

**Framing, Debating, and Standardising  
“Natural Food” in Two Different Political  
Contexts: Sweden and the U.S.**

**Magnus Boström and Mikael Klintman**

Score Rapportserie 2003:3  
ISBN 91-89658-11-6  
ISSN 1404-5052

*Framing, Debating, and Standardising “Natural Food” in Two  
Different Political Contexts: Sweden and the U.S.*

**Magnus Boström**

Phone +46 8 674 74 19

E-mail [magnus.bostrom@score.su.se](mailto:magnus.bostrom@score.su.se)

**Mikael Klintman**

Phone +46 46 222 34 60

E-mail [mikael.klintman@soc.lu.se](mailto:mikael.klintman@soc.lu.se)

**Score**

(Stockholm Center for Organizational Research)

SE-106 91 Stockholm School of Economics

Sweden

## **ABSTRACT**

Food labelling has been introduced in several countries as a tool for consumers who want to make reflexive and responsible choices. This is connected to increased worries and concerns about environmental, ethical, and health-related problems caused by production and consumption. Organic food is interpreted by many as a good solution to such problems. An international organic movement has been quite successful in promoting the organic industry and trade, as well as in establishing criteria for what should count as “organic.” However, there is considerable variation across countries as to how organic food principles and labelling standards are debated and decided.

This report examines and compares debates and standardisation of organic food and agriculture in Sweden and the U.S. Standardisation of organic food and agriculture is carried out in both countries, but in different ways. In Sweden a private organisation (KRAV) - consisting of NGOs, associations for conventional and organic farmers, and the food industry - has been rather successful in promoting organic food labelling as an eco-label. KRAV has developed a complementary position vis-à-vis the state and the regulatory framework in the EU. In the U.S., the Federal Government controls standardisation. The Government frames the label as a “marketing label,” and rejects the idea that organic food production would have relative advantages to the environment, health or food quality. This type of framing is separated from the ones created by organic constituencies, leading to deeper controversies than in Sweden.

In this paper we compare the organic standardisation processes against the different political and regulatory backgrounds in these countries. Organisational processes behind food labelling are examined; e.g. who are participating in which forms? The paper pays particular attention to how actors frame organic food and agriculture. We use framing theory for investigating how actors develop ideas about what they are doing and how they are forming coalitions. This body of literature is also used for illuminating the compromises that lie behind standardisation of organic food.

In the concluding section we discuss some reasons why it has been easier in Sweden to carry on standardisation. Still, it is also important to pay attention to some possible negative consequences of the more consensus-oriented debate climate in Sweden.

## **Preface**

By using a comparative perspective, the aim of this paper is to contribute to the discussion of consumer-oriented environmental politics and regulation. Since consumer-oriented regulatory strategies are currently on the political agenda we believe that it is of interest for both social scientists and policy-makers to understand the conditions, opportunities, and dilemmas involved in such strategies. This case study is part of a broader research project and the case will be compared to certain other cases (e.g., forest certification, fish labelling, and green mutual funds). The research is financed by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, by the Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning, and by the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation.

We would like to thank all informants from Sweden and the U.S. for providing us the information that was necessary for writing this report. The authors have made the same working effort and are equally responsible for the content.

Magnus Boström

Mikael Klintman

Stockholm and Lund, May- 2003



## Contents

<b><u>Preface</u></b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b><u>1. Introduction</u></b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b><u>2 The Political and Regulatory Context for Organic Labelling in Sweden and the U.S.</u></b>	<b>9</b>
<b><u>3 Frame Conflicts in Different Debate Climates</u></b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b><u>4 Organic Labelling in Sweden and the U.S.</u></b> .....	<b>13</b>
<i><u>4.1 Sweden: Standardisation through a Private Organisation</u></i> .....	<b>13</b>
<i><u>4.2 Sweden: Integration and Normalisation of Organic Production</u></i> .....	<b>15</b>
<i><u>4.3 U.S.: Standardisation toward Federal Control</u></i> .....	<b>19</b>
<i><u>4.4 U.S.: Polarised Regulatory Apparatus</u></i> .....	<b>20</b>
<i><u>4.5 U.S.: Polarised Market Sectors</u></i> .....	<b>23</b>
<b><u>5. Sweden and the U.S.: Framing Platforms for Consensus or Other Resolutions</u></b> .....	<b>24</b>
<i><u>5.1 Sweden: Compromises between Orthodoxy and Pragmatism</u></i> .....	<b>24</b>
<i><u>5.2 U.S.: Public Debates about the Fundamentals of Organic</u></i> .....	<b>27</b>
<i><u>5.3 Framings of Health</u></i> .....	<b>29</b>
<i><u>5.3.1 U.S.</u></i> .....	<b>30</b>
<i><u>5.3.2 Sweden</u></i> .....	<b>32</b>
<i><u>5.4 Debates about Methodology and Science: What can we know?</u></i> .....	<b>33</b>
<i><u>5.4.1 U.S.: Debates about the Methodological Fundamentals of Labelling</u></i> .....	<b>33</b>
<i><u>5.4.2 Sweden</u></i> .....	<b>36</b>
<b><u>6. Conclusions and Discussion</u></b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b><u>References</u></b> .....	<b>41</b>

## **Abbreviations**

AMS, Agriculture Marketing Service

EPA, Environmental Protection Agency

FDA, Food and Drug Administration

IFOAM, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements

KF, Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society

KRAV, Association for Control of Organic Production

LRF, Federation of Swedish Farmers

NOP, National Organic Program

NOSB, National Organic Standards Board

OFPA, Organic Food Protection Act

SLU, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

USDA, United States Department of Agriculture

## 1. Introduction

Parts of the public in all corners of the world worry about the connection between food production and environmental problems as well as health risks. Governments and other actors need to tackle this deep, globalised anxiety. Many governmental as well as nongovernmental organisations (NGO:s) have interpreted food labelling as a fruitful strategy that may complement state regulation. Food labelling fits well within the image of an individualised, reflexive, and market-driven society in which people take on active responsibility, both for their own health and for a wider community. However, initiatives and responses related to food labelling differ between countries such as the U.S. and Sweden. One might expect that food labelling would be more straightforward in the U.S. where there is, at least in policy debates, an even broader and more explicit commitment to market-liberal ideologies. By contrast, the political culture in Sweden has traditionally given more credence to state intervention. Intriguingly, however, practical reality does not always follow these clear-cut ideological distinctions. Standardisation processes for organic agriculture occur in both countries. But in Sweden a private organisation (KRAV) has been rather successful in promoting organic food labelling as an eco-label. In the U.S., however, standardisation is more dependent on state involvement. Another difference is that the federal Government in the U.S. does not frame organic food labelling as an eco-label in the sense that organic production would be better for the environment.

Using theories of policy processes and framing theory we compare policy debates and initiatives concerning food labelling in these two countries, in light of their different policy cultures. One aim is to identify factors that facilitate or complicate food labelling. At another level we analyse the organic labelling debates in order to assess the preconditions of these processes as parts of the increased public empowerment through green consumer democracy that many actors hope for. We examine

- the strategies and framings of different organisations, coalitions and policy networks in food matters,
- the political cultures and the regulatory contexts,
- debates about organic food labelling as based on science or ideology.

We focus on interviews and debates about what should be the principles and criteria for using the main organic food label in the respective countries.<sup>1</sup> How

---

<sup>1</sup> We have done interviews with key-persons in the field and we have read documents, web pages, and secondary material. In the Swedish case 9 key persons have been interviewed from the Swedish Board of Agriculture, the processing industry, KRAV, LRF (Federation of Swedish Farmers), Coop Sweden, and the Swedish Ecological Farmers. In the American case 6 key persons have been interviewed from the USDA, the NOP, and from representatives of organic farmers.

do different interest groups frame “natural food” in the debates, and what consequences may these framings have for labelling policies? To the extent that partly different topics have been debated in Sweden and the U.S., we have chosen to look at these differences in our analyses instead of being rigorous in only looking at identical issues.

We believe it is fruitful and illustrative to compare the case in Sweden and the U.S. The countries have followed certain similar historical patterns in that organic production, and later standardisation, has been carried out in both countries for a time. Both countries have a comparatively long tradition of dealing with environmental regulation. Also, both countries are western liberal democracies with a deep cultural commitment to consumer empowerment. At the same time it is interesting to examine how labelling may be influenced by factors such as unique political and regulatory cultures. For this purpose the U.S. and Sweden present quite contrasting settings (see section two).

To get the broader picture we begin by looking at the political and regulatory contexts in each country, before we introduce framing theory. In part 4 we describe how standardisation takes place in the two countries with focus on political, organisational, and regulatory matters. In part 5 we focus on certain debates with the help of framing theory. In the concluding section we discuss some factors that help explain why standardisation issues have been less controversial in Sweden and we also discuss some consequences of different kinds of debates.

## **2 The Political and Regulatory Context for Organic Labelling in Sweden and the U.S.**

Product labelling can be understood as a result of standardisation. Here we conceive standardisation not only as concerning technical matters, but also more generally as a social form of regulation or rule making. Standardisation is, ideally, the issuing of rules, i.e. standards, that are voluntary (at least for some of the actors, compared to directives), and that are written and explicit (compared to norms). Researchers argue that the issuing and following of standards increase in modern globalised societies, as well as the impact of standards (Boli & Thomas 1999; Brunsson & Jacobsson 2000). Though standardisation results in voluntary (yet often powerful) rules, anything seems to be potential objects for standardisation (food habits, organisational routines, quality management, etc.) and this mode of regulation also increasingly penetrates the environmental field (Boström 2003a).

Since standards are often voluntary, they are issued without reference to the formal authority of an organisation. Standards can be developed by state agencies, which by using this strategy are not using their full formal authority to enforce certain behaviour. However, they often combine the use of mandatory

and voluntary instruments. In both the American and the European (Swedish) case, authorities have introduced standards for how to define and use notions and labels of organic production and organic food. Producers are free to choose if they want to use the term “certified organic” for their products, but if they do so they must follow the definitions and criteria provided by these standards. One major aim with the standards is to avoid false use of the word organic.

Standardisation processes do often exceed the nation state level. As regards organic labelling, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, which was founded in 1972, has been very influential. IFOAM defines a set of basic standards for organic agriculture, and is often seen as the main ideological actor within the organic movement. Its standards have, for example, influenced the rules and criteria of the EU-regulation.<sup>2</sup>

Although standardisation often has global connections, such a process is shaped by specific national political cultures and configurations (cf. Mol et al. 2000; van Tatenhove et al. 2000). Liefferink et al. (2000:16) have found that ‘Joint Environmental Policy-Making’<sup>3</sup> is most developed in countries with a policy culture oriented toward cooperation and consensus-building in the relation between private and state actors. These findings suggest that the Swedish political and administrative culture – often described as pragmatic, consensus-oriented, and open towards large interest organisations – may in turn influence policy processes that do not necessarily occur within state arenas (e.g. Richardson et al. 1982; Kitschelt 1986; Micheletti 1991, 1995; Lundqvist 1996). An example of this is labelling processes.

By comparing the situation in northern Europe and the U.S. (e.g. Majone 1996:10ff; Egan 2001:18ff.), one notices that European regulatory style has traditionally relied on bureaucratic centralisation, state intervention, public ownership, Keynesian fine-tuning of macro-economic variables, the providing of public goods, and universal welfare schemes. In contrast, as Majone (1996:10) describes it: “American-style regulation /.../ expresses a widely held belief that the market works well under normal circumstances and should be interfered with only in specific cases of market failure”. On the other hand, when it happens that such issues are on the political agenda in the U.S., there is a rather firm regulatory culture. For example, as David Vogel (2001) maintains, before mid 1980s the U.S. took the lead in developing consumer and environmental regulation, often by reference to a precautionary and risk-averse approach (although the U.S. has subsequently been bypassed by the EU and European countries in certain issues of this kind).<sup>4</sup> Further, it is well known that

---

<sup>2</sup> see <http://www.ifoam.org>

<sup>3</sup> Joint Environmental Policy Making refers to “The type of policy arrangement /.../ both jointly formulated and/or implemented by the state and private actors and by having a *voluntary* element.” (Mol et al. 2000:2)

<sup>4</sup> See also Weiner & Rogers 2002.

'free' trade and commerce require a lot of 'rules of the game', so a political culture praising market liberalism and individualism does not automatically stand in opposition to regulation or legalism (Christensen & Peters 1999, Egan 2001). Indeed, the U.S. is often viewed as the prototype of the regulatory state (Majone 1996, Egan 2001:33-38). Independent regulatory agencies have since long played significant roles in the US-context, but regulatory activities tend to be more fragmented compared to the case in the EU (Egan 2001) and particularly in comparison with the situation in Scandinavian countries (e.g. Christensen & Peters 1999). In the U.S., there is a long tradition of private bodies such as business organisations, standardisation organisations, and professional associations, being engaged in rule making (Egan 2001).

So the political and regulatory background in the U.S. is rather complex. This makes it a bit difficult to foresee how standardisation in the specific case of food labelling would be developed. A reserved attitude towards regulation is mixed with a certain readiness to regulate; and regulatory agencies compete with private actors about who should set the rules. Moreover, although this political culture of market liberalism and individualism may "tell" society and its members that one should not interfere with "the market mechanisms" through the use of, for instance, organic or fair-trade labels, the same political culture may contribute to the opposite idea that individuals should be able to express specific *political* concerns through the channel of consumption (cf. Micheletti 2003). It is thus an open question whether or not product labelling might be considered as a fruitful strategy in order to deal with environment and health matters in such a context. Another circumstance is that the political and regulatory culture in general is said to be more polarized than the situation in Scandinavian countries (e.g. Christensen & Peters 1999; Vogel 2001). How might this be manifested in the case of product labelling?

We will examine how these general political and regulatory factors shape standardisation and debates in these two countries. The focus on the general political and regulatory context is not sufficient, however, for explaining characteristics and outcomes of concrete policy issues and debates. But it does serve as a background by illustrating political opportunity structure (Kitschelt 1986; McAdam 1996), which facilitates or impedes policy implementation. In order to study specific policy arrangements one also has to take into account what actual issue is at stake, how actors frame the issue, and how the specific policy networks (or coalitions) are characterized including actors' formal positions and power resources (cf. Mol et al. 2000; van Tatenhove et al. 2000:200). For example, Karin Hofer (2000), who has studied organic labelling of food products in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Austria finds that new policy networks – including organic producers, environmental organisations, political parties, retailers, and proactive state actors – are instrumental for breaking

through traditional structures of agriculture politics and for identifying opportunities for alternative policies.

We discuss such factors in our examination of (a) the context for organic labelling in Sweden and the U.S., and of (b) the debates about organic labelling.

### **3 Frame Conflicts in Different Debate Climates**

We have chosen to analyse debates about organic labelling as conflicts within, or between, *frames*. We use the terms *frames* and *framing* as simplifications of the complex and uncertain reality in order to make parts of reality more understandable and/or to push an agenda. Martin Rein and Donald Schön (1993) similarly define frame constructions as

(...) a way of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analyzing, persuading, and acting. A frame is a perspective from which an amorphous, ill-defined, problematic situation can be made sense of and acted on (Rein & Schön 1993:146).

However, Rein and Schön tone down the strategic dimensions of framing. According to them, it is more fruitful not to perceive framing primarily as a strategic contest for resources (see also Laws & Rein 2003). Instead, one of these authors focuses on the preconditions of a reciprocal, frame-reflective discourse, in which antagonists may “reason [well beyond instrumental rationality] their way to conflict resolution” (Laws & Rein 2003). We want to argue, however, that the focus on preconditions of a frame-reflective discourse and constructive reframing can in a fruitful way be combined with a study of strategies, resources and contest. But this requires that the analyst not get caught in a narrow perspective of instrumental rationality and constancy of preferences among the groups studied. Polarised coalitions may, for instance, assume that they use the most “rational“ strategies, although the coalition are not aware that a reciprocal frame reflection across the coalitions could make both parties redefine their own preferences and the best way to get there. Such reframing may help previously polarised coalitions resolve their controversies.

In our organic labelling cases we examine how coalitions “bridge” their frame constructs in order to acquire “frame resonance” among other policy actors and the broader public (cf., Snow et al. 1986; Snow & Benford 1988; Boström 2003b; Klintman 2002a). How do they frame “naturalness” in their struggles over definitions and criteria surrounding organic food labelling? What roles do consensus building, pragmatism and polarisation play in the struggles toward defining “naturalness” in organic labelling? Are there arguments in favour of a redefinition of “naturalness” aimed at expanding organic labelling so that it may include new technology that does not use synthetic substances? Here it is useful to distinguish three types of framing: (a) diagnostic framing, that is, claims about responsibility and blame related to the “problematic” situation; (b)

prognostic framing, within which strategies and solutions are defined; (c) motivational framing, which concerns the rationales for the activity of a coalition, framing aimed at motivating and mobilizing the alliance and its proponents to work towards the goal (see Snow & Benford 1988; Benford & Snow 2000).

In framing theory it is useful to separate disputes that take place *within* a common and reciprocally accepted frame (i.e., *disagreements*) from disputes *between* different frames (i.e., *controversies*). Whereas the former type of disputes is often possible to solve by referrals to facts, the latter type tends to involve an intricate mixture of values and facts, making it almost immune to resolutions by the use of facts alone (see Schön & Rein 1994). Applied to our object of study, we ask the following question: Do the disputes over the framings of organic food labelling (sometimes shaped as discourses where the framings themselves may be critically debated) move toward a questioning of the superiority of “naturalness” per se? Or are the debaters aimed at fitting their criticism *within* the dominant frame of “organic, natural food”?

In sum, we use framing theory in two complementary ways. Firstly, in order to theoretically understand how standardisation, in the first place, becomes practicable. In this perspective, framing is seen as a necessary activity in standardisation processes. Through framing, actors develop ideas about what they are doing, they learn to communicate and are forming coalitions. There need to be an idea about standardisation before standardisation actually can be carried out, but this idea(s) can be more or less debated and more or less taken for granted. Secondly, and connected to this first point, we use framing theory for discussing the character and degree of self-reflexivity of the debates. Although framing is an integral part of standardisation, we cannot predict beforehand how actors actually frame different matters. Thus, framing theory can be a useful analytical tool for assessing how topics are included or excluded in debates and projects.

## **4 Organic Labelling in Sweden and the U.S.**

### ***4.1 Sweden: Standardisation through a Private Organisation***

In Sweden, organic food labelling was first initiated ‘from below’ by voluntary organisations within the organic movement. It was, moreover, introduced independently of the state. However, while still being a relatively autonomous project, it is now part of the EU-regulation as well as of the Swedish programme for sustainable agriculture (which, for example, has a goal that 20 % of the

agriculture should be organic by 2005).<sup>5</sup> Today, the Swedish organic labelling schemes must be at least as “strict” as the EU-standards.

The first initiatives of eco-labelling in Sweden were taken in the mid 1980s. This was a period when the public awareness in Sweden of environmental issues grew quite rapidly.<sup>6</sup> However, environmental conscious individuals were introduced to large number of trademarks with various self-made promises about the qualities of the products. Products were called “organic”, “natural”, “ecological” and so forth, and were decorated with labels with nature symbols such as trees, pandas, flowers, and meadows. There were no systems of auditing or certification. The diversity of green symbols threatened to cause confusion and arbitrariness; there was no way for consumers to see, sense or taste if a product was produced with or without synthetic chemicals.

Because of the lack of transparency and accountability, powerful retailers such as actors within the business of everyday commodities realized the importance of independent and credible third parties that could scrutinize the environmental claims on products and labels. This was also a major motive for the EU-regulation of organic farming, which was introduced in the early 1990s (Le Guillou & Scharpé 2000:5-6).

Standardisation practices were introduced, and environmental organisations began to cooperate with important retailers and resourceful purchasing organisations (Tjörnemo 2001, Boström 2003a). Swedish retailers are, by international comparison, particularly responsive to ecological issues, and they were a driving force for the introduction of environmentally friendly products: “the major retailer groups/chains in Sweden have adopted ecological strategies and made them an important and integrated part of their retailers’ image” (Tjörnemo 2001:66, our trans.). This is important since they have a powerful position to force producers in the supply chain to follow voluntary standards (cf., Marsden et al. 2000). There is now wide support for both mandatory and voluntary regulations governing the provision of information in food areas in Sweden (Nordic Council of Ministers 2001).<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Sweden became a member of the EU in the mid 1990s and by that part of EU’s Common Agriculture Programme (CAP). The EU-regulation in the agricultural and food sector is rather detailed (in spite of some deregulation measures at the EU-level), which is motivated by the ambition to stimulate productivity, guarantee farmers good living conditions, stabilise and homogenise markets, and to guarantee a supply of safe provisions to reasonable prices. In the 1990s, rules about organic farming were introduced. A rather detailed regulation (2092/91) defines what organic farming is, and this framework was complemented by rules for breeding of animals (1804/99).

<sup>6</sup> In Sweden, different eco-labelling systems, such as “Good environmental choice” (issued by Swedish Society for Nature Conservation [SSNC]), KRAV (see below), and the Nordic half-official eco-label “the Swan” were introduced by the end of the 1980s or in the beginning of the 1990s (Boström 2003a).

<sup>7</sup> Surveys indicate that there are widespread positive attitudes towards eco-labelled goods in Sweden even though aspects such as price, quality, and health are usually ranked higher (Swedish Board of Agriculture 2001:54ff; Jörgensen 2001:49ff, 65 ff.; Magnusson et al. 2001; Ekelund 2003). Still, it is a minority who actually purchases eco-labelled products frequently as an active environmental choice,

KRAV (Association for Control of Organic Production) was started in 1985 by four NGOs within the Swedish organic agriculture movement (KRAV 2000). KRAV defines organic agriculture as a system of agriculture in which, for example, pesticides and artificial manure are excluded (KRAV 2000:8). KRAV aims at creating a credible labelling scheme for organic food, and to stipulate rules for organic production. The aim is also to monitor production, processing, and distribution, as well as to disseminate information about organic agriculture.

During its early period, it was mainly the Swedish Ecological Farmers that controlled the KRAV-association. In 1990 KRAV was transformed to an economic association in juridical terms, for the purpose of receiving broader acceptance in society. This meant that several other interest groups became members in KRAV (see below). In the mid-1990s KRAV expanded quite dramatically. In the beginning, activities were carried out completely by voluntary labour, but now KRAV is more professionalised. It has over 100 persons employed and is controlling for about 6 % of the Swedish arable land. KRAV's criteria have been developed and expanded continuously as well. KRAV is also (as the first controlling body worldwide) an accredited control organisation according to the criteria of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). KRAV is positively assessed and generally known among the Swedish public (Ekelund 2003), and therefore KRAV's name is an important symbolic resource. The KRAV-label is often seen as the 'driving-license' for anyone who wants to enter the market for organic food in Sweden.

#### ***4.2 Sweden: Integration and Normalisation of Organic Production***

Although the initiatives of establishing KRAV were taken by organic farmers, a much broader commitment was soon established and institutionalised in 1990 when KRAV became an economic association. KRAV has now 28 member organisations including organisations representing industry (e.g., Swedish Meats, Arla Foods AB), environmental protection (e.g., Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Animal Rights Sweden), mainstream retailers (the Cooperative Union and Wholesale society [KF], ICA, Hemköp [Axfood]), and unions and farmers (both the leading Federation of Swedish Farmers [LRF] and associations representing organic farmers [Swedish Ecological Farmers]). The consumer interest is largely represented by KF although some other small organisations participate as well (and KRAV is often regarded as representing the general consumer interest).

KRAV and Demeter Sweden (the latter being an association for controlling biodynamical farming, which is member of Demeter International) initially had activities and rules that were independent of the Government. But since 1993 the

---

but around 70 % of the consumers feel that they should be able to express their attitudes in their consumption – for example by boycotting certain food products (Nordic Council of Ministers 2001:9).

Swedish Board of Agriculture and The National Food Administration authorize them as the only Swedish organisations controlling that organic agriculture and production are in accordance with the EU-legislation. Accordingly, KRAV is authorized to define farming as organic in coherence with the EU-regulation 2092/91 and 1804/99 (see Le Guillou & Scharpé 2000). At the same time, KRAV has its own stricter rules that also cover a broader spectrum of issues. A producer who wants to use the KRAV-logo must comply with KRAV's own rules. Thus, compliance to the EU's rules does not automatically give a producer the right to use the KRAV- logo.<sup>8</sup>

An interesting aspect of this relationship between the authorities and KRAV is that the authorities legitimise the organic movement and indicate that organic agriculture has certain benefits compared to conventional agriculture in terms of sustainability or ecological balance. In Sweden, eco-labelling is part of the general political goal that 20 % of the Swedish arable land should be organically produced by 2005. This definition of organic production follows the EU-regulatory framework, which is less strict than the common definitions of the organic movement. Nevertheless, the government clearly signals that organic production and food labelling is part of a strategic political effort to make the whole agriculture more sustainable (e.g. prop 1997/98:2; Swedish Board of Agriculture 2001). While the Swedish Board of Agriculture, in a current action-plan document, notices a lot of knowledge gaps when comparing the environmental impact of organic and conventional farming methods, the following quote captures the general view on organic production:

**With the target of 2005, the ecological [cf., organic] production moves from being a niche production mode to becoming a significant sector within Swedish agriculture. The efforts within organic agriculture is a means toward developing Swedish agriculture in a more environmentally friendly, production ethical, and sustainable direction. This change is taking place as [ecological/organic] knowledge and experiences are used within the whole agricultural sector.(our trans) (Swedish Board of Agriculture 2001:81, our trans.).**

This positive attitude from state actors toward an independent organic movement lies in strong contrast to what is the case in the US-case (see below).

However, the relationship between the regulatory framework of the EU and Krav is also somewhat complicated. KRAV-adherents have the opinion that the rules within the EU-regulation are too detailed so that the rules even make certain kinds of organic practices impossible (as in for example organic mushrooms). There is a fear in the KRAV-network that the EU is gradually removing the power to define what is organic from the organic movement. Also the National Board of Agriculture expresses this fear and opinion. The KRAV

---

<sup>8</sup> The eco-labelled part of organic agriculture (which KRAV dominates) is about half of all organic agriculture. Taken together, the organic agriculture's share of all arable land was 12 % by 2000 (Swedish Board of Agriculture 2001:5, 43).

members and state agencies are actually forming a “Swedish position” in order to defend the legitimacy for the national organic movement to autonomously define what is ecological (Swedish Board of Agriculture 2001:82).<sup>9</sup> Our informant from the National Board of Agriculture claims that this agency largely shares the view on organic agriculture with the KRAV-network. She acknowledges KRAV’s autonomous role as an ideological source of inspiration and perceives Krav as a pioneer in promoting alternative methods. This is an interesting contrast to the case in the U.S. where standardisation through the federal state seems to be more accepted.

Within KRAV the political culture of attributing importance to large interest organisations continues, as well as its emphasis on dialogue, preparedness for compromises and consensus building. Yet it takes place outside of state-based organisational structures. The cooperation between LRF and organic producers, as well as the membership of LRF in KRAV and IFAOM, has received great attention internationally. This cooperation ”becomes a symbol of the Swedish notion of ecological production as a normal part of agriculture, rather than merely a marginal niche production” (National Board of Agriculture 2001:29, our trans.).

However, the main part of LRF’s members practice conventional farming, and several members are not very delighted with LRF’s engagement in KRAV, according to our informant from LRF. Therefore, LRF affirms organic agriculture but also brings out its own systems of control of the environment within the framework of conventional agriculture. For example, LRF has constructed an own system called Swedish Farmers Environmental Check-up, which is a voluntary tool for monitoring how a farm complies with the law. Since several enterprises in the processing industry require that farmers really use this system, the degree of adherence is as high as 90 % (Sundberg 2002). But there is no label associated with this system. The opposite is true for the Swedish Seal (Svenskt Sigill), which is issued by a large Swedish co-operative with farmers (Lantmännen; a subsidiary to LRF) and which is marketed as an environmentally friendly alternative *within* the framework of conventional agriculture.

Initially, organic products were provided by a specific category of farmers and producers outside the traditional market (Jørgensen 2001:17). But resourceful retailers early included organic products in their own chains of distribution, which has not been very common outside of Sweden, particularly not in the U.S.<sup>10</sup> In Sweden, large retailers have supported KRAV, and they have

---

<sup>9</sup> While this is a problem in Sweden, the EU-regulation, according to one of our informants, does more good in other EU-countries in which autonomous standardisation processes has been more problematic.

<sup>10</sup> In countries such as Great Britain, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden retailers are central for the supply of eco-labelled food, while separate health shops are more commonly used in other countries such as

had a role of continuously identifying and paying attention to the demand for labelled goods. Currently, it is often the retailers who take initiatives for developing labelling-criteria for particular products.<sup>11</sup>

What complicates the matter is that these retailers also have their own trademarks that they market as ecological: for example KF's Änglamark ("Angel land" in English). The retailers both want KRAV and their own trademarks, which help them shape individual profiles. Products with the label Änglamark are normally also KRAV-labelled, but there are exceptions such as meat. These exceptions reflect unresolved disputes in KRAV. KF includes the additive nitrite in meat products, which has the double function of giving a nice rose-coloured shade and eliminating some microbes that may cause diseases. KRAV is normally hesitant to additives (see below) and there are different expert opinions as to whether nitrite really is unsafe. KF and other proponents of nitrite did not succeed in working toward a KRAV-label for meat products which would include nitrite. KF did not want to take the risk to dispense with nitrite, but there was one other possibility. KF could use Änglamark without using KRAV. One informant from KRAV says that they have discussed the risk that retailers replace KRAV with their own trademarks, but representatives from the retailers have confirmed that they are interested in keeping KRAV, which indicates KRAV's great credibility and status position in Sweden.

The big players in the food industry and food policy all have some kind of relation to KRAV, either as members, associative members (e.g., the association for biodynamic farming), or as partners in a dialogue. Producers and companies can participate in a dialogue when products are to be developed, and provide necessary information. In Sweden there is generally a comprehensive cooperation between the actors in the field. Within the Swedish Ecological Farmers one perceives the Swedish dialogue as unique (Sundberg 2002), as is the case within other fields such as forestry (Boström 2002). The Swedish political culture with consensus, pragmatism, and openness toward large organisations continues outside the state in new organisational forms. However, KRAV is not only an expression of consensus but also an arena for continued power struggles between parties. Within such an arena all players are given some room for influence and negotiation. Later in the report we investigate how this structure influences framing activities. But first, we look at the political, regulatory, and organisational structure in the US-case.

---

the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany (National Board of Agriculture 2001:53; Jörgensen 2001:25-26).

<sup>11</sup> There may of course also be obstacles to the expansion of labelled goods because of the powerful position of these retailers. It may for example be difficult for small producers to entry the market since the retailers demand large-scale deliveries.

### ***4.3 U.S.: Standardisation toward Federal Control***

The history of widely accessible organic food in the US is not very long. Similar to the Swedish development, US organic agriculture alongside modern conventional agriculture began on a very small scale. The 1940s and 1950s saw a very marginal use of organic principles in agriculture, while the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a dramatically growing interest in alternative agriculture. A broad range of reasons for preferring “chemical-free products” could be found among organic consumers: they commonly assumed that organic food choices would be beneficial to health, the environment, and small-scale farming (Hartman & New Hope 1997). This was also the time when laws and regulations started to mention organic food, although the organic farmers still constituted a small and dedicated group of semi-idealists (Lathrop 1991).

In 1973, Oregon was the first state to pass a state law regulating organic food. The law was passed as a response to reports on fraud and inconsistencies in terms of organic claims. Soon after came several other states.<sup>12</sup> The 1980s was a decade of debates within organic agriculture about definitions, production processes and labelling procedures in the organic food sector (Bones 1992). These debates bore little fruit, at least if one makes a judgment based on the substantial differences in state organic farming regulation that arose across the U.S. By 1990, 22 states in the U.S. had passed laws on organic food, with considerable variation between them. Compared to the labelling history of Sweden – at least if one ignores its dependency on the development of EC regulation - the American system(s) used to be even more intricate, largely due to the differences between the 22 states (Amaditz 1997). Certain states did not require third-party certification. Instead it was up to each company to label their own products as “organic.” Other states, which had an organic labelling legislation, nevertheless permitted voluntary “self monitoring”; still other states required a certification of all products that were labelled “organic” (Golan 2000; Lathrop 1991). Certification standards used to vary across States and certifying organisations. And, according to Amaditz (1997), the most serious problem during that time was that producers and marketers in 28 unregulated states could continue to make claims that, based on the other states’ definitions, could be said to be capricious. Based on his slightly naïve realism, Amaditz concludes that consumers during that time was “left to wonder [...] what foods are truly organic” (1997:538), as if organic foods were something absolute, which policy makers could discover. Nevertheless, the pluralities and inconsistencies of organic claims and trademarks had long disturbed fractions of organic consumers, retailers and producers in the U.S. (perhaps to an even larger extent than in Sweden). Moreover, outside of the U.S., some potential importers in foreign countries found it far too complicated to deal with 44 state and private organic certifying agencies in the US, although the market increased steadily for

---

<sup>12</sup> (OR. Rev. Stat. § 616.406 (1996) (Organic Food Regulation)).

exports of organic grains, nuts and dried fruits (Burros 2000). The broad picture of American organic food labelling in the 1990s and 2000s is that of a federal ambition to move from a more complex and diverse system to a nationally standardised one. This ambition was manifested by the incorporation of the Organic Food Protection Act (OFPA) into the 1990 Farm bill. The explicit goals by Congress were

- (1) to establish national standards governing the marketing of certain agricultural products as organically produced products;
- (2) to assure consumers that organically produced products meet a consistent standard; and
- (3) to facilitate interstate commerce in fresh and processed food that is organically produced.<sup>13</sup>

The OFPA in turn led to a National Organic Program (NOP), which has been working on national organic standards. The program includes a “National List” of Allowed Synthetic and Prohibited Non-Synthetic Substances for organic production, labelling requirements, as well as an accreditation program, and guidelines for imports and exports (Alternative Farming Systems Information Center 2001; Frankel & Borque 1998:1).

Aside from the often-mentioned confusion prior to the national standards, the standards have been said to reduce certain transaction costs before the products reach the stores (although the final price premiums have instead been raised). The increasing interest among American agricultural actors to move closer to EU organic standards for economic and trade reasons has also been a strong motive for the standardisation (Golan 2000).

#### ***4.4 U.S.: Polarised Regulatory Apparatus***

Important for the understanding of the more conflict-oriented debate climate in the U.S. than in Sweden is that a board called the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) has the task of developing standards and to give recommendations to the USDA. On the face of it, this structure is one of open and pluralist deliberation. The NOSB has thirteen individual members from different,

---

<sup>13</sup> <http://envirotext.eh.doe.gov/data/uscode/7/6501.shtml> [Accessed 2003-01-07]. See 7 U.S.C. § 6501. Despite the marginal proportion of organic food (2% of the U.S. food market) its exponential growth was reason enough to clarify organic labelling. It has commonly been argued that food retailers and distributors hesitated to choose organic foods due to the varied state laws. Also it was claimed that it was virtually impossible for “even the most sophisticated consumer to understand the term “organic”(S. Rep. No. 357, reprinted in 1990 U.S.C.C.A.N. at 4944). Consequently, there were consumers and other agents in the food chain that did not even trust “legitimate organic producers” (Clark, supra note 8, at 325). According to Amaditz (1997) there was a consensus across a broad range of actors that the U.S. needed a national standard for organic food. Actors could be found among “state agriculture departments, national farmers’ organisations, organic industry trade associations and consumer interests” (Amaditz 1997:540).

organic food-related backgrounds: four growers, two handlers, three public interest advocates, three environmentalists, and a scientist.<sup>14</sup> They should all be organic experts and environmental and consumer advocates. In addition to this breadth of organic interest, the board has the deliberative principle of treating specific interests within a certain organisation as irrelevant. This principle is the same within KRAV in Sweden. Yet, there are a few important differences between the two countries here.

Firstly, whereas KRAV have members from an unrestricted number of organisations, the membership in NOSB is much more limited (i.e., 13 individuals maximum). Secondly, whereas the KRAV members include those who are only partially involved in organic practices (and partly in “conventional food practices”), the NOSB is comprised by fully devoted organic actors.

Thirdly, a fundamental difference is that KRAV (although being an NGO) has the authority to set their own labelling standards as long as they do not set lower standards than those regulated by the EU. In the U.S., the USDA may accept or reject the NOSB’s recommendations in their implementation of the Organic Food Protection Act.<sup>15</sup> Critics have argued that NOSB is mainly created to give the organic regulatory process an image of a thorough stakeholder dialogue, whereas the USDA can easily reject the recommendations made by the NOSB.

This is connected to a fourth important difference between the countries. A common view within the organic industry and the organic movement in the U.S. is that the Government (represented by the USDA) is allied with the conventional and biotech-intensive food industry. Some organic players argue that the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (Section 2119) is a reflection of an unsupportive position within the federal government. To be sure, the Act states a criterion of compatibility with a system of sustainable agriculture in order for substances to be approved in organic production and handling. But the Act does not address organic agriculture as an improvement for the environment or for health – neither as necessary nor sufficient for a system of sustainable agriculture. Instead of being qualified as an “ecolabel,” the US Government frames organic labelling in the U.S. as simply “a label based on consumer preferences.”<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> S. REP. 1990, 101-357, *supra* note 11. In addition, OFPA suggested that other expert panels would scientifically evaluate the materials within the National list.

<sup>15</sup> The USDA is not the actual certifier. Instead, the USDA accredits certifiers, which may be state or private agencies. As opposed to KRAV, these agencies do not have the authority to establish organic principles, only to make certain that the established principles are followed (65 Fed. Reg. At 80597-80651-56).

<sup>16</sup> In an interview, the program manager Keith Jones at National Organic Program accordingly stresses the ideological impact of the organic alliance rather than organic agriculture being an entirely science-based optimal agricultural system. Proponents of conventional agriculture or GM draw upon this when they claim that organic labelling or – even more – labels such as “GM-free” falsely imply that conventional agriculture or GM technology would somehow be inferior to organic food. This controversy can hardly be separated from the intractable dispute between conflicting ideological frames.

The aims and framings of the USDA have long been assumed to be in opposition to the framings of the organic players, as the latter alliance struggles toward “letting organic stay organic” or toward “maintaining high organic standards.” Such perceived threat from outside” has contributed to the struggle among various organic actors to unite in a common alliance. There are concrete issues in which parts of the organic alliance sense that they are in opposition to the USDA. For instance, in the name of national uniformity, a state cannot use its own alternative seal to reflect higher standards than is indicated with the Federal USDA seal. A state is not allowed to require higher organic standards than the USDA does federally, unless there are specific environmental conditions, which necessitates stricter state standards. Such exception could be if unique state restrictions are needed to protect a certain watershed. These federal restrictions on organic improvements at the state level have led to strong reactions from the organic alliance, such as organic producers and the Organic Consumers Association. There are for instance organic players who have referred to the right of free speech in their claimed right to communicate with consumers about their products, and their claimed right to display their competitive advantages compared to those who barely meet the Federal organic criteria (Frommer 2001, at 3C).

This criticism is part of the more general suspicion within the organic alliance against the Federal Government. The suspicion is reflected in, for instance, most websites that belong to the organic actors and in the controversies.<sup>17</sup> Many people regard the organic industry, devoted consumers, and the NOSB, as counterparts to the USDA, (although – as we shall see – the USDA has recently, at least temporarily, subscribed to the recommendations brought forth by the NOSB). By saying “according to the EU regulation or stricter,” the Swedish Government in contrast presents itself as resonating the framed ideals of the organic movement in Sweden. Thus the Swedish debates rarely reach beyond disagreements within the dominant organic frame. The counterpart of KRAV is rather the EU than the Swedish government. In framing terms these organisational differences may co-vary with debates within a main, common frame in the Swedish organic context, while the relationship between the U.S. Federal Government and organic NGO:s (although NOSB is part of both) is characterised by controversies that take place between separate main frames. In section five we look more concretely on how framing, debating, and standardisation take place in various contexts.

---

<sup>17</sup> See e.g., <http://www.purefood.org/Organic/denouncenop.cfm> about Demeter Association (Accessed 15 January 2003).

#### ***4.5 U.S.: Polarised Market Sectors***

The organic food market is an increasingly lucrative one. USDA acknowledged by the end of the 1980s that organic produce had become established as a distinct market with high premiums (Golan 2000:26; USDA 1989). Organic cropland doubled between 1992 and 1997 in the U.S. Each year the number of organic farmers increases by 12 %, although it still has not reached more than a few percent of the consumer expenditures for food at home.<sup>18</sup>

When comparing organic production and retailing in the US and Sweden one can find certain structural differences. While it in Sweden is common that the same company produces both organic and non-organic foods, the two sectors appear to be more differentiated in the U.S. Certain American food companies put a lot of efforts into creating an image of being “completely organic” in their production. Moreover, retail sales of organic food take place in stores which are promoted as “natural products stores” or “organic supermarkets” (Vaupel 1997: supra note 3, at 139). In the 1980s and onwards, upscale supermarkets have been developed which specialize in organic food, such as Whole Foods Market, Bread and Circus, and Wild Oats. They all have stores in many states of the country. In addition to such food chains, certain distributors buy organic foods directly from farmers and sell the products on domestic outlets. On these markets it is also still possible to find products with competing labelling claims, such as “sustainable” or “natural.” Instead of regulating such claims, Congress has encouraged various organic actors to educate consumers about alternative ecological claims.<sup>19</sup>

It should be mentioned, however, that certain signs of overlaps are found between conventional and organic companies. For instance, Heinz owns the organic Earth’s Best Baby Food. Also, in 2001 Dole Food company, the largest producer of vegetables and fruit, entered the organic sector by marketing organic bananas (Longtin & Lineback 2001:11A). Nevertheless, it is still fairly easy to distinguish producers, marketers and sellers who are largely dependent on the organic sector from those who, while having entered the organic sector, have an interest in their conventional products not being misleadingly regarded as inferior to organic food.

The so far fairly clear distinction between organic and non-organic interests in the whole chain of provision contributes to the more polarized and heated debate climate in the U.S. compared to, for example, Sweden. Debates take place between separate frames instead of within a common one. The diagnostic and prognostics framings are distinct, particularly from the organic alliance; the other alliance is said to cause enormous threats to the environment. Health and

---

<sup>18</sup> In 2000 the organic food market was \$ 7.8 billion. The whole domestic food market was \$ 350 billion (Green 2001).

<sup>19</sup> S. REP. NO. 357, *reprinted in* 1990 U.S.C.C.A.N. at 4954.

small-scale farming, and organic production are the only solution.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, certain actors in conventional or GM farming claim that the organic alliance misleads the consumers to pay huge price premiums for “organic” products that, due to narrow definitions of organic, may be less sound to the environment or health than so-called “conventional” products.<sup>21</sup> Whether valid or not, it would be difficult with such separation of frames in the Swedish case where organic farming and retailing is more integrated into the mainstream food industry. In Sweden, there is, according to our informant from the Swedish Board of Agriculture, a dynamical relationship between conventional and organic farming in that the latter in practice stimulates the development of new methods within the former.

## **5. Sweden and the U.S.: Framing Platforms for Consensus or Other Resolutions**

### ***5.1 Sweden: Compromises between Orthodoxy and Pragmatism***

In the Swedish case, it is fair to say that most actors in the field since mid 1980s have converged. In other words, there exists a dominant frame which actors more or less agree with. It is an eco-pragmatic frame, in which two basic competing ideals – naturalness and normality – are balanced.

KRAV’s framework for organic agriculture relies on a principle of ‘naturalness’. Organic farming should be as natural as possible, and that excludes for example pesticides and chemical-synthetic fertilizers. It takes a holistic and systematic view on farming, which balances cultivation of vegetables and breeding of animals and which relies on renewable local resources. It includes a precautionary principle when new technologies and methods are to be assessed. All actors within the KRAV-context affirm these definitions and principles, although some simultaneously work within the framework of conventional agriculture.

According to informants from KRAV and from its member organisations, it is normally fairly easy to establish rules and criteria for “organic food.” All informants say that there are rarely big controversies even though KRAV’s members reflect very different interest groups. Nonetheless, disputes occasionally emerge. The disputes concern what substances or processes should be

---

<sup>20</sup> See e.g., the Rural Advancement Fund International. See <http://www.rafiU.S.org/> (Accessed 17, January 2003); Organic Consumers Association. See <http://organicconsumers.org> (Accessed 17 January, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> See e.g., Food Safety Network, <http://www.foodsafetynetwork.ca> (Accessed 23 January, 2003).

There are actors who claim that “organic farming is moderately worse for the environment (compared to conventional agricultural processes), because the copper and sulfur organic farmers use as fungicides are permanent soil contaminants. Furthermore, the Scottish Crop Research Institute says: “The balance of environmental advantages and disadvantages in the organic system is not clear”. See Avery & Avery 2002.

included or not in the standards. From an organic or environmental perspective there may be certain aspects that should be included or considered in the standard and there may be other aspects that are included in the standard but which are more dubious. Such kinds of debates are connected to the tension between the two ideals of naturalness and normality. “Naturalness” is an important and carefully framed principle at KRAV. However, pragmatism is also a crucial principle. It is important that there be a wide range of consumers who want to buy products. It is also important that producers have a realistic chance to make adjustment, and that resourceful retailers want to sell the labelled products. KRAV is not interested in remaining in a niche-market for radical lifestyles. Their products should reach everyone, be safe, not repugnant and not too expensive. These are important aspects of motivational framing.<sup>22</sup> This pragmatic attitude can be in conflict with the framing of naturalness.

During the last two years a debate has concerned aspects such as small-scale production, local production, energy and transport. These are aspects, very common in framings of environmental problems, that are not included in the KRAV regulatory framework. This reflects the rather strong and increasing position of the retailers and the processing industry within KRAV. For these groups, frames about large-scale production, centralised system of distribution, and free trade are more important, if not to say sacred. KRAV has for example excluded labelling of country of origin, with the exception for fresh food. One informant from the Swedish Ecological Farmers considers this inconsistent (it reflects the importance of health/safe theme, but not the theme of reducing use of transport). She fears that ignorance of such aspects may reduce KRAV’s credibility. She believes that many consumers are reflexive enough to question eco-labelled products that are distributed from the other side of the world, at least if similar products are possible to obtain locally.

Disputes may also show up when new kinds of issues emerge, for example when completely new kinds of products are to be labelled. A current issue is organic processing. What are the principles for organic processing? What happens when crops are refined to better adapt to margarine production? “Organic processing” is an ambiguous term – referring to both originality and artificialness – and has led to debates about what ought to be included. In what way, and how far, can an organic primary product be transformed and still be organic? Informants from KRAV hold that the manipulation of raw material must be as “natural” as possible. That includes for example mechanical processing but not processing with artificial chemicals – often aimed at getting special effects to appeal to our senses, for instance taste, colour, and consistency – regardless of

---

<sup>22</sup> However, eco-labelled products tend to be perceived as more expensive than conventional products, which they often are. But this connotation may be problematic, since not all eco-labelled products are the most expensive ones. Consumers do not always look at prices when buying provisions, but presume that some products are more expensive, thus choosing other products.

whether or not there exist indications of bad consequences for environment or health.

One informant from KRAV talks about controversial changes in the history of food labelling; changes that created internal debates and certain disappointment. Examples of such changes are when KRAV allowed the 'industry sugar' (white sugar instead of the naturally brown sugar), when the KRAV-labelled milk was homogenized and vitamin-enriched (after an advisor group to the National Food Administration noticed that children did not get enough vitamins when the school began to serve eco-labelled milk). Thus, modification of the natural products can be required if KRAV's goal to reach broad consumer groups is to be attained.

Still, there are other substances and processes that are very far from being accepted by anyone in the KRAV-context. GMOs, for instance, have an unpleasant ring in Swedish ears. To be sure, an informant from the food processing industry does not rule out that genetic modification may be compatible with environmental considerations. Yet he believes that it is completely impossible to talk about GMO in organic food-labelling circumstances (cf. below on the US-case).

'Artificial chemicals' are also red-flagged. This makes it difficult to label products such as margarine. Interestification of fat is done for the purpose of receiving firmer consistency and special taste qualities, something that requires chemical refinement. However, this chemical reaction is also possible through the use of biological enzymes that exist in organisms. Such a process is arguably viewed as organic or ecological enough since it is based on substances from nature, an informant from KRAV maintains. KRAV also approved this method initially, but withdrew this permission later. Opponents framed it as a 'biochemical' process rather than a 'biological' process, i.e. not natural.

According to an informant from the food processing industry no analysis of the consequences was carried out in this case. It was rather a question of biological and perhaps ideological principles. He experiences that there is a resistance to such kind of products generally.<sup>23</sup> He also claims that this is a rather arbitrary standpoint since other eco-labelled products – cheese, for instance – actually require quite advanced processing.

The KRAV-adherents need to balance carefully between orthodoxy and pragmatism. The products are framed as both organic/natural and normal. Moreover, they must be possible to distinguish from conventional products, since an important dynamical point with eco-labelling is that it should differentiate symbolically, and by way of that visualise an alternative (cf. Ljungberg

---

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, Lupton (1996:90) makes the notion that butter tend to be perceived as natural and margarine as artificial.

2001; Boström 2003a). The following quote from an EC-document indicates that this relationship may create problems for the organic identity.

“For several years /.../ conventional agriculture has been increasingly subject to strict environmental and animal welfare rules. This has meant the development of new approaches and methodologies, /.../. The organic farming sector now needs to see where it stands in relation to these new developments, and to consider the production rules it applies with a view to maintaining a specific identity clearly distinguished from conventional agriculture” (Le Guillou & Scharpé 2000:24).

When conventional agriculture develops methods that are more environmentally friendly, perhaps the advantages with organic farming become not as evident as before.

As there is (a somewhat competitive) division of labour between eco-labelled organic products and other products (such as eco-labelled conventional products, trademarks, and other eco-standards of procedures; see above and see Boström 2003a, Sundberg 2002), there is also a division *within* the organic sphere. This can be seen in contrast to the US-case, where the organic alliance is more united against their common antagonists. One of KRAV’s initial goals was that all organic farmers should be united (KRAV 2000:17), but it became difficult to fulfil. Above all, it has become difficult to unite pragmatic KRAV-enthusiasts with representatives for the more orthodox and ideologically animated movement for biodynamic agriculture. This organic movement has existed since the 1940s with the association for biodynamic farming (established in 1944) and the control organ Demeter Sweden (established in 1957). So a division between the pragmatic and the orthodox took place organisationally. This may have helped some more strategically oriented organic enthusiasts approach actors within the conventional sphere.

## ***5.2 U.S.: Public Debates about the Fundamentals of Organic***

Whereas the Swedish disputes have been based on organic framings that mainstream consumers should be able to regard as simultaneously ‘normal’ and ‘natural’, extensive American conflicts have pertained to basic issues of naturalness and producers’ preferences. For instance, the frames of organic principles as either “superior to health and/or to the environment” or as “merely ideological marketing tools” are largely separated.

Fundamental production processes have also been disputed, such as those which soon became well known under the name “The Big Three”: GM, food grown with biosolids, and irradiation. Between 1994 and 1996, the NOSB (represented by organic actors) had made several recommendations to the USDA. In light of this, thousands of people became highly surprised, mainly in a negative way, by The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

proposal that became public in December 1997. Under the proposal, the USDA endorsed production processes which most people would agree are inconsistent with the framing of naturalness within the organic alliance. Based on their “traditional” yes-, unless-framing, the USDA proposed that irradiation, sewage sludge, and – most controversially – genetic modification should be permitted under the organic label. Their reasoning contended that excluding these (unsynthetic) production processes (not shown to be unsafe) from the organic label would falsely imply that the Department assumes that these three types of processes are unsafe. The National Organic Program (NOP) under Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) asked for public comments on these inclusive organic standards over the Internet. The USDA received more than 275,603 comments during the comment period (and the comments continued to drop in afterwards). Most responses strongly rejected the proposal.<sup>24</sup> The unity of the organic alliance was complete in their rejection: The organic industry complained, for instance, about the proposal’s inclusion of synthetic pesticides and irradiation.<sup>25</sup> Consumer groups and organic farmers argued that the proposal had very weak ties to organic principles and practices. The general public made similar remarks.<sup>26</sup>

The head of the Department, Dan Glickman, who is strongly in favour of GM food, admitted that “The response was 20 times greater than anything ever before proposed by the USDA” (St. Louis Post Dispatch, March 26). From a democratic point of view, it was particularly interesting to note the strong prevailing view among the public that the comments led the USDA to give up quite happily without reservation. And the Big Three were indeed withdrawn between the proposal and the final rule (that came in effect on October 21, 2002 (see AMS’s final rule 2000:149ff). Moreover, there were other adjustments made, such as copying some of the EU thresholds, largely to make the US organic labelling regulation better conform to that of the EU (see below! See also Butler 2000).

**The controversy had been resolved, at least temporarily. It had been based on a conflict between two separate frames. One frame is founded on the naturalness principle combined with a pragmatic, precautionary approach similar to the dominant frame in Sweden. Another frame (i.e., a technology-optimist, yes, unless approach) contends that the three “new” production processes should be approved under the organic label unless they could be proven dangerous. In framing terms, the controversy soon became reframed into a democratic**

---

<sup>24</sup> USDA Secretary Dan Glickman Comments at Release of National Organic Standards. Available Online: <<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/glickremarks.htm>>. (Accessed 17 January, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> See *Organic Groups' Outcry Compels USDA to Delay Action on Labeling Rules*, Minneapolis Star-Trib., February 7, 1998, at 10A.

<sup>26</sup> *Editorial: Truth in Food Labeling*, Atlanta Constitution, December 27, 2000 at A18; Green, *supra* note 18.

issue—about free consumer choice—which no party dared to deny completely after the public reactions over the Internet.

Yet, it is often within the nature of conflicts between frames that it is difficult to resolve them in a way that each side is convinced that the other side will not try to have it “their way” again within a limited period of time (based on the old, separate frames). Thus, some would argue that the Big Three controversy is far from over. As early as in 1998, Lilliston & Cummins warned that USDA’s ban on The Big Three from organic certification was only a temporary, tactical move advised by biotech multinationals:

Analysts warn however that Glickman’s ban on biotech, sludge and irradiation under the organic label is not necessarily a permanent ban, as evidenced by the emphasis in his May 8 statement on “current” organic practices and “current” consumer expectations. Shortly before the end of the comment period, the nation’s biotechnology leader, Monsanto, advised the USDA to back off temporarily on trying to include gene-altered products under the organic label for a three-year period and then to try again. (Lilliston & Cummins 1998:196).<sup>27</sup>

### ***5.3 Framings of Health***

One important aspect of framing is its role in motivating people to engage in collective action. Advocates of organic labelling can do so for example by claiming that organic labelled goods have environmental benefits, or by claiming that these labelled products are quite mainstream and not very difficult to find or not too expensive. When it comes to organic food, proponents may also be tempted to use health arguments. Using health themes in framing related to food labelling may be very powerful. Concern for food habits and health tend to be an increasing obligation for modern, individualized, and self-disciplined Westerners. Through the extensive risk communication in media and other channels these consumers are said to be radicalised in their broadened interest in food contexts (Eder 1996:154 ff.; Lupton 1996; Beck-Gernsheim 2000). Notions of healthy food often revolve around “naturalness,” and that food should be free from excessive processing (Lupton 1996: 80 ff.). However, this kind of framing may be a source of contention in standardisation of food. Do the standards really reflect healthier or safer food? Here we begin with the American case.

---

<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, it is obvious that organic food labelling is not an isolated Western affair. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) held a meeting on February 8, 2000 on “the Role of Business Partnership in Promoting Trade and Sustainable Development.” A purpose of the meeting was to promote biotechnology as organic in India. The U.S. biotech company Monsanto has bought the Indian seed company Mahyco, and tries to introduce its GM products through this Indian company. Since the beginning of Monsanto’s field trials in 1998, the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology in New Dehli has filed a case in the Supreme Court in India to stop the field trials. (FoodFirst 2000).

### 5.3.1 U.S.

The health aspects associated with organic food belong to the most polarized ones in the labelling disputes in the U.S. The governmental bodies that deal with food labelling in the US construct very clear “yes,-unless-framings” as regards the safety of GM, radiation, and in some cases the use of human biosolids.

Unless a process has been proven to be dangerous to human health, with “sufficient” scientific evidence, its use should not be restricted. This framing is a reversal of the precautionary principle, or “no,-unless,” which the European Union and its countries subscribe to, at least rhetorically. An example of how the “yes, -unless-framings” are applied in the US is the position of the Food and Drug Administration that GM should not have to be labelled as such since there is not sufficient evidence that it is dangerous (FDA 1992). It is fair to say that an extension of this is the former suggestion of the USDA that the Big Three should be permitted under the organic label; there is no reason, the Department held, why any type of production should *not* be called organic if it is free from artificial chemicals and if it has not been proven unsafe.

Interestingly, there is a certain discrepancy between the health concerns among the public and the bodies within USDA. The massive protests against the Big Three that we mentioned above largely concerned GM processes, whereas the governmental organisations have seen no health dangers with GM. A use of biosolids, however, was not much discussed in the public Big Three Debate, although the National Organic program under USDA has acknowledged certain possible health risks with it.

[...] at least I'm not aware of any health concerns regarding GMO:s. Radiation is in the same situation. I'm not aware of any, or at least there are not any definitive studies I guess I should say, on ionizing radiation. But sewage sludge there are beginning to be some studies out there, and I think EPA:s own work is beginning to show that there may be some questions there that need to be answered (Interview April 4, 2002 with Keith Jones, Program Manager, National Organic Program)

At the National Food Processors Association, Regina Hindwine is eager to stress that “Organic does not mean safer. Organic does not mean healthier.” (in Lilliston & Cummins 1998:195). The USDA sees as its role to strongly echo this negative claim in order to stay free from the accusation that the exclusion of the Big Three from organic labelling misleads the consumers. And already in 1990, at the time of the OFPA, Congress stressed that organic in as production claim that refers to processes rather than to consequences to the environment, health or “quality.”<sup>28</sup>

The separate framings in this context between organic actors and Federal representatives were particularly clear during the NOSB's first meeting. A board

---

<sup>28</sup> S.Rep. No. 357, reprinted in 1990 U.S.C.C.A.N, at 4946-47.

member, John Bell Clark clearly revealed his astonishment when the Joann Smith, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture (at USDA) told the board that the OFPA does not concern food safety. Consequently, she emphasised that the board should not claim that organic food is safer than conventional food and thus make conventional food “look bad.” (Clark 1995, *supra* note 8, at 331). Already at this early stage we note fundamentally different framings as to what organic food is.

In their final rule, the Agricultural Marketing Service, under USDA accordingly holds that “The NOP prohibitions on use of excluded methods [i.e., the Big three] are not intended to imply at least that conventionally produced products made by those methods [...] are less safe or nutritious than organically produced products” (AMS, 2000:149-150).

As in Sweden (see below) the organic industry in the US has to be cautious not to claim that organic food is healthier. Still, the health frames are very clear surrounding the promotion of organic food in the U.S. It is tempting for the organic industry to imply a status of organic food as more healthy:

“Organic food is certainly safer and better than the chemical-doused, genetically contaminated, or irradiated food typically found on grocery store shelves.”<sup>29</sup>

“When you eat food that is organically grown, you are taking a pledge to your health, while helping our environment, one bite at a time.”<sup>30</sup>

Such claims are often made by bringing up a precautionary framing of what potential risks consumers may avoid by choosing organic. Also, the deeper metacultural framings of naturalness (see Schön & Rein 1994) have a profound public resonance, which makes people connect organic to health. Moreover, environmental NGO:s use powerful rhetoric in their claims of the superiority of organic agriculture and food for human health. Pure Food Campaign is one of these NGOs:

The term “organic” is generally considered by the public to indicate healthier food. Activist organisations opposed to unsustainable agriculture practices or genetic engineering have increasingly advised consumers to change their food buying habits and to begin purchasing organic foods (Lilliston & Cummins 1997:1).<sup>31</sup>

Statistically, we see that the organic health frame has gained considerable cultural resonance among the American public. According to the ABC NEWS

---

<sup>29</sup> Organic Consumers Association press release, Oct. 1, 2002 See <http://organicconsumers.org> (Accessed 2003-01-17).

<sup>30</sup> Organic Trade Association, Oct.1, 2002.

[http://www.ota.com/whats\\_news/Issue22Page1.pdf](http://www.ota.com/whats_news/Issue22Page1.pdf) (Accessed 17 January, 2003)

<sup>31</sup> Ben Lilliston works in The Environmental Education Group in Chicago, Illinois. Ronnie Cummins participates in the Pure Food Campaign in Little Marais, Minnesota.

Organic Food Poll of 2000,<sup>32</sup> 57% of all consumers in the U.S. believed that organic foods are better for the environment; 45% believed that organic foods have better nutritional value. Only 5 and 3% respectively believed that organic foods are worse in terms of the environment and nutrition than conventional food.

### 5.3.2 Sweden

Health matters have not been very controversial in the Swedish case, probably because KRAV has not made it a major subject. It would be difficult for KRAV to claim that organic food is healthier than other food since such a statement would irritate some of KRAV's members. However, the many alarms about controversial food processes (BSE, GMO, chemicals etc.) and the widespread anxieties about what we are eating (cf. Nordic Council of Ministers 2001:87ff; see Ljungberg 2001) do concern KRAV, although informants from KRAV express a somewhat reserved attitude to such alarms. The public may be tired of listening to all alarms and may become indifferent. Moreover, KRAV is oriented toward environmental sustainability, and is thus not a label that can guarantee that the labelled products are healthier. So KRAV has previously avoided talking about health.

Nonetheless, KRAV cannot help observing that many people make the connection between eco-labelled food and health issues, which is documented in some studies (Ekelund 1996, 2003; Jørgensen 2001:50; Magnusson et al. 2001; Mårtensson & Pettersson 2002:164-167). Thus, KRAV has begun to cautiously bring health issues into the promotion of its products, since these issues are discussed among consumers anyway.

But the message is not that KRAV-labelled goods *are* healthier. The argument is more theoretical and ideological. In a newsletter issued by KRAV,<sup>33</sup> it is maintained that science has developed a lot of knowledge about how to technically develop crops. But science has not in general been concerned with health matters. Thus, society does not know much about the health qualities of different food processes, KRAV concludes. Besides, it is difficult to know if for instance "organic" food processes are healthier than other processes, since different substances in food are interrelated in complex ways. To be sure, thresholds that are based on animal tests in conventional or high-tech farming are sometimes based on the precautionary principle and acknowledgements of knowledge uncertainty. But how can one know that the experts have tested the right variables, KRAV asks. Perhaps they have not searched for the right diseases. Perhaps humans react in other ways than laboratory animals. In organic

---

<sup>32</sup> - ABC NEWS Organic Food Poll of 2000. Available online: [http://more.abcnews.go.com/onair/DailyNews/poll\\_2000203.html](http://more.abcnews.go.com/onair/DailyNews/poll_2000203.html)

<sup>33</sup> "Kravmärkt" in *Krav Konsument* Nr 1 2000.

farming, on the other hand, all crops – a common argument contends – get the substance they need in reasonable proportions; no pesticides are used; and one may also feel like a more moral human being by choosing environmentally friendly products, a sense that in turn may be good for one's health.

KRAV is not only carefully framing the health theme but also strategically reflecting upon the problem of uncertainty. Deborah Lupton observes that

“the continual opposition of ‘processed/artificial’ and ‘natural’ foods is a response to uncertainty. If we can believe that a food is ‘natural’ then we feel better about eating it. In the context of a climate of risk and uncertainty, being able to hold on to such binary oppositions and their moral associations makes it easier to live one's everyday life” (Lupton 1996:92).

## ***5.4 Debates about Methodology and Science: What can we know?***

### *5.4.1 U.S.: Debates about the Methodological Fundamentals of Labelling*

As we have mentioned above, organic food labelling policies are in a transition from diversity and regionalism, and to federally regulated standardisation. Yet, as opposed to the situation in the countries within the EU, the public and organic actors in the US federation currently do not, aside from its trade interests, have any legal obligation to adapt to any supranational food labelling regulations.<sup>34</sup> This has led to a very intense controversy and to a polarized debate. Simply put, there has not been any starting point that all actors can agree on. As we saw in the case of The Big Three, the public, the organic industry, and NGO:s saw a real opportunity to get their voices heard, concerning fundamental values behind organic agriculture and labelling.

There have been fundamentally ideological and epistemic controversies over the validity, implication (reads: hidden and misleading message), and usefulness of labelling (see Klintman 2002a; 2002b). These disputes take place between separate methodological and epistemic frames. An interesting point about consistency in organic labelling is made by Amaditz (1997). He maintains that, if Congress really wants organic labelling to reflect a certain group of *production processes*, rather than the content and quality of final products, all maximum allowable residue levels would be redundant under the organic label:

“as long as an organic producer followed the dictates of the OFPA, the simple fact that its crops were contaminated inadvertently would not matter, because the food still would be produced organically (Amaditz 1997:554).”

Amaditz concludes that Congress therefore accepts that consumers treat the organic label as “more than a production claim” (Amaditz 1997:553). This

---

<sup>34</sup> Indirectly, however, the organic industry in the U.S. (as well as perhaps the USDA) has felt the need to adapt to the “stricter” thresholds of the EU and other regions for reasons of international trade.

conclusion, we hold, is a bit premature. Congress regards residue testing as an important part of the OFPA scheme because congress believes that testing will ensure that organic farmers not use synthetic pesticides (i.e., a production issue). Also, Congress claims that certified organic production ought to follow the “widely-held belief that organically produced food has fewer residues.”<sup>35</sup> Whereas the first Congressional point makes complete sense, the second one turns out to be inconsistent with the previous attempts by Congress, via USDA, to include Big Three under the organic label (far from “widely-held beliefs”). The truth is probably that the U.S. Congress holds a rather pragmatic position. To Congress, the organic label does only not imply reflection of isolated production processes. Nor is the organic label a reflector of unique consequences to health, the environment or “quality.” Congress has stated that,

“[t]his legislation does not attempt to make scientific judgments about whether organically produced food is more healthful, nutritious, or flavorful than conventionally produced food” (S. REP. NO. 357, *reprinted in* 1990 U.S.C.C.A.N. at 4947).

Rather, Congress treats the organic label as a consumer marketing label with the aim of motivating a certain, not economically rational fraction of consumers in the U.S. and abroad to purchase organic food without worsening the situation for the conventional food industry.<sup>36</sup> This perspective in the U.S. of organic as a rather arbitrary, and sometimes ideological, consumer preference differs from Sweden. Here, the Government openly states a hope and support, for environmental reasons, for a development, where the KRAV-fraction of Swedish agriculture is much increased.<sup>37</sup>

Many actors in the U.S. organic alliance are very pleased with the new organic ruling with its “stricter” thresholds for organic labelling, exclusion of the Big Three, and reduction of the permitted amounts of non-organic substances to the EU-levels. Their epistemic framing appears to be that organic labelling can be a more or less perfect reflection of the “true” separation of products. In the new organic ruling there are four thresholds that define various levels of organic purity. An interesting claim within the organic alliance is the following: the “stricter” the organic thresholds are the more trustworthy they ought to be among the public. But the question is whether it is reasonable to trust more than the honest intentions behind a product certified as “100% organic” (i.e., with no GM or other nonorganic substances or processes involved). So far the debate surrounding the methodological validity of, for instance, organic claims of “GM-free” have been strongly polarized between

---

<sup>35</sup> S. Rep. No. 357, reprinted in 1990 U.S.C.C.A.N, at 4953.

<sup>36</sup> As The Secretary of Agriculture, Dan Glickman released the final organic rule in December, 2000, he maintained that “the organic label is a marketing tool [...] It is not a statement by the government about food safety. Nor is ‘organic’ a value judgment by the government about nutrition or quality” (Butler 2000, *supra* note 61).

<sup>37</sup> See for example the Government bill (Prop 1997/98:2) p. 52, 72 (Sustainable Agriculture and Fishery) and the action-plan document of Swedish Board of Agriculture (2001:11).

framings of either treating food labelling as absolute and objectively scientific (in the naïve sense of the term) or as completely ideological, arbitrary and worthless (since it is not absolute and objectively scientific). As Klintman (2002b) maintains, an important step toward reciprocal frame reflection would be that both alliances acknowledge, and reach an open consensus over the fact that food labelling belongs to neither of these poles. Lately, actors within the organic alliance have expressed increasing worries about “genetic pollution” in addition to the diffusing of synthetic chemicals between fields that may jeopardize the separation of organic and nonorganic production. So far the burden of proof lies largely on the organic actors to claim that no mixing has taken place. If the burdens of proof were shared among organic and nonorganic farmers (the latter having to prove that their substances not be spread to other parts of the agricultural system) it is possible that a reciprocal reflection of epistemic and methodological frames may take place.

In the USDA’s adaptation to the comments on the proposal of 2000, one should note the high degree of trade pragmatism. There is no scientific or health-related basis for the raises in thresholds. Aside from the public pressure to “raise the organic standard,” there was much pressure from international trade interests reflected in the changes from the March 2000 proposal to the December 2000 final rule (65 Fed. Reg. at 80576-83). International commentators, the EU, and leading organic associations involved in organic international trade agents came up with suggestions of how to better comply with international standards. These are a few examples: from the proposal to the final rule the minimum content for “made with organic” was raised from 50% to 70%. Also, products labelled “organic” (which means made by 95-99% organic ingredients) may only use nonorganic ingredients (the additional 1-5%) when these are only commercially available as nonorganic. In addition, it is interesting to note that certain modifications in the final rule can be regarded as less strict. For instance, in the proposed rule it was mandatory to indicate the organic percentage in “organic” (95-99%) and “made with organic” (70-74%) whereas it was optional in the final rule. This change is partly an adaptation to standards in other countries, and has nothing to do with ecological or health-related limits. Still, there are several differences between the U.S. and the EU, both in terms of the actual regulations and the political contexts.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> While GM-labelling is compulsory in the EU-regulation [Directive 90/220/EEC; cf., Regulation (EC) No. 1139/98], U.S. authorities quite the contrary discuss whether producers should be allowed to label products as ‘free from genetic modification’ though it may be viewed as distorted consumer information (Klintman 2002b; cf. Sassatelli & Scott 2001:219). Concerning threshold levels; in both the U.S. and the EU-regulation, at least 95% of the content needs to be produced according to the organic standards in order for a product to be certified as “organic.” In the U.S. regulation, the label “Made with organic ingredients” can be used for products with 70%-95% organic content, whereas products with less than 70% organic ingredients can have the term “organic” placed only as ingredient information (AMS 2000:351ff; Klintman 2002b). See § 205.304, available Online: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/nop2000/Final%20Rule/regtext/reg-labeling.htm> [Accessed 16 November, 2001]. In the EU-regulation, products with 70%-95% organic content can only have the

It would be possible, however, to introduce criteria which inarguably would be directed towards environmental improvements. The mode, distance, emissions, and energy use of food transportation would be potential criteria. However, such criteria would be likely to meet strong opposition from the international organic industry and from the trade-oriented USDA. The free trade ideology of the bigger organic players would speak against such substantial environmental criteria.

#### *5.4.2 Sweden*

In Sweden, there has not been any marked particular debate on methodological issues connected to labelling and threshold levels. As in other eco-labelling processes in Sweden there seems to exist a kind of methodological trust concerning labelling issues. However, there have been rather intensive debates surrounding organic agriculture as such, or more precisely about its definition or whether organic agriculture really has advantages for the environment (Ekelund 1996:373, Sundberg 2002). Is sustainable development within agriculture the same as organically labelled agriculture? Or can it be defined in a wider way and include conventional forms of farming (and thereby include small amounts of pesticides or artificial manure)? There is a current debate about such definitions and it is especially intensive among researchers within the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU). Some researchers have expressed critical viewpoints on organic farming and on whether the use of pesticides really has dramatic negative consequences. Some researchers even claim that organic farming is more damaging for the environment than is conventional farming. It is, however, a difficult methodological task to study consequences of different forms of farming, since it concerns open and complex systems that may bring about long-term consequences. Different farms operate in different environments. An organic farm working as an isolated island in a landscape with only conventional agriculture has other consequences for the environment than if organic farming was used in the whole landscape (Drake & Björklund 2002:6). As Carlsson-Kanyama & Lindén (2001, p. 6) maintain, it is hard to generalize about environmental impacts from KRAV-labelled as opposed to conventional foods. Informants from the KRAV-network hold that the current debates are often rather flawed since debaters tend to use anecdotal results from isolated studies; that some researchers compare apples and oranges when comparing organic and conventional farming and not considering the impact of the surrounding landscape; and that research funds still tend to favour conventional farming.<sup>39</sup>

---

term “organic” placed in the ingredient information. Below 70%, no expressions of organic content are allowed. (See the EEC Regulation 2092/91 for comparable thresholds in the EU).

<sup>39</sup> State funding for research on organic agriculture now reaches 6 – 7 % of all funding for agriculture research. By including all other sources the share is at most 10 %,

KRAV has reacted by taking on a kind of holistic view and focusing on a wide range of questions (without providing definite answers). And there exist other studies as well within SLU, which emphasises the environmental benefits of organic farming (e.g. Drake & Björklund 2002), and which KRAV refers to in its newsletter. Most importantly, KRAV's members (e.g. LRF and KF) have defended KRAV against those who question organic agriculture, and the authorities trust KRAV. However, according to actors such as LRF, and as expressed by an action plan of the Swedish Board of Agriculture (2001:2), the assumption is also that a somewhat reformed conventional agriculture could very well be consistent with the idea of a sustainable agriculture. Thus, to them sustainable agriculture is broader than organic agriculture. But organic agriculture plays an important role for developing and stimulating the conventional agriculture, for example by providing new ideas, sharing knowledge and experiences.

The kind of 'yes-unless' framing commonly used in one of the two coalitions in the US-case is not frequently appearing in the Swedish case. Here, most actors seem to share a more reserved or reflexive attitude to science. Knowledge gaps about the consequences of different farming methods do not lead authorities and business actors to dismiss the possible benefits of organic production. Certainly, authorities and others express an optimistic belief in science, and are constantly pleading for more research (e.g. Swedish Board of Agriculture 2001:2 p. 12-15). Still, in light of the knowledge uncertainty they choose to hold the pluralist perspective that many possible roads toward sustainability should be tried and that organic production certainly is one of the most promising roads.

## **6. Conclusions and Discussion**

Standardisation of organic agriculture - including food labelling - takes place both in the U.S. and Sweden, but in rather different ways. One would perhaps think that this market- and consumer-oriented strategy would be less disputed in US-context; but this is not the case. For instance, the American debate includes a range of issues which are hardly even considered in Sweden in relation to labelling (e.g., the Big Three). In the case studies we note that the current Swedish organic labelling debates have several characteristics of *disagreements*, which mainly take place *within* a common, rather pragmatic eco-business frame (some individual debaters and researchers at SLU excepted). The American labelling debates, however, often reveal more fundamental controversies

---

(<http://www.cul.slu.se/nyheter/ekollantbruk.pdf> Accessed 03 October 2002); which sharply contrasts the political goal that 20 % of all agriculture should be organic by 2005 and the talk of a general switch over of agriculture in direction towards sustainability.

between coalitions using separate frames. We attribute these differences to a few factors which vary across the two countries.

Firstly, the traditional political culture in Sweden that stresses openness, agreements and consensus building between major players in the field (state actors and interest organisations) seems to continue in new forms in ecological issues. Swedish actors – both the KRAV members and state agencies – tend to agree, and are even forming a “Swedish position” in defending opportunities for the organic movement to autonomously define what is organic. Rather than feeling threatened by the government as in the US-case, the organic movement perceives the main pressure as coming from a detailed EU-regulation. Thus, all big players in Sweden defend and recognise KRAV for its role of working towards a more sustainable agriculture. Yet, they do not agree in every detail, and some actors simultaneously develop other standards that partly compete with the KRAV-standard.

In the U.S., political authorities at the federal level, and advocates of organic agriculture, often play the roles as antagonists. Within the organic industry in the U.S., the fact that the USDA is the organic authority is considered both a weakness and a strength within the organic industry. While many organic actors in principle appreciate the “reduced confusion” that the USDA:s organic standards may ideally lead to, the general level of trust in the Federal Government is fairly low within the organic movement. And it is easy to note the pressure on the USDA from other interest groups not to equal organic foods production with sustainable agriculture or with superior implications for the environment or human health. The organic alliance, on the other hand, frames the organic label as both an eco-label and sometimes also as a health label. The U.S Government presents a somewhat reserved attitude toward strict organic standards. On the other hand it reveals a certain preparedness to sharpen the standards. Our study shows that the concerned public may be an important resource for the organic movement. For example, by referring to frames of consumer rights – which is especially important in the U.S. political culture – the organic movement has created great framing resonance among a good part of the public regarding the need for a “more natural” organic agriculture. This has contributed to a successful lobbying for “stricter” standards.

Secondly, the division of labour in which competition and cooperation are mixed and to a high degree institutionalised – not least within the KRAV-organisation – usually helps prevent or resolve latent conflicts. This point contends that issues are normally not debated among the actors in the field but rather solved and handled by the existence of different channels. For example, LRF may not fully agree with proponents of organic agriculture. Nevertheless they support KRAV, since LRF’s members still have the possibility of using other labels or other forms for environmental performance (which also is supported by LRF). The same is true for KF, which has the possibility of using its

“green” trademark “Änglamark” also for non-KRAV-labelled products. This pattern of interaction is less present in the U.S. where the market is more divided into the organic food industry versus conventional/GM food industry. In the U.S., a division between on the one hand organic (and more expensive) chains of grocery stores and on the other hand conventional ones is common. Moreover, the organic rhetoric in the U.S. is characterised by a more symbolic, yet explicit, distinction between good guys and bad guys, something which is no longer used very prevalent in the Swedish discourse (see Boström 2001). This more polarized structure in the U.S. is reproduced in the sense that actors to a certain extent are forced to choose where their main interests lie: either accept organic agriculture in all its parts or reject it.

Thirdly, KRAV has received a legitimate status within the EU - and as well as within the national (Swedish) regulatory framework. Therefore, it is not as easy to question KRAV’s credibility as such, while it is always possible to debate KRAV’s more specific rules and framings. In the U.S. the definition of organic agriculture is more dependent on the federal government. There is not the same opportunity for autonomous standardisation by an alternative actor in America. To be sure, the option exists; but in order to make such claims one has to follow very strict rules. For instance, alternative labelling may never use the term “organic.” However, representatives from the organic movement instead took the opportunity to participate in a state-centred standardisation process (NOSB), a process that has contributed to the crystallizing of two opposing coalitions.

The regulatory, political, and organisational context helps create a mild debate climate in Sweden, which in turn helps making eco-labelling “productive” in certain respects; there exist several channels and forms for making and implementing rules aimed at environmental improvements. However, this does not mean the end of framing or the end of framing disputes, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the existence of a debate as such shows that KRAV's members still have to argue in favour of eco-labelling, for example by indicating the health theme. Secondly, there is an ambition to expand the eco-labelling schemes continuously, which involves other framing dilemmas, such as how to balance naturalness with cultural “normality.” As soon as new products or types of products are to be labelled, spaces for framing disputes emerge. Thirdly, some of our informants express concern about displacement of power constellations within KRAV. This displacement favours retailers and the processing industry, they claim. Due to their power position it is, for example, difficult to talk about aspects such as local production, energy use, or transport in eco-labelling and standardisation debates.

Although food labelling is less disputed - and in this respect more efficient in Sweden - the consensus climate may perhaps also have negative consequences. How can we know that things really are environmentally unfriendly or unhealthy if the fundamentals are difficult to discuss or question in an open

way? Framing always is about making the complex world more comprehensible; it is about simplification. All simplifications in turn entail some degree of selection and arbitrariness, which is problematic if the debate climate does not give room for questioning of a frame (for example about ‘naturalness’ or ‘free trade’). This is particularly problematic if consumers view the label as synonymous with organic agriculture, which they in turn may view as superior agricultural processes and products. It would perhaps be important to make clearer to the public that organic labelling is only one tool among others aimed at increased consumer reflection of environmental issues. And, as with all other types of standardisations, some important aspects may not have been taken into consideration in the selection process.

In this respect, disputes between separate frames (as in controversies) may have certain advantages compared to disputes within a common and reciprocally accepted frame (as in disagreements). The efforts of frame reflection in an “intractable” controversy may ideally – if they lead to a resolution – have the advantage of bringing fundamental value differences and bottom lines up to an open public debate, a level rarely reached in milder disagreements. As we note, however, it is not always obvious to everyone that a long-lasting resolution has been reached in debates that have the characteristics of open frame reflections. It takes time to assess the long-term effects of such debates. Accordingly, it is still premature to immediately judge the policy controversies based on the apparent public openness and democratic deliberation.

## References

- Agricultural Marketing Service, 2000, *Final Rule*. National Organic Program, USDA, 7 CFR, Part 205.
- Alternative Farming Systems Information Center, 2001, *Organic Food Production*. USDA. Available Online: <http://www.nalusda.gov/afsic/ofp/ofp.htm> [Accessed 16 November 2001].
- Amaditz, K.C., 1997, The Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 and its impending regulations: a big zero for organic food? *Food Drug Law Journal*, 52(4): 537-59.
- Avery, D.T. and Avery, A.A., 18 October, 2002, 'Negative Campaigning' for the New U.S. Organic Food Standards. *Center for Global Food Issues*. Available Online: [http://www.cgfi.org/materials/articles/2002/oct\\_18\\_02.htm](http://www.cgfi.org/materials/articles/2002/oct_18_02.htm) (Accessed 23 January 2003).
- Beck-Gernsheim, E., 2000, Health and Responsibility: From Social Change to Technological Change and Vice Versa. In Adam, B., Beck, U. and van Loon, J. (eds.) *The Risk Society and Beyond. Critical Issues for Social Theory*. London: Sage Publications.
- Benford, R., and Snow, D., 2000, Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26: 611-39.
- Boli, J. and Thomas, G., 1999, INGOs and the Organization of World Culture. In Boli, J. and Thomas, G. (eds.) *Constructing World Culture. International nongovernmental organizations since 1875*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bones, G.B., 1992, State and federal organic food certification laws: Coming of age? *North Dakota Law Review*, 68: 405- 444.
- Boström, M., 2001, *Miljörelsens mångfald*. Lund: Arkiv förlag.
- Boström, M., 2002, *Skogen Märks – Hur svensk skogscertifiering kom till och dess konsekvenser*. Score working paper series 2002:3. Stockholm: Score.
- Boström, M., 2003a, Environmental organisations in new forms of political participation: Ecological modernisation and the making of voluntary rules. *Environmental Values* 12:175-193.
- Boström, M., 2003b, Cognitive practices and collective identities within a heterogeneous social movement: the Swedish environmental movement. Forthcoming in *Social movement studies*.
- Brunsson, N., and Jacobsson, B., 2000, (eds.) *A world of standards*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burros, M., December 21, 2000, U.S. Imposes standards for organic-food labeling. NY Times on the web, <http://www.nytimes.com>.
- Butler, M.E., 2000, Glickman announces national organic standards. *Food Chemical News*, December 25, 2000.
- Carlsson-Kanyama, A. and Lindén, A-L., 2001, Trends in food production and consumption: Swedish experiences from environmental and cultural impacts. *Int. J. Sustainable Development*, 4 (4).
- Christensen, T. and Peters, G., 1999, *Structure, Culture, and Governance. A comparison of Norway and the United States*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

- Clark, J.B., 1995, Impact and analysis of the U.S. Organic Food Production Act of 1990. *Univ. Toledo L. Review*, 26: 323-346.
- Drake, L. and Björklund, J., 2002, *Effekter av olika sätt att producera livsmedel – en inventering av jämförelser mellan ekologisk och konventionell produktion*. <http://www.cul.slu.se> [Accessed 30 September 2002].
- Eder, K., 1996, *The Social Construction of Nature*. London: Sage Publications.
- Egan, M., 2001, *Constructing a European Market. Standards, Regulation, and Governance*. Oxford University Press.
- Ekelund, L., 1996, Demand and supply factors on the market for organic vegetables: the case of Sweden. 13<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Horticultural Economics. *Acta Horticulturae* 429:367-375.
- Ekelund, L., 2003, På spaning efter den ekologiska konsumenten. En genomgång av 25 svenska konsumentundersökningar. Paper till seminarium *Mat med mervärden - Goda affärer. Ekologisk mat, konsumenter och trender*, arranged by Ekologiskt Forum, KSLA 2003-05-15, Stockholm.
- Food and Drug Administration, 1992, May 29. Statement of Policy: Foods derived from new plant varieties. *Federal Register*. 57: 22984-23005, at 22991.
- FoodFirst. 2000, January 31. *Let Organic – Stay Organic*. Oakland, Ca: FoodFirst/Institute for Food and Development Policy. Available Online: <http://www.foodfirst.org/action/2000/1-31-00.html> [Accessed 14 November, 2000].
- Frankel and Borque 1998, Certified Organic: Recent Developments in the Proposed Rule For a National "Organic" Standard in the U.S. <http://www.foodfirst.org/progs/global/sU.S.g/>.
- Frommer, F.J. Jan 14, 2001, Some Worry that New USDA Label Might Change Organic Farming. *The Bismarck Tribune*.
- Golan, E., Kuchler F., and Mitchell L. 2000. *Economics of Food Labeling*. Washington DC: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 793.
- Green, F. (2001). U.S. sets organic food standards. *San Diego Union-Tribune*, December 21, 2000, at A1.
- Hartman and New Hope. 1997. *The Evolving Market Place*. Hartman & New Hope: Bellevue, WA.
- Hofer, K., 2000, Labelling of Organic Food Products. In Mol, A., Lauber, V., and Liefferink, D. (eds.) *The Voluntary Approach to Environmental Policy. Joint Environmental Policy-making in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jørgensen, C., 2001, *Prisbildning och efterfrågan på ekologiska livsmedel*. Rapport 2001:1. Lund: Livsmedelsekonomiska institutet.
- Kitschelt, H.P., 1986, Political opportunity structures and political protest: Anti-nuclear movements in four democracies. *British journal of political science* 16:57-85
- Klintman, M., 2002a, The genetically modified (GM) food labelling controversy: Ideological and epistemic crossovers. *Social Studies of Science*, 32 (1): 71-91.
- Klintman, M., 2002b, Arguments surrounding organic and genetically modified food labelling: A few comparisons. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 4: 247-259.
- KRAV, 2000, *15 goda år med KRAV. Vi skriver historia*. Uppsala: KRAV.

- Lathrop, K.W., 1991, Preempting Apples with Oranges: Federal Regulation of Organic Food Labeling, *J. Corp. L.*, 16: 885-930.
- Laws, D., and Rein, M., 2003, Reframing Practice. In: Hajer, M., and Wagenaar, H., (eds.) *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press
- Le Guillou, G., and Scharpé, A., 2000, *Organic farming. Guide to Community rules*. European Commission: Directorate-General for Agriculture.
- Liefferink, D., Andersen, M.S. and Enevoldsen, M., 2000, Interpreting Joint Environmental Policy-making: Between Deregulation and Political Modernization. In Mol, A., Lauber, V., and Liefferink, D., (eds.) *The Voluntary Approach to Environmental Policy. Joint Environmental Policy-making in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lilliston B and Cummins R. 9 July, 1997, Whose organic standards? USDA prepares for an “unfriendly takeover” of the natural foods industry. Available Online: <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/1527/infoJu97.html> [Accessed 11 November, 2001].
- Lilliston B and Cummins, R., 1998, Organic Vs “organic”: the corruption of a label. *The Ecologist*. 28 (4): 195-199.
- Ljungberg, C., 2001, *Bra mat och dåliga varor. Om förtroendefulla relationer och oroliga reaktioner på livsmedelsmarknaden*. Lunds universitet: Sociologiska institutionen.
- Longtin, D., and Lineback, D., 2001, Keep eyes open if you go organic. *U.S. Today*, January 24, 2001, at 11A.
- Lundqvist, L.J., 1996, Sweden. In Christiansen, P.M., (ed) *Governing the environment. Politics, policy, and organization in the Nordic ‘Countries’*. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Lupton, D., 1996, *Food, the body and the self*. London: Sage Publications.
- Magnusson, M.K., Arvola, A, Koivisto Hursti, U-K., Åberg, L., and Sjöden, P-O., 2001, Attitudes towards organic foods among Swedish consumers. In *British Food Journal* 103: 209-226
- Majone, G., 1996, Regulation and its modes. In *Regulating Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Marsden, T., Flynn, A. and Harrison, M., 2000., *Consuming interests. The social provision of foods*. London: UCL Press.
- McAdam, D., 1996, Conceptual origins, current problems, future directions. In McAdam, D., McCarthy, J.D., and Zald, M.N., (eds.) *Comparative perspectives on social movements. Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Micheletti, M., 1991, *The Swedish Farmers’ Movement and Government Agricultural Policy*. London: Praeger.
- Micheletti, M., 1995., *Civil society and state relations in Sweden*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Micheletti, M., 2003, forthcoming, *Shopping with and for virtues*. Stockholm university, department of political science.
- Mol, A., Lauber, V. and Liefferink, D., (eds.) 2000, *The Voluntary Approach to Environmental Policy. Joint Environmental Policy-making in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Mårtensson, M., and Pettersson, R., 2002, *Grön vardag. Hushåll, miljöhänsyn och vardagspraktik*. Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion.
- Nordic Council of Ministers, 2001, *Food Labelling: Nordic Consumers' Proposals for Improvements. A pan-Nordic survey of consumer behaviour and attitudes towards food labelling*. Copenhagen: TemaNord 2001:573.
- Rein, M., Schön, D.A., 1993, Reframing Policy Discourse. In Fischer, F. and Forester, J, (eds.) *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*. Durham; London: Duke University Press. pp.143-166.
- Richardson, J., Gustafsson, G. and Jordan, G., 1982, The Concept of Policy Style. In Richardson, J., (ed.) *Policy Styles in Western Europe*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Sassatelli, R., and Scott, A., 2001, Novel food, new markets and trust regimes. Responses to the erosion of consumers' confidence in Austria, Italy and the UK. *European Societies*, 3: 213-244.
- Schön, D.A. and Rein, M. 1994, *Frame reflection*. New York Basic Books.
- Snow, D. and Benford, R., 1988, Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization. In Klandermans, B., Kriesi, H. and Tarrow, S. (eds.) *From structure to action: Comparing social movement research across cultures*. London: Jai Press.
- Snow, D., Rochford, B. (Jr), Worden, S. and Benford, R., 1986, Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation. *American sociological review*, 51:464-481
- Sundberg, M., 2002, *Sida vid sida – Ny och gammal reglering av jordbruk och miljö*. Score working report series 2002:6. Stockholm: Score.
- Swedish Board of Agriculture, 2001, *Ekologiska jordbruksprodukter och livsmedel – aktionsplan 2005*. Rapport 2001:11.
- Tatenhove, v.J., Arts, B. and Leroy, P., 2000, *Political Modernisation and the Environment. The Renewal of Environmental Policy Arrangement*. London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Tjärnemo, H., 2001, *Eco-Marketing & Eco Management. Exploring the Eco-orientation –performance link in food retailing*. Lund University: Institute of economic research.
- USDA, News Release, no. 0425.00, Dec. 20, 2000. Available Online: <http://www.usda.gov/news/releases/2000/12/0425.htm> [Accessed 16 November 2001].
- USDA, 1989, Demand for organic vegetables is growing. *Vegetables and Specialties Situation and Outlook Report*. Economic Research Service, TVS-248: 9-10.
- USDA News Release 2000: *Glickman Announces National Standards For Organic foods*. Available Online: <http://www.usda.gov/news/releases/2000/12/0425.htm> (Accessed 23 January 2003).
- Vaupel, S., 1997, Advising Producers of Organic Crops. *Drake Journal of Agricultural*, 137 (2):1, p. 139.
- Weiner, J.B, and Rogers, M.D., 2002, Comparing Precaution in the United States and Europe. *Journal of Risk Research*, 5(4), 317-349.
- Vogel, D., 2001, *The new politics of risk regulation in Europe*. Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK.

