

From the Editor

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This issue features four articles and three book reviews. In the first article (“A precautionary approach to genetically modified organisms: Challenges and implications for policy and science”), Anne Ingeborg Myhr addresses the problem of how the commercial use of GMOs should be regulated given the broad range of views among scientists and other stakeholders about how to handle lack of scientific understanding and scientific disagreement about their value and their risks. Proponents claim “that the world needs GM crops to counter future poverty, food deficits, hunger, climatic changes, and also that GM crops are safe and will increase agricultural production,” while critics are concerned about their risks. The research community seems divided and they differ “in their views as to whether there are real risks of adverse effects on health and the environment.” “This has caused disagreements about the significance of scientific evidence on benefits and risks and the appropriateness and necessity of risk frameworks and regulation. Especially, the role of precaution in risk assessment and management processes of the commercial use of GM crops and GMOs in general has caused controversy.” The purpose of Myhr’s article “is to examine some of the key issues affecting the relationship between precaution as a legal standard and as an approach to the use of science in decision-making processes. In practice, there are unresolved important questions with regard to how the precautionary principle should be used that prevent widespread application.” The authors conclude with six recommendations about how to handle the use of the precautionary approach.

The last three articles make use of studies of people’s attitudes, beliefs, and values.

The first of these articles examines alternative feed resources for farm-raised salmon. In “Perspectives on Salmon Feed—A Deliberative Assessment of Several

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Alternative Feed Resources,” Frøydis Gillund and Anne Ingeborg Myhr look at some of the problems in finding sources of feed for salmon raised on farms that are a viable alternative to the unsustainable uses of fish meal and fish oil. The proposed new resources include “species from lower trophic levels, by-products and by-catch from fisheries and aquaculture, animal by-products, plants, genetically modified (GM) plants, nutritionally enhanced GM plants and products from microorganisms and GM microorganisms.” Their study is based on “a deliberative evaluation of these alternative feed resources, involving 18 participants from different interest groups within Norwegian salmon aquaculture.” This study revealed a number of uncertainties about a “broad range of appraisal criteria concerning health and welfare issues, economical issues, environmental issues, and knowledge and social issues” and the need for future evaluative deliberations to “improve the information base upon which decisions on future feed resources for farmed salmon are made.”

In the second article (“Citizens’ views on farm animal welfare and related information provision: exploratory insights from Flanders, Belgium”) Filiep Vanhonacker, Els Van Poucke, Frank Tuytens, and Wim Verbeke report on their findings from two empirical studies with Flemish citizens designed to “address the problem of a short fall of information provision about higher welfare products.” The purpose of the studies was to “(1) to improve our understanding of how citizens conceptualize farm animal welfare, (2) to analyze the variety in the claimed personal relevance of animal welfare in the food purchasing decision process, and (3) to find out peoples’ needs in relation to product information about animal welfare and the extent to which the current information caters to these needs.” The findings of the studies “help inform the discussion about how citizens can be informed about animal welfare and the preferred *content, source, and medium of such information.*” “The paper also provides insights into citizens’ semantic interpretation of the concept of animal welfare (*what wordings they use*) and the range of relevance that animal welfare has for different groups that, in turn is useful in identifying *which segments* can be targeted. This can contribute to a more effective valorization of animal welfare as a product attribute.”

In the final article of this group (“Are Farmers of the Middle Distinctively ‘Good Stewards’s? Evidence from the Missouri Farm Poll, 2006”), authors Harvey S. James, Jr. and Mary Hendrickson used a survey of Missouri farmers to address the question of whether middle-scale farmers are better stewards of the land and their animals. The claim that they are can provide reasons for trying to preserve them. However, the authors found little evidence that they were “particularly noteworthy in these regards. We do find evidence, however, that middle-scale farmers are more pessimistic and anxious about their role in the future of agriculture.”