

Seminar - Ethical Information about Food

Stockholm, March 25th 2004

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The Nordic Council

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Summary

This seminar report presents the discussions and the conclusions of a Nordic seminar on ethical labelling and other means of providing information about ethical concerns in the production of food, held in Stockholm on March 25th, 2004.

The seminar was organized on the basis of the report on Ethical Labelling of Food, TemaNord 2003:527, written at the request of the Nordic Council of Ministers in a cross-sectorial cooperation between the food, agricultural and forestry, fisheries, environmental and consumer sectors. At their meeting in Kalmar on June 25th, 2003, the Council of Ministers (Ministers for fisheries, agriculture and forestry and food) recommended that relevant committees within the Nordic cooperation be asked to prioritize and develop the proposals for possible initiatives for consumer information on ethical conditions in food production contained in the report. These tasks should be carried out against a backdrop of a dialogue with consumers, trade and producers. The seminar saw the opening of the dialogue called for by the ministers.

The presentations at the seminar were held by Birgitta Lund from Livsmedelsverket (The National Food Administration) in Sweden who presented the report on ethical labelling, by Louise Ungerth from Konsumentföreningen (Consumers Association) in Stockholm with an analysis of what consumers expect of ethical respect, labelling and information, by Mette Reissmann from Forbrugernes Hus (Danish National Consumer Agency) in Denmark on the compilation of a public Danish data base with consumer information on ethical conditions, and by Leif Iversen from Initiativ for Etisk Handel (IEH) (Initiative for Ethical Trade) in Norway on how respect for ethical demands can be put into practise by IEH via the production and trading chain.

The workshops were intended to elicit views from the actors who are involved in ethical labelling and information; consumers, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), producers, industry and authorities.

For the discussions the participants at the seminar were divided into four groups:

- Consumers
- Organisations who administer labelling schemes
- Production and trade
- Authorities

The purpose of dividing the participants into groups according to whom they represent was to elicit attitudes that are not coloured by compromises and consensus. After the workshops there was an opportunity to discuss opinions in a plenary discussion.

The views of the various interest groups at the seminar were largely identical. The participants noted that the majority of consumers believe that it is possible to influence society through a conscious consumer choice, that the majority of consumers have an attitude to ethics in the production of food, but few act in accordance with this attitude. Consumers expect that others, e.g. the retail trade, have taken a stance on ethical requirements, and that the products that are offered in the market meet a reasonable

ethical standard. The consumers' commitment to ethical conditions must, however, be used to stimulate development, and to strengthen the competitive position of the companies that already assume a social responsibility.

The participants agreed that labelling is just one method of providing information. There are many other channels of information, such as data bases on the Internet, the home pages of organisations or companies, brochures, not forgetting the media. But there are several labels with an ethical message in the market, and there are groups of consumers who use the labels actively. The existing labels should be strengthened and developed, and a major effort must be made to communicate the message to the consumers.

Modern information technology provides good opportunities for disseminating information about ethical concerns in production and trade. Technology is used today by organisations, companies and, to a limited extent, by the authorities. The data primarily cover processes that have been initiated to promote ethical production and trade, and to a lesser degree products. Product information is, however, also available on some company home pages. Information technology that may be used at the time of purchase has been invented and is available in the shape of scanners in the shops, EAN codes and SMS combined with access to data bases and the Internet. The technology is not being used yet, and the trade feels that so far consumers' interest in using the technology at the time of purchase is too small for the shops to invest in expensive online scanners.

The participants agreed that companies are responsible for consumer information about ethical considerations in the production and trading process. The majority of the interest groups at the seminar felt that the authorities should assume a responsibility by introducing legislation laying down the basic ethical requirements, by setting an example and by including ethical aspects in public procurement and by collecting and disseminating information about ethical conditions and initiatives. Although, the production and trade group felt that initiatives for labelling and developing other methods of information should not be taken by the authorities, but by companies.

The outcome of the seminar shows that, in the short term, no major breakthrough for ethical considerations in production and consumption can be expected, especially not at a time when fierce price competition is the rule. But consumers and industry show commitment, and initiatives are taken from various sides to improve consumers' possibility of choosing products on the basis of ethical considerations. At present it is more important to open up to the development, information and debate on ethical conditions in production and trade rather than to introduce new ethical labels. In this context the media play an important role.

The seminar calls upon organisations, trade unions, companies and authorities to set up a dialogue about ethical production and trade, to form partnerships and create synergy effects.

The participants at the seminar did not decide on a prioritization of the proposals for further action in the report on Ethical Labelling of Food. The steering group has subsequently discussed the priorities and recommends to the Nordic Council of Ministers that, most importantly, an analysis of the socio-economic consequences of the use of different methods of information about ethical conditions in food production should be made. The analysis should be conducted by a research institution with

technical support from a cross-sectorial Nordic project group. The results of such an analysis will provide a better basis for the prioritization of further measures.

1 Preface

In 2002-2003 the Nordic Council of Ministers produced a report on ethical labelling of food in a cross-sectorial cooperation between the food, agricultural and forestry, fisheries, environmental and consumer sectors. The aim was to gather existing experience and assess the need and possibilities for further ethical labelling and other methods of consumer information.

The report Ethical Labelling of Food¹ analyses how best to inform consumers of ethical conditions in food production. In the report the project group makes concrete proposals for initiatives that can be implemented by authorities in Nordic cooperation.

The Nordic Council of Ministers (Ministers for fisheries, agriculture and forestry and food) discussed the report at a meeting in Kalmar on June 25th, 2003. The Ministers recommended in their declaration on ethical labelling of food that relevant committees within the Nordic cooperation should be called upon, against a background of a dialogue with consumers, trade and producers, to develop priorities and progress the proposals from the project group into possible initiatives, in order to meet the need for consumer information on ethical conditions in food production.

The dialogue called for by the ministers was opened at a seminar in Stockholm on March 25th 2004. This report presents the interventions, discussions and conclusions of the seminar.

The seminar was planned and the report prepared by a steering group composed of:

Kerstin Jansson	Jordbruksdepartementet (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Affairs), Sweden, project manager
Birgitta Lund	Livsmedelsverket (The National Food Administration), Sweden
Lars Aslo Petersen	Fødevarerdirektoratet (The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration), Denmark
Berit Korpilo	Jord- og skogsbruksministeriet (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry), Finland
Sesselja Maris Sveinsdottir	Miljø- og levdsmiddelstyrelsen (The Environmental and Food Administration), Iceland

¹ Etisk mærkning af fødevarer, TemaNord 2003:527. The report has been translated into English: Ethical Labelling of Food. ANP 2004:741 A short version in Danish is available in the publication TemaNord 2003:532.

Anne Pia Lødemel

Mattilsynet (The Norwegian Food Safety
Authority), Norway

Eeva-Liisa Østergård

Rapporteur, Denmark

2 Background to the seminar

The report on ethical labelling of food concludes, in general terms, that ethics in the production of food is stirring up public opinion, and that the area attracts the attention of consumers, industry, the media and politicians. In its strategy for sustainable development² the Nordic Council of Ministers has specified as one of the long-term goals in the food sector that consumers, via labelling and other methods of consumer information, must be guaranteed the possibility of making a genuine and informed choice on the basis of, for example, ethical considerations. Ethical questions have often been discussed within the remit of the Council of Ministers for a number of years, and several reports have been published on this subject. A continuing Nordic discussion on sustainability, including human rights, animal welfare and environmental protection in connection with food production, may give a clear picture of the ethical considerations that are essential for consumers. The discussion may strengthen the influence of the Nordic countries internationally.

The project group for the ethics report concluded, on the basis of the mapping out of existing ethical labelling in the food sector and its discussions about current literature, that now is not the time for proposing the introduction of a general Nordic ethics label for food.

The conclusion is based on an assessment of the experience with “bureaucratic” labels initiated by authorities that have proven to have poor prospects of success. According to the project group, an ethical label has better chances of achieving impact, when the initiative stems from a strong public opinion, possibly coordinated by NGOs (non-government organizations), and when industry sees an interest in using the label as a competition parameter.

A label on the product has two clear advantages compared with other consumer information. Fundamentally, the label can convey a complicated message in a recognizable and eye-catching form, and the label provides information at the moment of purchase. The disadvantages are that setting up the label, introducing the label in the market and controlling it is a professionally and financially demanding task. The review of the criteria behind it is time consuming.

Furthermore, a new Nordic labelling initiative may be too narrow in a globalised world, where foodstuffs are produced all over the world, and where it will be difficult, from a Nordic starting point, to get to grips with all the ethical criteria that need to be included and controlled.

There are, however, labels that have made an impact in the market, above all the organic label and the Fairtrade label. The ethics report concludes that existing labelling schemes should be maintained and controlled within the existing framework.

² Nordic Council of Ministers, Sustainable development. A new course for the Nordic Countries. TemaNord 2001:505.

The project group stressed the fact that there is a great development potential in other information methods than labelling. A broad range of information methods, i.e. labelling, electronic information, dialogue and social debate – and the synergy effect between them – can be used to inform consumers about ethical conditions in food production.

The project group suggested that the Nordic Council of Ministers should keep up a broad communication about ethical conditions in food production. The communication should contribute to the public debate on an objective basis in accordance with the view of the Nordic countries on ethics in food production. The communication can build upon the existing ethical interest among consumers and contribute to consumer understanding of the ethical conditions in food production through education, teaching and information initiatives, seminars and conferences. The communication may also benefit from industry's involvement in ethics through a dialogue with producers, sectors and the retail trade.

An international aim and awareness of conventions and the work in supranational organisations and in NGOs will be an important element in this work.

The project group suggested a number of concrete initiatives that, in the opinion of the group, may be started by the authorities in a Nordic cooperation. In addition, there are own initiatives from industry and organisations and possible national initiatives. The suggestions do not in any way add up to a total solution that meets all wishes for ethical labelling and information, but is one step in a dynamic development in the area.

The Nordic Ministers for Fisheries, Agriculture and Forestry and Food decided at their meeting at Kalmar on June 25th, 2003, (annex 4) to use the conclusions of the project group about development potential for ethical labelling of foods as a starting point and to recommend that relevant committees in the Nordic cooperation give priority to and develop the proposals.

The project group's proposals for concrete initiatives and a prioritization of the proposals are described in chapter 4 of this seminar report.

3 The Deliberations of the seminar

3.1 Presentations

Birgitta Lund, Livsmedelsverket (The National Food Administration) in Sweden introduced the report Ethical Labelling of Food, TemaNord 2003:527 and the background to and aims for the work of the project group. She referred briefly to the conclusions of the report and the group's seven concrete proposals for further work.

Louise Ungerth, Konsumentföreningen (Consumer Association) Stockholm contributed with an analysis of consumers' expectations of ethical information. Her main thesis was that most consumers would like to avoid having to choose between different labels, symbols and information when they enter a food shop. Any consumer who is interested would assume that the food shop has rejected products that do not comply with ethical requirements. Many consumers have an attitude to ethics in the production, but when they are in the shop and have to choose, it is more important that the foodstuffs are good, fresh, easy to prepare and that they are not too expensive. Various household surveys show that consumers believe that it is possible to influence social development through a conscious consumer choice and that companies should state their social commitment in order to give consumers a choice. Consumers are committed to ethics in production, but the schism between attitude and action is marked.

According to Louise Ungerth, ethical labelling is unlikely be a solution. What is important is that NGOs, media, authorities and others keep the discussion alive, and that industry and the retail trade, in particular, keep working on ethical "codes of conduct". NGOs and authorities should urge that information about ethics in production and trade is available. Concerned consumers should also have the possibility of going into shops with the knowledge that there is a guaranteed minimum standard for the impact of foodstuffs on human beings, animals and the environment. The way the retail trade markets products is significant. Experience shows that when the retail trade focuses on, for instance, organic produce through their advertising, selection and placement in shops, etc., demand grows. In Sweden organic eggs thus have 30% of the market in COOP shops despite a 40% higher price than eggs from free range chickens. This is the result of the chain's strong marketing efforts and a public debate on battery versus free range chickens. The retail trade has a great responsibility in marketing foods that have been produced with respect for ethical conditions. The problem is that the companies which respect a reasonable ethical standard carry the costs and are worse off in competition with companies that simply aim to offer the lowest possible price. It would be desirable that companies which do not promote themselves on ethical concerns stated this clearly on their home page. Louise Ungerth referred to a survey that shows that positive labelling (green traffic light) influences consumers that are already committed to the environment, whereas consumers with a limited interest in the environment are not affected by either green or red labelling. A negative label (red traffic lights) influences consumers whose interest in the environment lies between the two.

Mette Reissmann, Forbrugernes Hus (Danish National Consumer Agency) Denmark presented the Danish Etikbase³ which was set up in 2002 by Forbrugernes Hus (formerly ForbrugerInformationen) under the Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs. The Etikbase is an optional facility for companies wishing to show a positive profile to consumers, business partners, present or future employees or buyers. As a background to her demonstration of the Etikbase on the Internet *Mette Reissmann* discussed a range of consumer attitudes from different surveys and the main conclusions from three reports from the Nordic Council of Ministers⁴ on consumption and ethics.

The Etikbase is all about people – employees and suppliers. The criteria for participation are based on international conventions from the ILO (the International Labour Organisation) and the UN (the United Nations) on labour rights and human rights. Companies participate on a voluntary basis, and companies may do so if they have a policy on social and ethical issues, and if they are actively working to create visible and noticeable improvements. The Etikbase is process oriented. The information from companies is based on recognized non-financial accounting principles, and the information is checked annually by an independent firm of accountants with random sampling from 25% of the participants.

Through the Etikbase the consumers may obtain information about the social responsibility of companies, and it is used by 4700 consumers per month at the moment. It is the intention in the long term to link information about companies' social responsibility with product tests from Forbrugernes Hus on the net, which is the type of information most frequently sought by consumers.

Compared with product labelling a data base continues to fall short in the sense that the information is not at hand at the time of purchase. The technology *is* available, however, and in future the information will be available via SMS and scanners in the shops.

Leif Iversen, Initiative for etisk handel (IEH), (Ethical Trade Initiative), Norway, spoke of ethical trade in practice – why and how an effort is being made in order to promote ethical trade. He pointed to the Nordic countries' shared traditions with respect to environmental protection and human rights and traditions for stakeholder cooperation and partnerships as a good basis for a Nordic cooperation in this area. Ethical trade must, however, be considered in a global perspective.

IEH is a partnership organisation which builds on a cooperation between companies, organisations and trade unions with the purpose of developing competence and practical tools for ethical trade. Companies attach growing importance to their social responsibility, and industry has recognized that the meaning of the concept needs to be reviewed, and new strategies must be built up. Economic, environmental and social concerns are part of the concept, and in the social area companies face their biggest challenge. The strongest “pressure” from NGOs, the media, the labour movement and

³ www.csr-scorecard.org

⁴ Nordic Council of Ministers, Consumers' sense of ethics, TemaNord 2001:583, Ethical consumption in the Nordic countries. How to involve consumers in ethical consumption? TemaNord 2003:557 and Ethical labelling of food TemaNord 2003:527.

consumers is on social issues, but at the same time there is a lack of tools for companies to use.

IEH assists companies in developing ethical guide lines, which companies may use in their negotiations with suppliers or as part of a supply contract. IEH participates in the subsequent process with advice, training, mapping out and to a certain degree identification of local contacts. A training package gives buyers instructions about how to control suppliers. It is important for companies to know all their suppliers and to start a dialogue with them during the process towards ethical trade. Many companies use questionnaires in order to map out the status of suppliers, and many make control visits with their own inspectors or through various control bodies. Subsequently, the supplier must prepare a plan for amending criticisable conditions. The associated companies report to IEH annually on a reporting form.

IEH works at system level, and their work does not include labelling of products. It is, however, important to support existing labels such as Fairtrade, and any new labels must be credible.

Leif Iversen stressed the responsibility of authorities to stimulate companies that have already assumed a social responsibility. It is a problem that, at present, any company that does not escapes. It is important, in this context, to bear in mind how consumers' ethical commitment may be used to promote companies' social responsibility.

3.2 Workshops

The workshops were designed to elicit the views of actors involved in ethical labelling and information: consumers, NGOs, producers, trade and authorities.

The participants at the seminar discussed in four groups:

- Consumers
- Organisations that administer labelling schemes
- Production and trade
- Authorities

The purpose of dividing participants into groups according to whom they represent was to provoke attitudes that were not coloured by compromises and consensus. After the workshops these views could be defended in a plenary discussion.

All groups were asked to discuss and answer question 1 and, furthermore, express an opinion on at least one more question:

1. How may consumers be informed about various ethical conditions in the food production/food chain? Advantages and disadvantages of various alternatives.
2. How do we find out what consumers think?
3. How can we promote the synergy effect through cooperation between authorities, organisations, trade and producers? What are these actors responsible for?
4. Prioritize the various proposals from the ethics report (TemaNord 2003:527 and 2003:532)

- Development of information and educational methods about ethics in food production
- Analysis of the socio-economic consequences of the use of various information methods on ethical conditions in food production
- Nordic guidelines for the use of ethical claims in marketing
- Labelling of fish from sustainable fishing
- Nordic data base on sustainable food production
- Methods of measuring the environmental impact of foods
- The development of criteria and a label for animal welfare

Results of workshops

1. *How can consumers be informed about various ethical conditions in the food production/food chain? Advantages and disadvantages of various alternatives.*

The consumer group discussed *various information methods for ethical aspects, the responsibility of authorities and the responsibility of companies.*

The group concluded that various means should be used in parallel in order to promote ethical production and trade.

Focus should be on the development of information technology to be used at the time of purchase. There is for example the possibility of using EAN bar codes and SMS systems as information source.

Schools should teach children and youngsters about ethical problems.

Companies should assume an ethical responsibility for the production and trade links.

In particular, authorities should assume a responsibility and send clear signals about the political attitudes in society vis-à-vis production and trade, and about the goals society is pursuing. A number of political areas should be involved.

The organisations group agreed that “what” the information is about influences “whom” one wants to reach with the information, which in turn affects “how” one wants to provide information.

To its own question “*what*”, the group answered that the ethical aspects of production that one might want to raise may be listed under the main headings: *Environment, animal welfare and human rights*. The challenge is to define what ethical aspects are important within each field. For example, what should be defined as ethics within the environment? Is it respect for bio-diversity in the production, the consideration of transport, and whether to use renewable or non-renewable resources, the consideration of recycling and/or reclamation? This discussion reflects the complexity of the ethical issue.

The question “*who*” was not discussed in depth, but it was agreed that the segmentation of the target groups is important for the right choice of means of communication.

In order to make progress on the question “*how*” the group discussed existing labels. The Swan label was considered an environmental label for services and non-food products, the Ø label/KRAV label as related to the environment and animal welfare and

the Fairtrade Label as related to human rights. The group found that a combination of the Swan label and the Fairtrade label or a combination of the Ø label/KRAV label and the Fairtrade label would be the most comprehensive ethical labelling today. The group believes that it is not feasible to incorporate all ethical concerns under one label. It would be preferable to choose a label on the basis of the problems and challenges that are most urgent in a given situation for the relevant group of products, production country or production. If, for example, the aim is to support a positive process in a developing country, it would be most appropriate to rely on a Fairtrade label rather than an Ø label.

The group concluded that labels make it easier for consumers to be conscious of the environment and make ethical choices. But the effectiveness of labels depends on consumers' knowledge of them. The public sector has a responsibility for spreading information. The public sector should also show its attitude through action in terms of public procurement, for instance. Voluntary organisations may supplement the public sector effort by pressurizing shopping chains to provide information about ethics.

The ideal situation, according to the group, would be a "mandatory declaration" in the sense that everybody who does not produce in accordance with the ethical requirements of the labels should label their products accordingly. The group, however, considers this wish unrealistic.

The group discussed the possibilities of an ethical data base and Internet access via shop scanners. The group has only little confidence that scanners in shops will be used in the ordinary shopping situation when shopping for food. As consumers we expect – or at least we hope – that the products are acceptable, and we do not want to spend too much time looking for information about ethical aspects. The group believes, however, that the existence of an ethical data base in itself provides security for consumers, because it allows them to check products or producers, if they wish.

What is important is the credibility and reliability of the data base. It must be controlled by an independent third party.

It applies to both labelling and data bases generally that it may be difficult for small producers and possibly small subcontractors to comply with the requirements or to get documented compliance with the requirements.

The Production and Trade Group discussed *the basic values for ethical labelling, ethical labelling of foodstuffs* and *who will be handling ethical labelling*.

The group found that the discussion on ethical aspects is characterized by murky notions. They found that it was too broad to speak of sustainable development and include many aspects within this concept. It is necessary to establish the essential notions and define more closely what values are being discussed. The word ethics should not be used. In the view of the group, human rights should be the main interest.

Food is not a very interesting product group when we are talking about providing information about ethical conditions in production. There is a greater need for a discussion of ethical aspects for other groups of products. In the Nordic countries the food production is managed and organised and foodstuffs are under control.

Furthermore, there are already a number of labels on food and there is no need for the development of new labels. If we want to use a label with "ethical" aspects, we should concentrate on the European organic label.

The group pointed out that labelling entails:

- That consumers carry “the entire responsibility”, and that this is not reasonable. Consumers cannot fully comprehend what a label represents. The content and the criteria of the labels are not even known to experts.
- That criteria must be clearly stipulated and that procedures are laid down to measure and control the criteria, and that this is a major task.
- That a label means that there is an in-depth process of deciding the criteria and controlling *products*, and that the *process* is not in focus. A broad view is needed to create *systems* enabling companies to start the process of dealing with their ethical responsibility.
- That credibility should be created through control by a third party.
- That there is a risk of choosing labelling for products that are easy to label, and avoiding the problematic products. A retail chain may have 50 labelled products, but it is much more important to take a look at the other products.

The conclusions by the group (which were clarified further during the discussion of question 3) are that there are already a number of food labels that include ethical aspects, and that there is no need for new labels. Labelling is, in any case, just one way of providing information. There is, however, not just one solution, but many partial solutions. What is most important is to start a process for ethical production and trade.

The group believes that the authorities should not get involved in ethical labelling and information. It is up to the organisations (NGOs), companies and trade unions to provide information about ethics in production and trade.

The authorities group discussed *the responsibility of authorities and advantages and disadvantages of different information methods*. The group finds that the authorities are responsible for a basic set of ethical rules. This basic level may be supplemented with several types of voluntary information.

Labelling may be found on the product as such, on the shop shelf or the counter, possibly as a symbol. It is a disadvantage that there are many different labels, which are difficult for the consumer to grasp. It is not a good solution, either, to incorporate a lot of information in one label, because having to comply with the many parameters will give rise to conflicts. If a label is to be informative about ethical concerns in production and trade, the label must carry a *clear message*.

An *ethics data base* is a good idea, in the opinion of the authorities group. Via a data base it is possible to give thorough information, and the data base could be compiled at the Nordic level. In time, the data base may be combined with scanners in the shops, bar codes on products, text messages and other methods of information technology. The disadvantage of a data base is that some groups of consumers are unlikely to be interested for the time being.

There is a host of other methods of oral and written information about ethical aspects:

Brochures may be left in locations where consumers pass, e.g. stations and libraries.

Information stands may also be set up in many different places.

Projects in schools are, by experience, a good way of teaching children about this type of subject.

Using media both for advertising and objective information is an important method.

Cookery books with a message are suggested by the authorities group as a new idea to promote consumer knowledge of products made and traded with special ethical concerns. Example: Coffee recipes with Fairtrade coffee.

The group believes that the public sector should be a model. Ethical aspects should be taken into consideration in public procurement. The power of the good example and the rings-in-the-water effect could help influence consumer behaviour.

2. *How do we find out what consumers think?*

Question 2 was discussed solely by the **organisations group**, who explained the different methods that may be used to find out about the consumers' view of ethics in the context of food.

Opinion polls/surveys provide an answer that may be generalized and analyzed statistically. The disadvantage is that the surveys measure attitudes, but not necessarily actions such as consumers' willingness to pay.

Focus groups go into depth and may link attitudes to a shopping situation, but it should be questioned whether the results are descriptive of a large part of the population. The results may rarely be generalized.

Surveys of consumers in the shop/observed shopping behaviour provide solid information about consumers' choices, but it is difficult to get a representative sample and difficult to generalize.

Simulation games may give a straight answer about willingness to pay, but is a poor link to the consumer's shopping situation.

The media often show how attitudes are formed and explained, and thus provide a background to understanding how consumers react. But the media may also present a distorted view of reality. Despite this flaw the group pointed to the media as the consumer's best ally.

Demand is probably a poor indicator for consumer attitudes. Consumers' choices are decided by daily routines, lack of time and the display of products in shops.

The organisations group finds it sensible to combine different surveying methods. The group finds that one good method is to use *focus groups* in order to gain an understanding of the role ethical values play for consumers, and how consumers think in various shopping situations. In order to be able to generalize, it may be useful also to use *shop surveys* that focus on what is actually happening during shopping.

The group points to the fact that no methods are certain when it comes to collecting information about the consumers' view of ethics. It is difficult to juxtapose the ethical aspects of a product and the other qualities of the product. The consumer's view of quality, price and product qualities is assumed to be associated with individual preferences, whereas views on ethics are associated with values that are developed collectively in the public space. Ethical views are part of a broader set of values which the person adopts not just for the role of consumer, but as a human being. Attitudes to,

for instance, child labour in production is associated with the role of citizen as much as with the role of consumer.

3. *How to promote the synergy effect through a cooperation between authorities, organisations, trade and producers? What are these actors responsible for?*

The consumer group stresses cooperation and synergy effects at all levels.

Ethical questions in connection with production and trade should be discussed at the global level, in the Nordic countries, EU and WTO.

An initiative such as IEH – The Initiative for Ethical Trade – is a good idea that should be promoted at a joint Nordic level.

In order to speed up the use of labels and other methods of information there ought to be mutual recognition and cooperation between different control systems. It should be possible to introduce “group certification” so that a farmer or producer does not receive control visits from several instances.

Authorities and governments should lead the way in a joint effort and set up cooperation with organisations and industry.

The production and trade group has confidence in the IEH model and believes that cooperation between NGOs, companies and trade unions would produce a major synergy effect. The group stresses the fact that these parties work together across country borders whilst respecting the cultural differences between nations. The group believes that the responsibility for initiatives should not be left to authorities.

There is, however, not just one single solution for information dissemination, but a range of solutions.

An ethics data base such as the Danish one, EAN codes on products and scanners in shops are ways of creating transparency on ethical issues. The group does not, however, believe that the time is ripe for installing scanners, which are expensive, and which consumers have not used much so far (to get price information). A more obvious possibility is a reference on the product to the web-page, which enables the consumers to obtain information about the products at home via the Internet.

The authorities group concluded that the synergy effect may be achieved by:

- Developing good meeting places where authorities, organisations, industry and others can discuss their individual roles, get appreciation of the diversity and complexity of ethical issues and set up a dialogue. There should be a broad participation at these meeting places. All parties have a role to play.
- Authorities assuming the task of collecting information about ethical initiatives from organisations and using it in schools, for example, and for competence development generally.
- Setting up project cooperation between authorities and industry about ethical information.

Plenary discussion

Question 1 about how consumers may be informed about various ethical conditions in the food production/food chain gave rise to the following views:

All groups had pointed out that the labelling on the product as such is just one way of providing information about ethics, and possibly not always the best. The panel discussed systems that start a process of promoting ethical production and trade, but do not necessarily include labelling of products. The stress is not initially on informing consumers, but on creating results in the production and trade chain, e.g. when IEH assists labourers in developing countries to obtain the right to join trade unions. It is clear, however – simply to allow market forces to operate – that consumers must be informed. It was also said by the consumer side that an ethical label may spark off a development through its visibility.

A claim raised during the workshops that the content and criteria of the labels are diffuse and not even known by experts was rejected by the organisations group. A label is based on a set of criteria expressed in unambiguous terms. The problem is that the contents of the labels have not yet been communicated with sufficient success to consumers. The fact that a label is based on set criteria does not exclude a simultaneous process of developing the labelling system.

Question 2 about how we find out what consumers think of ethical labelling and information *gave rise to a lively discussion.*

A representative for the production and trade group felt that consumers are mainly interested in the price of the products. It was estimated that about 2% of consumers might shop on the basis of ethical considerations, 15% would occasionally pay more for products with an ethical profile, whereas more than 80% only went by price. This was evident from the turnover in shops. There is thus no reason to make the issue of ethics more complicated than it is.

From the consumer side it was said that it is not strange that consumers are more interested in price, when the price is the only parameter that companies highlight and compete on. Others agreed with this and felt that it was underestimating consumers to maintain that the price was the only relevant factor for them. Such a view of the consumers is too simplistic. Consumers are interested in many other qualities in food, especially at weekends when they have more time.

In this connection the organisations made the point that the authorities and the media could make it known why products are cheap, and that the low price may have been achieved at the cost of the environment, animal welfare, labour conditions in the developing countries, etc.

In connection with the organisation group's review of various survey methods, the consumers asked how much research is available about how consumers actually act when it comes to selecting products produced according to special ethical requirements. It was stressed that there are no surveys of whether or why consumers choose wholesome food, for example. The answers (given in different contexts) were that there are some surveys on the subject, and that most surveys are about organic produce. The surveys do not yet seem to have provided an explanation as to why there is a gap between consumers' attitudes and actions.

A representative for the authorities said that the schism between the attitudes and actions of consumers must be decisive for the information strategy we choose, and that the IEH scheme and similar initiatives might be an attractive possibility that may strengthen the attitudes of consumers.

Despite the consumers' dilemma concerning attitude and action it has, according to the representatives of the organisations group, become a competition parameter for companies to assume an ethical responsibility. This development is considered very positive by many participants.

In the context of various methods of surveying, a few results from the *Matpolitiske forbrukerpaneler* (Food political consumer panels) were mentioned. Animal welfare is a subject that concerns many of the participants in the consumer panel. The general view is that information about animal welfare should not be part of the labelling of meat, and that it is difficult for consumers to consider animal welfare when shopping. Instead authorities should raise the general level of animal welfare.

Question 3 about how the synergy effect can be promoted through cooperation between authorities, organisations, trade and producers, and what these actors are responsible for gave rise to the following points of view:

Many stressed the responsibility of authorities for providing information about ethical aspects. Ethics in production and trade is a topical subject in society, and there is a need for information and debate. The authorities should lead the way and form partnerships with organisations and companies. Though the view expressed by the production and trade group was that the authorities should not be driving the development, but that any initiative should be taken by companies.

The Norwegian Initiative for Ethical Trade (IEH) was met with general sympathy during the plenary debate. Within this initiative there is cooperation between NGOs, trade unions and industry. It was, however, underscored that the initiative would have floundered without public aid in the initial stages. For the time being the IEH is run with a small secretariat (three persons), and they are not in touch with consumers, except for consumers' access to the web page. The approach is that companies describe their commitment to the initiative and thus to ethical production and trade.

In the discussion about the responsibility of authorities, a consumer voiced the demand that the competition policy should be changed throughout the world in order to allow for other factors than short-term financial gains.

3.3 Conclusions

There is a limit to the breadth and width of a discussion on *ethical information about foodstuffs* at a one-day seminar with participation of various stakeholder groups. The discussions at the seminar do not, however, stand alone. The seminar is based on the report Ethical labelling of food, TemaNord 2003:527, which puts together available experience of ethical labelling of foodstuffs, and assesses the needs and the possibilities of further ethical labelling as well as other methods of consumer information. The purpose of the seminar has been – through a dialogue between consumers, organisations, trade and producers – to obtain a clear picture of consumers' expectations, and to prepare proposals for possible initiatives to meet consumers' demand for information about ethical conditions in food production. The objective of the seminar has also been to contribute to the priorities and further development of the proposals for future cooperation between the Nordic countries, which are contained in the above report.

The outcome of the workshops for different interest groups – consumers, organisations, production and trade and authorities – largely coincides. They agree, for instance, that apart from labelling there are many ways of informing consumers, that data bases have a major development potential, and that companies must take ethics into consideration and let this be known. The most marked disagreement was about the role of the authorities since the production and trade group found that the initiative for ethical information should stem from companies, organisations and trade unions, not from the authorities.

Main results

- The majority of consumers believe that it is possible to influence society through conscious consumer choices.
- The majority of consumers have an attitude to ethics in the production of food, but few act in accordance with this attitude.
- Consumers expect others, e.g. the retail trade, to have taken a stance on ethical requirements, and that the products that are offered in the market live up to a reasonable ethical standard.
- The consumers' commitment to ethical conditions in food production must be used to stimulate the development and to strengthen the competitive position of the companies that already assume a social responsibility. Consumers need a better understanding of the problems and to learn that information about ethical conditions in the production exist.
- Labelling is just one way of providing information. There are many other information channels, such as data bases on the Internet, the home pages of organisations, companies, brochures and not forgetting the media. These means may be used in parallel. All methods have advantages and disadvantages⁵. The main difference between labels and other means of information is that at the moment labels may be used at the time of purchase whereas other methods depend on consumers seeking information before or after purchase.
- There are already several labels with an ethical message, and there are groups of consumers who use the labels actively. Existing labels should be strengthened and developed.
- The labels may be used in combination. The message from the labels should be clear, and a greater effort should be made to communicate the message to consumers. It was a general view at the seminar that it is difficult to incorporate different ethical messages in one single label.
- Modern information technology presents good opportunities for providing information about ethical concerns in production and trade, and the use of technology is rising very rapidly. The technology is used today by NGOs, companies and, to a limited extent, authorities. The information mainly covers processes that have been initiated to promote ethical production and trade, and to

⁵ The strengths and weaknesses of different labels and other methods of information are analysed in the report Ethical labelling of food, TemaNord 2003:527.

a lesser degree products. Product information is, however, also available on the home pages of some companies.

- Information technology that can be used at the time of purchase has been invented and is available in the shape of scanners in shops, EAN codes and SMS combined with access to data bases and the Internet. The technology is not being used yet, and the retail trade believes that consumer interest in using the technology at the time of purchase is still too limited for shops to invest in expensive online scanners.
- The credibility of labels and other methods of information and the traceability of labelled products are necessary prerequisites for consumers' trust and willingness to use the information. Credibility should be established through control by an independent third party.
- Companies carry a responsibility for informing consumers about ethical conditions in the production and trading process. Companies' commitment is strengthened by the fact that an ethical profile has already become a competition parameter.
- Schools should teach children and youngsters about ethical problems in production and trade, especially by means of project work.
- A majority of the interest groups at the seminar feel that the authorities must assume a responsibility concerning ethics in production and trade. It should be done by introducing legislation that lays down basic ethical requirements, by showing an example and taking ethical aspects into consideration in public procurement and ultimately by collecting and providing information about ethical concerns and initiatives.
- The producer and trade group does not feel that the public sector should take initiatives for labelling and developing other methods of information.
- NGOs, trade unions, companies and authorities should set up a dialogue on ethics in production and trade, form partnerships and create synergy effects.
- At the moment it is more important to open up to development, information and debate about ethical conditions in production and trade than to introduce new ethical labels. In this context the media play an important role.
- Surveys of consumer behaviour should be carried out.

The results of the seminar confirm the conclusions and general recommendations in the report Ethical Labelling of Food, TemaNord 2003:527.

The report on ethical labelling concludes that the interest for ethical values in production and consumption is an integral part of social development, and that the interest is strengthened by globalisation. The respect for ethical values in production is a reality that consumers, industry, organisations, authorities and politicians are aware of.

The development and the debate have been ongoing for 10 to 15 years. The results of the seminar show that there is no short term prospect of a major breakthrough for ethical considerations in production and consumption, especially not at a time characterized by fierce price competition. But the commitment is there among consumers and in

industry, and initiatives are taken by different actors to improve the possibilities for consumers to choose products on the basis of ethical considerations.

The conclusions from the seminar call upon NGOs, trade unions, companies and authorities to set up a dialogue, form partnerships and create synergy effects for ethics in production and trade. This cooperation may take place at national, Nordic or international level.

4 Priorities and recommendations concerning the proposals in the report Ethical Labelling of Food

The results of the seminar fully support the general recommendation in the report Ethical Labelling of Food, TemaNord 2003:527, that the Nordic Council of Ministers should maintain a broad communication about ethical conditions in food production. The communication must contribute to the public debate on an objective basis in accordance with the Nordic countries' view of ethics in food production. The communication should be founded on the existing ethical commitment amongst consumers and contribute to consumers' understanding of ethical conditions in the food production through education, teaching and information initiatives, seminars and conferences. The communication may, furthermore, benefit from industry's commitment to ethics through a dialogue with producers, sectors and the retail trade.

None of the workshops dealt with question 4 concerning prioritization of the seven concrete proposals for further initiatives within the Nordic cooperation proposed in the report. The steering group of the seminar has, therefore, discussed the prioritization on the basis of the seminar deliberations.

The steering group presents the following concrete recommendations to the Nordic Council of Ministers, with the intention that the relevant senior officials committees within the Nordic cooperation should promote the prioritized proposals on ethical labelling and information.⁶ The proposals should be seen as a step in a dynamic development in the area.

4.1 Nordic seminar on ethical information on food

The first proposal in the report for *a cross-sectorial seminar with participation from authorities, the food trade, retail trade, consumer and other organisations to discuss possible information and educational initiatives and inclusion of consumers in the discussion about ethics in food production* has now been implemented in the shape of the seminar on ethical information about food. The outcome is described in this report.

⁶ The steering group maintains the definition of ethical labelling in "Ethical Labelling of Food". Ethical labelling means that a product is labelled with information as to whether the production process respects ethical values. It also applies to other methods of information that the respect for ethical values should be mentioned. The reference point is ethical values that are on the public agenda in the context of production and consumption of food, first and foremost sustainability, human rights, animal welfare and environmental protection.

4.2 Nordic guidelines for the use of ethical claims in marketing

The proposal for *preparing Nordic guidelines for the use of ethical claims in marketing* was taken up in the autumn of 2003 by the Nordic consumer ombudsmen. The Norwegian consumer ombudsman presides over the work, following the model of the Norwegian guidelines⁷ which were laid down in June 2003. A draft will be discussed at the meeting of the consumer ombudsmen in May 2004. For the time being there are a number of open questions, and no decision has been taken as yet as to what should be included in the concept of ethics. The Norwegian consumer ombudsman would be happy to receive suggestions of subjects to be included in the document.

4.3 Labelling of fish from sustainable fisheries

Labelling of fish from sustainable fisheries has been on the agenda of the Nordic Council of Ministers since 1996 and various initiatives have been taken at the Nordic and international level. The discussion about labelling of fish from sustainable fisheries has now been taken up by FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization under the United Nations) as a Nordic initiative. In October-November 2003 an expert committee prepared a proposal for a labelling system at the request of the FAO Commission of Fisheries (COFI) and with Nordic funding. The proposal is to be discussed also at a "Technical Consultation" within the remit of FAO in the autumn of 2004 with a view to presentation to COFI for approval in the autumn of 2005.

4.4 Analysis of the socio-economic consequences of various information methods

The steering group then gives priority to the proposal that *the Nordic Council of Ministers should start a project to evaluate the socio-economic consequences of various initiatives to inform consumers about ethical conditions in the food production.*

During the discussions at the seminar there was broad support for the view that different methods of providing information about ethical conditions in food production and trade should be used in parallel. Existing labels are important, but other information methods than labelling offer new possibilities, and especially the development of electronic information on the Internet and in shops is expected to lead to significant changes in the information flow.

Labelling is the tool that is most commonly used to inform consumers about ethical conditions. A label has advantages for the consumers because it is visible and may be used during shopping, but a label entails high costs to industry and thus to consumers and control costs for authorities.

Very little is known about the effectiveness of labelling and other information methods in relationship to costs. There is, however, sufficient experience in the field for a socio-economic assessment of the methods. A cost/benefit analysis may both give an impression of the costs of labelling and other information, and demonstrate the effectiveness of the methods.

⁷ <http://www.forbrukerombudet.no/assets/984/etisk-forbruk.pdf>

A socio-economic analysis should include an assessment of the costs to companies, trade and the public authorities of labelling and other methods of information. The analysis should, furthermore, assess these costs compared to the effectiveness of the information vis-à-vis consumers, as well as the social benefits in terms of the effect on sustainable food production, respect for human rights, improved animal welfare and better protection of the environment.

A socio-economic analysis of various information methods about ethical conditions in food production will provide a better basis for the prioritization of efforts. The analysis will be of use to the Nordic countries because a joint research project will both save resources and strengthen the competence of the Nordic countries in the discussions on ethical labelling that are already being held in the EU. The analysis may, furthermore, be based on a shared value basis that may be presumed to have special Nordic characteristics.

Recommendation

The Nordic Council of Ministers should set up a cross-sectorial project group with participation from the food, agricultural and forestry, fisheries, environmental and consumer sectors with a view to opening a dialogue with a research institute about an analysis of the socio-economic consequences of the use of various methods of information about ethical conditions in the food production. The analysis will be conducted by a research institute with professional support from the cross-sectorial project group.

4.5 Nordic data base on sustainable food production

The proposal of starting a *pre-study on the development of a consumer-oriented data base with information about sustainable food production including the respect for human rights, animal welfare and the environment* is important, but may be set aside at the Nordic level, for the time being, because the development of consumer-oriented data bases is well on the way in other fora.

In Denmark Forbrugernes Hus (formerly ForbrugerInformationen) set up the Etikbase in 2002 as a facility for companies to provide information about the ethical considerations that form part of the company's policy and activities. The Etikbase functions on the basis of a partnership between a public authority and private companies. In Norway there is also an ethical data base – Etisk forbrukernetverk – aimed at consumers. It differs from the Danish initiative because participants are not businesses but interest organisations and the like, such as Norges Naturvernforbund (Norwegian Nature Conservation Association) and Max Havelaar Norge.

Aided by a grant from the EU, the Forbrugernes Hus was able to set up cooperation with consumer organisations in Germany and Austria in 2003 in order to develop the Etikbase to cover the EU, starting with Germany and Austria.

The seminar expressed a positive view of ethics data bases. The existence of independent data bases as such gives security because consumers can check products or producers, if they wish. Data bases use modern information technology and thus present future possibilities for contact with large groups of interested consumers. Data bases are easier to update than labelling schemes.

The seminar did not just discuss the public Danish ethics base, but also the home pages with ethical information from organisations, and especially the Norwegian Initiative for Ethical Trade Information (IEH). Information on the net was considered useful, also in the case of companies' home pages about ethics. The decisive point is that data bases and home pages must be credible, and that the information should be checked by an independent third party, or possibly by the authorities. At the seminar it was suggested that companies should join an independent scheme to ensure credibility.

The steering group assesses that the work of developing the consumer-oriented data bases in Denmark and Norway is so well advanced that there is no benefit in spending resources from the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Recommendation

The Nordic Council of Ministers should keep abreast with the development of consumer-oriented data bases in Denmark and Norway through the Senior Officials Committee for Consumer Questions. In the light of developments, it may be considered at a later stage whether setting up a joint Nordic data base might be advantageous.

4.6 Methods for assessing the environmental impact of food

The proposal to organize *a group of experts to work on collecting the knowledge on the use of life-cycle analysis and other methods for assessing the environmental impact of food production, trade and consumption* cannot be given a high priority following the discussions at the seminar. The steering group estimates that, for the time being, the proposal should be dropped.

The proposal aims at improving consumers' possibilities of choosing food on the basis of environmental criteria including environmental protection during the production, trade and consumption, i.e. during the lifecycle of foodstuffs. Consumer information is important because food represent a large share of the environmental impact of households. Nordisk Miljømærknings Nævn (Nordic Environmental Labelling Board) has discussed the use of the Swan label on foods, but the national environmental labelling boards are divided in their attitudes, and especially the food sector has dismissed environmental labelling of foods. No final decision has been taken yet, and the discussions are expected to continue in the relevant fora within the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The environmental impact of foodstuffs is a delicate question which should be discussed some more. It is important to have access to recognized methods for measuring the environmental impact, and it is important, for the sake of a free consumer choice, to be able to provide information about the environmental impact of foods.

Recommendation

For the time being the Nordic Council of Ministers should set aside the proposal about collecting knowledge about methods of assessing the environmental impact of food, and await the development of discussions, which can be presumed to continue especially within the remit of the Nordic Environmental Labelling Board, the Senior Officials Committee for Consumer Questions and the Senior Officials Committee for Environmental Questions.

4.7 The development of criteria and a label for animal welfare

The proposal that *the Nordic Council of Ministers should open a dialogue with the food sector about animal welfare and urge the sector to voluntarily use labels signalling that extraordinary concern for animal welfare has been shown in the production* did not receive support at the ethics seminar. According to the proposal, *the labelling was to be based on criteria which are well above the legislative requirements, and the introduction of credible control schemes was foreseen. The dialogue could take place in the cooperation bodies with agriculture and the food industry which the Council of Ministers has already set up.*

The Norwegian participants at the seminar referred to a report from the Matpolitiske forbrukerpaneler (Food Policy Consumer Panels), “Kjøtt fra gård til bord. Om informationsbehov og prioriteringer blant forbrukerne” (Meat from stable to table. The need for information and priorities for consumers)⁸. According to the report, animal welfare is a subject that is of concern to many of the participants in the consumer panels. “The general view is that information about animal welfare does not belong on the labelling of meat. People mostly want a guarantee that the animal has been treated well. Not only should consumers be spared having to decide on questions about animal welfare at the time of purchase; most people do not have the knowledge to be able to interpret this type of information. Questions and assessments concerning animal welfare become too difficult and complex. The panellists therefore fear that ‘ethical labelling’ will misguide rather than guide consumers. Rather than introducing a system of differentiation between different ‘ethical standards’, it is suggested that authorities would do better to raise the level of animal welfare generally. If ethical labelling is going to be implemented, it is on condition that there is a government authority behind it, and that the labelling is in the shape of simple classification.”

The proposal in the report Ethical Labelling of Food goes on to argue that since existing private labels about animal welfare are not always credible, there seems to be potential for developing a verified labelling scheme and/or other information schemes about animal welfare. It is part of the background to the proposal that raising the level for animal welfare through legislation is difficult if not impossible at the global level, and that labelling therefore could be used as a tool in the market mechanism.

⁸ <http://odin.dep.no/ld/norsk/publ/rapporter/020061-220003/dok-bn.html>

The use of private labels on meat⁹ is more common in Denmark than in the other Nordic countries. The proposed dialogue between authorities and the sector may be relevant in Denmark, but will – judging by the discussions at the seminar – not be of any use at the Nordic level.

Recommendation

The Nordic Council of Ministers should set the proposal for a dialogue with the food industry about voluntary labelling about animal welfare aside.

⁹ In April 2004 in a series of articles about discount as against quality a leading Danish daily called a Danish welfare pig "happy, free and untruthful".

Annex 1. Programme for the Seminar



Nordiska
MINISTERRÅDET

SEMINAR ABOUT ETHICAL INFORMATION ON FOOD

Nordic Sea Hotell in Stockholm, March 25th 2004

PROGRAMME

9.30-10.0	Registration, coffee
10.00-10.10	Introduction, practical details (Kerstin Jansson)
10.10-10.25	Presentation of ethics project (Birgitta Lund)
10.25-11.10	Louise Ungerth, Konsumentföreningen in Stockholm What do consumers expect?
11.10-11.40	Mette Reissmann, Forbrugernes Hus Example Danish data base
11.40-11.50	Break
11.50-12.35	Leif Iversen EIH Ethical trade in practice. Why and how?
12.35-13-35	Lunch
13.35-13.50	Introduction to workshops
13.50-15.10	Workshops incl. coffee
15.10-16.45	Brief review of workshops + dialogue
16.45-17.00	Questions, conclusion

Annex 2. List of Participants

PARTICIPANTS AT THE ETHICS SEMINAR March 25th 2004

Inge Aarhus	Lillehammer Miljø	NO
Thomas Agnell	HSH (Handel og Service)	NO
Helene Arrenfeldt	Svensk Dagligvaruhandel	SE
Arne Dulsrud	SIFO (Statens institutt for forbruksforskning)	NO
Ulrika Ehrhardt	LI (Livsmedelsföretagen)	SE
Ann-Christine Larsson-Ekström	Nordiska Ministerrådet	SE
Toril S. Gravdal	Kvinne- og familieforbundet	NO
Marie Anette Hagen-Hansen	Forbrukerrådet	NO
Anne Hatløy	Fafo AIS	NO
Anders Hörberg	Sveriges konsumenter i samverkan	SE
Bengt Ingerstam	Sveriges konsumenter i samverkan	SE
Leif Iversen	IEH (Initiativ for etisk handel)	NO
Tuija Karanko	Jord- och skogsbruksministeriet)	FI
Kerstin Kjellman	Konsumentverket	SE
Gunnhild Aasgård Kristianslund	Matmerk	NO
Birgitta Lund	Livsmedelsverket	SE
Anne-Pia Lødemel	Mattilsynet	NO
Cecilia Mark-Herbert	SLU (Sveriges Lantbruksuniversitet)	SE
Kersti Matthiassen	OIKOS – Økologisk landslag	NO
Nora Mentzoni	Landbruksdepartementet	NO
Thomas Revhaug	Landbruksdepartementet	NO
Vigdis Veum Møllersen	Mattilsynet	NO
Marja Nygren	Konsumentverket	FI
Staffan Olsson	EAN Sverige	SE
Lars Aslo Petersen	Fødevedirektoratet	DK
Mette Reissmann	Forbrugernes Hus	DK
Jens Erik Romslo	Forbrukerombudet	NO
Katarina Rosenqvist	Rättvisemärkt	SE
Anne Kristi Sommer	Mattilsynet	NO
Daniel Sommerstein	Rättvisemärkt	SE

Bente Stærk	Nordiska Ministerrådet	DK
Atle Strande	Mattilsynet	NO
Sesselja Maria Sveinsdottir	Miljø- og levedsmiddelstyrelsen	IS
Mary Ann Sörensen	LRF (Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund)	SE
Riitta Tainio	Finlands Konsumentförbund	FI
Laura Terragni	SIFO (Statens institutt for forbruksforskning)	NO
Svein Tevasvoll	COOP	NO
Louise Ungerth	Konsumentföreningen Stockholm	SE
Elisabeth Varland	Barne- og familiedepartementet	NO
Maria Veggeland	Mattilsynet	NO
Mogens Werge	COOP	DK
Lena Westerlund Lind	SLU (Sveriges Lantbruksuniversitet)	SE
Kerstin Jansson	Jordbruksdepartementet (project manager)	SE
Eeva-Liisa Østergård	Project secretary	DK

Annex 3. Subjects for workshops

Workshops March 25th 2004

During the workshops and the subsequent debate the following questions were discussed:

All groups must answer question 1 and then discuss at least one more question.

1. How can consumers be informed about different ethical concerns in the food production/food chain? Advantages and disadvantages of various alternatives.
2. How do we find out what consumers think?
3. How can we promote the synergy effect through cooperation between organisations, trade and producers? What is the responsibility of these various actors?
4. Prioritize the various proposals in the ethics report (TemaNord 2003:527 and 2003:532)!
 - The development of information and educational methods about ethics in food production
 - Analysis of socio-economic consequences of the use of different information methods about ethical conditions in food production
 - Nordic guidelines for the use of ethical claims in marketing
 - Labelling of fish from sustainable fisheries
 - Nordic data base about sustainable food production
 - Methods of measuring the environmental impact of food
 - Development of criteria and label for animal protection (animal welfare)

Annex 4. Ministerial Declaration

The Nordic Council of Ministers (Ministers for Fisheries, Agriculture, Forestry and Food) Kalmar, June 25th 2003

Ministerial Declaration about

Ethical Labelling of Food

The food supply is constantly changing owing to intensive product development and internationalisation. There are also ever stricter requirements for information about food to the consumer. Consumers are entitled to expect that foodstuffs are of good quality and that the content is declared so that they may make their choices on the basis of correct information. As regards mandatory information, authorities help set frameworks for the kind of labelling that must be provided, and how it should be presented to fulfil its function.

The consumer may also want to obtain a different kind of information, e.g. of an ethical nature. What factors consumers then interpret into the information may vary from, for instance, a wish to buy products without additives to a wish to be able to choose to support certain production methods that are associated with specific positive values. The intention is that the different labelling systems should provide clear information that facilitates the consumers' choice. From a political perspective there is also an interest in supporting actions that contributes to sustainable development, for instance.

The consumers' demands for information about the qualities of foods or production methods may be satisfied in different ways, one of which is labelling with symbols on the product. A too abundant flora of symbols may, however, lead to problems for consumers in terms of difficulties with finding their way about and understanding the meaning of a certain symbol. It is therefore important also to look at other methods of providing the consumer with the desired information.

In the report Ethical Labelling of Food, TemaNord 2003:527, there is a review of several Nordic symbols relating to, e.g., product quality, production method, environment and trade.

The report also draws a number of conclusions that point to ways and means of developing information about ethical questions.

- The existing labelling systems should be maintained and strengthened within the present framework.
- In the areas where there is a need for information, the design of a new labelling system as well as other types of information may show the way forward.
- Introducing a new symbol, launching symbols in the market, maintaining the content of the symbol and controlling the label constitute a major professional and financial challenge, however.
- With previous experience and the social deregulation in mind, any new labelling system should be initiated by industry and/or organisations.

- Other methods of information for consumers have a huge development potential, e.g. electronic information in shops as well as on the Internet.

The report suggests the following concrete initiatives:

- that working on the development of methods for information and education concerning ethics in the food production should start with a cross-sectorial seminar with participation from industry and NGOs, for the purpose of obtaining a clearer picture of consumers' expectations of ethical information.
- that an analysis of the socio-economic consequences of the use of various information methods concerning ethical conditions should be made.
- that common Nordic guidelines for the use of ethical claims in food marketing should be prepared
- that the ongoing work within the Nordic Council of Ministers concerning labelling of fish from sustainable fisheries should be continued.
- a pre-study to evaluate whether data bases are an effective means of providing information so that a decision may be made about a Nordic data base on sustainable production.
- that the Nordic Council of Ministers should start an expert investigation in order to collect know-how about the feasibility of measuring environmental impact from foodstuffs.
- that the Nordic Council of Ministers should open a dialogue with the food industry about the development of criteria and a voluntary labelling system for animal welfare.

The Nordic Ministers find that the information about ethical conditions in food production is important and have noted the working group's conclusions about development potential. The working group points out, however, that at present there is no basis for introducing general ethical labelling of foodstuffs. Therefore the Nordic Ministers recommend that the relevant committees within the Nordic cooperation be called upon, against the backdrop of a dialogue with consumers, trade and producers, to prioritize and develop the proposals from the working group for possible initiatives to meet the demands for consumer information about ethical conditions in food production.

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