neighbour, who was an organic stock farmer, regularly tilled and ploughed under his pastures to reseed them. What he was explaining was actually the temporary pasture technique. Although the farmer was in compliance with the organic specifications and pasturing obligation, the consumer wondered what impact such practices might have on biodiversity. Next, another consumer pointed out that biodiversity was jeopardised by the pasturing options and early mowing practised by many stock farmers. How, for example, was this compatible with the spring nesting of certain rare birds? Yet at the same time he pointed to the existence of new room for manoeuvre with regard to these disruptive early practices, such as agri-environmental measures to subsidise late mowing and thus encourage farmers to respect the nesting and breeding grounds of these rare birds before cutting the grass. The presence of these rare species is linked to a diversified insect population that in turn is linked to the flowering of grasses that late mowing makes possible. The farmers, in turn, can gain from mowing later: the quality of late-mown hay is different, the hay has a positive impact on animal health, and the steers find it particularly tasty when they are confined to the barn in the winter. So, the image of pasturing is both complexified and can now become the subject of shared concern between stock farmers and consumers: the romantic image of the pasturing obligation that agrifood marketers use and abuse gives way to a complex system in which rare species, animal health, unforced stock farming, and taste are connected. The representation is recomplexified and questions the pasture's permanence and the impact of haying dates on herd health and biodiversity. These are concerns that can now be shared by producers and consumers. However, in rethinking the image of pasturing, the diversity of practices, and their consequences for biodiversity, consumers change their identities with regard to the pasturing obligation.

While the image of pasturing mobilised our consumers greatly, that of castration was much less mobilising. However, once the consumers understood the convergence that could existence between their biodiversity concerns and the farmers' concerns regarding pasturing, which involved castrating the bull calves, these consumers got fîred up. They got involved in a negotiation around castration that focused on two points. First, they wanted to know about the various castration techniques: Were they painful for the young bulls? Could one choose or develop a painless technique? Next, they negotiated over guarantees on the technique's implementation: Would it be done under clean conditions? Would the veterinarian be allowed to follow up the animals? The consumers got involved because they felt that there were shared concerns[9].

This case confirms – unlike the erasure of work that was produced by the standard and its interpretation – that the twofold questioning of consumers' and producers' practices is what makes production systems' reconfiguration possible. Where the standard simplifies, fossilises, and tends to align practices with a dominant model, forms of discussion that toss up

[9] This is in contrast to public opinion that is increasingly reluctant to condone the systematic castration of piglets in industrial pig farming systems. However, is this not precisely an example of the opposite situation, characterised by the lack of mutual understanding and the production of an identity in connection with artificialising practices that brings about feelings of disgust and uneasiness in consumers as the producers of their own identities?

for debate the product's characteristics, consumption practices, and consumption *as a type of work* opens up areas of negotiation to the partners.

Conclusions

The developments that lead to the formulation of sustainability standards for food production give rise to various measures and schemes. In this article we considered one scheme aimed at food safety and another aimed at guaranteeing biological quality. In both cases, although the schemes claimed to align producers' practices with consumers' demands, they actually erased the work of producer and consumer alike. This disappearance of the work that they do results from standardisation that aims to align artificialised production models (the necessary use of pesticides in one case, the stock farming system linked to the "lean and tender" standard in the other case) with the demands of sustainability. The thinking is that this alignment would be obtained by acting rationally, that is to say, by acting upon isolatable technical factors (the choice of pesticide, stock feeding practices) that can have an impact on quality. These standards are legitimated by simplifying representations of consumers' demands.

Our research design privileged the construction of situation that brought together, in different ways, producers and consumers to examine the potentials for change that might come out of interactions and deliberations between the two groups. We conclude therefrom that consumers and producers can develop an understanding of each other's practices if they each construct their own identities on the basis of work situations, that is to say, from an examination of their practices as practices that are aimed at the provision of food with regard to which their respective identities are defined. This mutual understanding is thus built upon the foundations of an increased subjectivisation of their practices, that is, a discursive and practical deployment of the reasons that guide the choices that they each make in real life.

Schemes that allow such mutual understanding are also schemes that make it possible, on the basis of many types of knowledge, to search for, in an exploratory manner, changes affecting production practices at some times, the relations between players in the chain at other times, and the definitions of the product's quality at other times. Moreover, this is usually done through reconfigurations of all three of these aspects. This is because work – the work done by consumers as well as by producers – is the place where human and non-human elements, the environment, and fairness truly link up, and that is where new ways of composing them can be redefined.

This notion of reconfiguration is a key notion in an approach to sustainability that is interested not only in "resource integrity" but also in "functional integrity" (to use PB Thompson's distinction). Constructing representations that are shared by producers and consumers, developing management strategies that involve the players, and maintaining the players' independence are essential components of such a reconfiguration that can be developed only if attention is paid to work.

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