Consumer Trust in Food

ITALY: Between Local Traditions And Global Aspirations

Maria Paola Ferretti And Paolo Magaudda
UNBO, University Of Bologna

Consumer Trust in Food -
A European Study of the Social and
Institutional Conditions for the Production of Trust[1]

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PREFACE

This report is a publication from Consumer Trust in Food. A European Study of the Social and Institutional Conditions for the Production of Trust. The TRUSTINFOOD project (2002-2004) is supported by the European Commission, Quality of Life and management of Living Resources Programme (QoL), Key Action 1 Food, Nutrition and Health (contract no. QLK1-CT-2001-00291). Unni Kjærnes at The National Institute for Consumer Research (SIFO) is responsible for coordinating the project.

On the basis of individual and institutional data, the study seeks to identify and analyse factors that determine trust in the food supply and in information sources. These factors include the roles of public authorities, consumer organisations, market actors, consumers, NGOs, etc. Representative surveys have been conducted in six countries, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Norway, and Portugal. Institutional studies have been carried out in the same countries and at the European level. By eventually bringing all these data together, we expect to achieve a systematic analysis of the institutional bases of consumer trust and distrust in food provision under varying conditions in contemporary Europe, including a critical analysis of alternative strategies for handling trust and distrust in the food system. More information and new publications are available on the project website: www.trustinfood.org.

This report presents data and analyses from studies at the institutional level in Italy. It belongs to a series of reports from each of the six countries and one concerning the European level. This report can be read independently. But together, the reports are also meant to provide a basis for the comparative institutional analyses. The research questions as well as the design and methodologies in these institutional studies have been closely coordinated throughout the process of data collection, analysis and writing. Responsible for this coordination have been the Danish partners: Lotte Holm at the Research Department for Human Nutrition, Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University (KVL) in Copenhagen and Bente Halkier at the Department of Communication, Roskilde University Centre (RUC). The various country teams in the TRUSTINFOOD project have contributed with long and intense discussions during a series of project meetings. In the final round, the full report drafts have been reviewed by Lotte Holm and Unni Kjærnes as well as by the responsible for each country team (Roberta Sassatelli). It must be emphasised, however, that the authors take full responsibility for the contents of this report.

We wish to thank all informants for their collaboration, stressing that while quoted extracts come from the interviews that they have kindly given us, we as authors are solely responsible for the interpretation and the overall structure of the argument in this country report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research presented here reveals that, in Italy, strategies for the production and the maintenance of consumer trust in food are characterised by a significant ambiguity. On the one hand, the traditional way of securing food quality and safety is to take refuge in the familiar – choosing local, natural, 'authentic' food. On the other hand, the further development of Italian agribusiness (one of the most important branches of the national economy) is dependent upon reaching new markets abroad. According to the National Sanitary Plan for 2002-2004, compliance with international standards of safety and quality, as specified by the SPS agreement of the WTO is a prerequisite for assuring consumer trust beyond national borders. Such compliance can only be achieved through technical innovation and logistic improvement. This tension between trust in the local and the need to gain trust globally appears as a distinguishing feature of food trust regimes in Italy.

The issue of quality – which occupies a dominant position in the national debate on food – is the common denominator of both strategies. Conveying the quality value of the Italian product to consumers is the strategy on which there is a remarkable degree of convergence amongst market actors, public authorities and consumer organisations. Indeed, developing an efficient system to guarantee the safety and quality of Italian-made products seems to be a common objective of all the actors included in the study

The analysis reveals that this can only be achieved by a policy of rigorous fraud prevention and containment of the hidden economy, since these are major obstacles to the production of trust in Italian food products both in Italy and abroad.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that a deficit in public accountability, transparency and openness is likely to be another source of consumer distrust. The consumer is a relatively new actor on the Italian scene. Endowed with little institutional power, consumers have recently emerged through the media and via EU recommendation as the subject of agri-food policy design and implementation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study presented here is part of the project "Trust in food. A European study of the social and institutional conditions for the production of trust" funded by the European Commission Research Directorate-General "Quality of Life and Management of Living Resources", Key Action 1 on "Food, Nutrition and Health". [1]

It was carried out in Italy starting in June 2002, and concluding in December 2003. Parallel studies have been carried out in the same time period in Norway, UK, Denmark, Germany and Portugal.

1.1 General objectives of the report

This study is intended as an enquiry into the structures and processes that characterise the trust regime on food in Italy. By trust regime we intend a system of specific connections between various actors, namely consumers, consumer associations, producers, retailers, scientists, public authorities and the media; institutionalised rules, that is norms, laws and regulations; technological equipment and material culture (farming equipment, distribution and farm facilities as well as specific notions and beliefs about nature, food and actors in the food chain).[2]

The aim of the project is, a) to chart the above mentioned dimensions of the trust regime on food with special attention to the changes in public regulatory policies at national level; b) to identify concerns and priorities among selected strategic actors in the food system;

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* *Acknowledgments: this country report draws on a series of documents and papers which have been written for, and presented in a number of research meetings during 2002 and 2003 and which are duly acknowledged in relevant sections of the writing. It has also benefited from discussions with all participants in the project during the meetings and from the feed-back received by Lotte Holm and Bente Halkier who coordinated the specific work package at the international level. Thanks are owed to Tim Cooper who contributed to the early collection of material about the Italian case, to Roberta Sassatelli who offered guidance and support during the collection and analysis of the data as well as the writing up of the report and, last but not least, to Jasper Chalcraft who has worked intensely on the draft report to ameliorate its style and intelligibility.*

[1] EU-contract number: QLK1-CT-2001-00291

[2] R. Sassatelli and A. Salvatore, *Discussion paper on the state of Art,* Bologna Trust in Food workshop 2002.

and c) to produce hypotheses on how better to identify the main strategies for the production and maintenance of trust.

Since the report is part of a wider study on the production of trust, we shall draw on the theoretical work prepared at previous stages of the project, and intend this report as material for further analysis on the production of consumer trust.[3]

The premises of the inquiry are that, i) the approach to trust and the conditions for the production of trust in food is a rational and partly institutionalised one[4]; ii) the understanding of institutional conditions for the production of trust in food combines structure, actor interaction and processual configurations between them[5]; the understanding of institutional conditions for the production of trust furthermore includes discursive constructions.[6]

The analysis will focus on five key issues, namely **quality, safety, nutrition**, **ethics** and **value for money**. We shall analyse how issues are related and sometimes entangled; how they are interpreted and problematised by different actors; how they are related to the challenge of maintaining, restoring and enhancing consumer trust. The actors considered will be **consumers, consumer associations, producers, manufacturers, retailers, food scientists, public authorities and the media**.

In order to focus our analysis two **case studies** were designed. The first concerns **beef**, which has been at the core of important food scandals in the 90s and at the centre of public debates on food and consumer concerns. The second case concerns **tomatoes**, which are normally considered a safe food, and have never been an object of controversy. Comparing and contrasting these two cases has been an important source of data.

1.2 Contents of the report

The report is divided into five Chapters. This **introductory Chapter** presents a brief overview of the Italian food system. It draws mainly on secondary literature and on a

[3]"Consumer Trust in Food" (A European Study of the Social and Institutional Conditions for the Production of Trust Funded by the European Commission "Quality of Life and Management of Living Resources", Key Action 1 on "Food, Nutrition and Health" EU-contract number: QLK1-CT-2001-00291).

[4]N. Elias, *What is Sociology?,* London, Hutchinsong, 1978; B. Miztal, *Trust in Modern Societies*, Cambridge, Polity, 1996; R. Sassatelli and A. Salvatore, *Discussion paper on the state of Art*, Bologna Trust in Food workshop, 2002.

[5]B. Halkier and L. Holm, *Discussion about country studies of institutional determinants for consumer trust*. Bologna Trust in Food workshop 2002; M. Harvey and A. Warde, *Towards a comparative institutional analysis of trust in food*. Bologna Trust in Food workshop, 2002.

[6]B. Halkier and L. Holm, *Discussion about country studies of institutional determinants for consumer trust*. Bologna Trust in Food workshop 2002

background document prepared at an early stage of the project, called 'Institutional mapping' as it charts the main features of public authorities, economic, civil society and scientific structures in the country. **Chapter 2** introduces the methodological tools used in gathering the data, analysing them and writing the report. Chapters 3-5 set out the data analysis.

In particular, **Chapter 3** addresses the question: What has the influence of the EU been in the Italian food system, with particular reference to institutional change and division of responsibility?

Chapter 4 addresses the issue of what strategies have been developed by different actors in order to maintain or restore consumer trust in food.

Chapter 5 focuses on the consumer and asks: What is the division of responsibility in relation to the consumer?

The report concludes with **Chapter 6** in which some general remarks on responsibility and trust regimes are presented. These remarks are intended as a possible starting point for further analysis.

1.3 An overview of the country

Italy has been a Constitutional Republic since 1948. The Treaty of Rome was signed nine years later and thus the Italian republic and the EC developed to a great extent at the same time.[7] Starting in the 50's the community legislation has progressively flown into the national system and modified the legislation of entire sectors, without affecting the main features of the political system, as the divisions between the legislative, executive and judicial powers have remained unchanged despite the existence of EU authorities.[8] Yet some observers note that "while the formal authority remains 'national' the effective control of the decisions lies elsewhere", that is to say at the supranational level.[9]

However along with the supranational authorities, also the local authority seems to have acquired greater political influence. Although the constitution made provision for giving legislative and administrative power to regions, it is only in the 70s that they started to function and only in the 90s that Law 142/90 initiated a politics of decentralisation of the

[7]Drawing on of article 11 of the Constitution, EU regulations take precedence over national (preceding and consequent) law and no as hoc constitutional amendment is necessary for this purpose.
[8]G. Grottanelli de Santi, "The impact of EC integration on the Italian form of Government", in F. Francioni, *Italy and EC Membership Evaluated*, London, Pinter, 1992: 182-189, p. 183.

functions of the State. The regions nowadays are the main channel through which EU directives and regulations are implemented in the country.[10]

Table 1: An overview of the country

System of Government	Executive branch**: Head of state: President Head of Government: Prime Minister (referred to in Italy as the president of the Council of Ministers) Cabinet: Council of Ministers nominated by the prime minister and approved by the president.** Legislative branch**: bicameral Parliament consists of the Senate or Senato della Repubblica (315 seats elected by popular vote) and the Chamber of Deputies or Camera dei Deputati (630 seats)** Judicial branch**: Constitutional Court or Corte Costituzionale, composed of 15 judges (one-third appointed by the president, one-third elected by Parliament, one-third elected by the ordinary and administrative supreme courts)**
Local Administrative Units	20 Regions 103 Provinces 8101 Local councils
Resident population	57,998,353 (July 2003 est.)
Population growth rate:	0.11% (2003 est.)
Labour force:	23 million ca.
Unemployment rates	8.7% (July 2002 est.)
Population employed in agriculture	5.3% of employed people (2000 est.)
Land	arable land: 31% permanent crops: 10% permanent pastures: 15% forests and woodland: 23% other: 21% (1993 est.)
Agricultural productions in the North	Grains, sugar beets, soybeans, meat, and dairy products.
Agricultural productions in the South	Fruits, vegetables, olive oil, wine, and durum wheat.
Added value food manufacturing	9% (1997ext.)
Employment in the food manufacturing sector	8% (1997 ext.)

Source: see details[11]

[9]G. Grottanelli de Santi, *The impact of EC integration on the Italian form of Government*, in F. Francioni, *Italy and EC Membership Evaluated*, London, Pinter, 1992: 182-189, p.189.

Every Italian region has a Regional Government, and normally also designates a geographically contiguous territory with a common history and cultural traditions, similar social and economic features. Each region presents its own peculiarities, but the differences that have been given more attention by scholars and observers are those between Northern regions and Southern regions. The North–South divide marks important economic, social and cultural cleavages that condition all aspects of life and therefore appears to be the most significant difference to be considered when studying Italy.

Indeed, after World War II Italy has developed from an agriculturally based economy into an industrial state ranked as the world's fifth-largest industrial economy. However, the country's economy remains divided into a developed industrial North, dominated by private companies and modern infrastructures, and a less developed agricultural South, with more than 20% unemployment.[12]

HIDDEN ECONOMY

The hidden or black economy, that is that part of the national economy which is based on clandestine work and illegal money transitions, constitutes a substantial part of the Italian economy. It is estimated that in Europe Italy is second only to Greece for the importance of hidden economy.

This phenomenon, though relatively high throughout Italy, is highest in the South (Calabria, 27.8% of workers are irregular) and lowest in the North (Emilia-Romagna, 10.4% of workers). In the South, this is worst in the agricultural sector. 38.4% of agricultural workers are irregular and in Calabria this rises to 46.6% - the highest in 1999.[13] This means that these non registered workers do not have regular contracts, paid holidays, health insurance and pension schemes, and don't pay income taxes.

CORRUPTION

Transparency International, an NGO working to fight corruption and foster

[10] L. Vandelli, *Il governo locale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000.
[11] Data on Government, administrative units, demography, use of land, unemployment rates are sourced from *CIA world factbook: Italy 2001*. Data on added values in food manufacturing and employment in the manufacturing sector are sourced from R. Fanfani, E. Montresor, F. Pecci (eds.) *Il settore agroalimentare italiano e l'integrazione europea*. Milano, Franco Angeli, 2001.
[12] *CIA world factbook: Italy 2001*, http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/it.html.
[13] ISTAT *Annual Report 2001*, p.170.

international transparency, annually prepares a report as an index of perceived corruption, where countries are ranked according to a score that relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen by business people, academics and risk analysts, and ranges between 10 (highly clean) and 0 (highly corrupt). In the *Corruption Perception Index 2003,* among 133 countries considered, Denmark is third with a score of 9.5, Sweden sixth (9.3), the UK eleventh (8.7), Germany sixteenth (7.7), Portugal twenty-fifth (6.6), and Italy thirty-fifth (5.3).[14]

THE AGRI-FOOD SYSTEM

In 1999, the importance of the SAA (Sistema Agro-alimentare, or agro-food system) was approx. 15.6% of GDP. Within this total, added value percentages were 16% for agriculture itself, 17% for the food processing industry, 14% for restaurants and catering and over 33% for food sales and distribution. The **food industry**, while spread over the country as a whole, **is concentrated in the North** which invoices 65% of the total turnover. **In the South the industrial infrastructure remains weak**, but the food industry is and has been a crucial development factor.

The food industry (again on 1999 data) consists of 61,000 companies and nearly half a million employees with 7% of the total industrial employment in the country.[15] After the mechanical and the textile sectors it is the most important branch of Italian economy, at least in terms of added value.[16]

The PMI (small and medium size enterprises) are the main subject of this industrialised sector and though the food chain is generally highly integrated[17], it presents many variations in its features from region to region. In Southern regions, and in particular in Calabria, the extreme fragmentation of the agribusiness is such that there is very little geographical integration; this results in scarce integration along the chain, each business follows strategies of self-subsistence, without a real synergy between the various levels of the chain.[18] This fragmentation, in the absence of leading industrial poles in the region, is

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[14]Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index 2003*: http://www.transparency.org/cpi/2003/cpi2003.en.html .
[15]R. Fanfani, E. Montesor, F.Pecci, *Il settore agroalimentare Italiano e l'integrazione Europea*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2001.
[16]R. Fanfani, E. Montesor, F.Pecci, *Il settore agroalimentare Italiano e l'integrazione Europea*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2001: 28.
[17]G. Fabiani, *L'agricoltura italiana nello sviluppo dell'Italia comunitaria*, In "Storia dell' Italia Repubblicana", Einaudi, Torino, 1995.
[18]RIS, *Ritratto della Calabria,* www.calnet.it/RIS.

the cause of a weakness of the links between the various levels of the food chain.[19] The productive infrastructure in the North presents a remarkably higher concentration and therefore enables a high integration in the food chain, which has been an important factor of development of the sector in these areas.[20]

The food system is characterised not only by an important number of PMI, but also by the concentration of specialised industries in some regions. For example in the beef sector, 50% of operators are concentrated in 10 provinces, mainly in the North.[21] This means that there are 'local systems' with corresponding agro-food districts and this gives rise to important differentiations both concerning products and local districts.

The territorial diffusion of **food manufacturing** is spectacular with over 7000 out of little more than 8000 local councils having at least one such firm. However, 50% of employees in the sector are concentrated in less than 15% of the local council areas and the Centre North regions have over 60% of the firms producing 80% of the added value of the industry total.

Many Italian firms in this sector in the 80s attempted to establish an oligopoly in their area. Barilla in pasta and Parmalat in milk products effectively achieved this aim. However, foreign multinationals have begun to enter the sector in a big way. Unilever in 1995 had a turnover of over 2 bn Euro and was second only in importance on the Italian market to the indigenous Parmalat. Nestle' approached 1.7 bn, followed by Bsn-Danone.

AGRICULTURE

Italy is the **second largest agricultural producer in Europe** contributing 17% of the value of final production in the EU, following only France with 23% and ahead of Germany (15%). If we consider the added value instead of production, the percentage increases and settles at a level similar to that of France.[22]

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[19]M. Leonardi e F. Lunati, *Rapporto Filiera Alimentare*, Enea-Nomisma, Progetto "Rilevamento elaborazione e analisi aggiornata e dettagliata di dati e statistiche relativi alla filiera agro-alimentare nel Mezzogiorno", Roma, 2000: 1-13.

[20]These data were confirmed during interviews with informants involved with innovation strategies in the Southern Regions, such as the stag of the technical and biotechnological department (Unità tecnico scientifica biotec) of the national institute ENEA, based in Rome.

[21]R. Fanfani, E.Montesor, F. Pecci, *Il settore agroalimentare Italiano e l'integrazione Europea*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2001: 43.

[22]R. Fanfani, E. Montesor, F. Pecci, *Il settore agroalimentare Italiano e l'integrazione Europea*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2001: 27-38

A key feature of Italian agriculture and food processing is the intense concentration of specific activities in often very small areas. In many cases over 50% of the value of national production in a single agricultural product is concentrated in not more than 5 provinces (out of 103).[23]

Also remarkable is the number of small farms on the territory. While there has been a big reduction in numbers of agricultural enterprises (farms) which are now below 3 million, the situation in Italy is in stark contrast to levels in Germany (1 million), France (1.2 million), and in Britain (less than 300,000).

According to the Provisional Results of the 5th General Census of Agriculture there were 2,611,580 agricultural, forestry and zoo-technical enterprises in Italy in 2000.[24] This means that with respect to the last census of 1990, there was a reduction of 13.6% in the number of farms.[25]

Employment in agriculture has passed from 43% of the population in the 1950s to less than 7% today but Italy is still way behind the levels of the UK (1.7%), in USA (2.8%) Germany (4.4%) and France (5.5%).[26] Immigrant labour, often irregular, plays an important part in the harvesting of fruit, tomatoes, tobacco and vegetables. Almost 50% of immigrant labour is located in the South.

RETAIL

Commercial activities represent an important branch of the Italian economy. Indeed, they provide 13.5% of added value to the economy, and employment for 15% of the workforce (data 1999).

There is a **strong predominance of small businesses**, although market concentration has increased remarkably in the last decade. Of the 700,000 retail enterprises, 100,000 are street vendors and that the vast majority of the rest are small (one or two persons) operations, mainly self-employed.[27]

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[23] For example, milk production, which is concentrated in Lodi, Cremona, Mantova, Parma, Reggio and Modena. Chicken farming is concentrated in just two provinces: Verona and Forli. Tomatoes are grown in Parma and Piacenza in the North (under cover) and in Naples and Puglia in the South. (see R. Fanfani, E. Montesor, F. Pecci, *Il settore agroalimentare Italiano e l'integrazione Europea*, Milano Franco Angeli, 2001.

[24] The census was completed in October 2000 and involved over 20,000 interviewers (5th Censimento dell'Agricoltura, ISTAT, 2001).

[25] 5th Censimento dell'Agricoltura, ISTAT 2001: 18.

[26] R. Fanfani, *L'agricoltura in Italia,* Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002: 13.

[27] L. Pellegrini, *Il commercio in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino 2001.

The fortune of small business has been a direct effect of **Law n.426/1971**, which gave to local councils the task of regulating the entry into in the market of commercial business, but required in addition a regional authorisation for opening supermarket and hypermarkets. This law aimed at restricting entrance into the market, so as to protect those who were already operating in the market. In 1998 the so called **Besani's Reform** (Law 114/1988) was an attempt to modernise and to some extent liberalise the retail system by giving to the regions competence in retail policy. Also, the consultative role of consumer groups was enshrined in the law in all decision-making procedures – though this still has to be rendered effective.[28]

Supermarkets and hypermarkets are increasingly popular; however **market concentration** is lower with respect to other European countries. Some 20 different chains have significant percentages of the business with the largest, Coop Italia, having only 13.5%. Foreign investment is becoming increasingly important with approximately 20% of the chains being owned by Carrefour and Auchan (France) and Metro and Lidl (Germany).[29]

Figures for 1999 had 58% of self-service selling space in Italy being represented by small surface area stores (up to 400 m2) as opposed to 35% in Germany and 20% in France. Also, with respect to Europe there were thus a very large number of points of sale per inhabitant (47 per 1000) compared to 13 in Britain and 21 in Spain and there are on average 140 square meters per 1000 inhabitants as opposed to 175 in Spain and 240 in France.

Only 10% of food and grocery space is in hypermarkets (compared to 40% in France). In 1997 there were 1,985 Discount stores, 190 Hypermarkets, 6,280 supermarkets, 5,633 superettes[30] and 96,729 'other' stores selling food and groceries, where 'other' refers to butchers, greengrocers, bakeries etc.[31]

THE CONSUMER: PURCHASING FOOD AND EATING

From the data reported below and sourced from the National Institute for Statistics, the **organisation of the household in Italy is rather traditional:** women are normally in charge of shopping and cooking, and meals are normally consumed at home.

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[28]L. Pellegrini, *Il commercio in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino 2001: 46.
[29]L. Pellegrini, *Il commercio in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino 2001: 85.
[30]Stores with less than 200 m² of floor space.

In contrast to northern Europe, the main meal of the day in Italy, as in previous years, continues to be lunch (69.9%) though this is part of a diminishing trend (down from 78.2% in 1993). Moreover most of these meals are consumed at home.[32]

The figures for those who eat in a school canteen or at their place of work, though rising, are still low (11.6% in 1993 to 13.3% in 2000) while those who eat lunch in a restaurant, or sandwich bar are still only around 4% (these figures regard what people see themselves as 'generally' doing at lunch).

In the year 2000, the amount spent on food by type of person varied from the 13.2% of monthly expenditure of singles under 35, to the 22.2 % of income for couples over 65 years of age without children.[33]

Data from the *Osservatorio Consumi*[34] (for 2001) indicate that supermarkets and hypermarkets together now represent 58.6% of total food expenditure locations. Nevertheless, traditional small shops continue to represent significant percentages of food-buying locations for specific products such as meat and eggs (33.8%), fish (32.3%) and bread and cereals (46.1%). The majority of meat and vegetable purchases take place in Super or Hyper markets (53.4% and 47.2% respectively). Also, a recent survey shows that the same percentage of Italians (53%) states that they have trust in supermarkets and small shops selling agricultural products, whilst the percentage that states having little trust is 33% for supermarkets and 35% for small shops.[35]

Organic consumption accounts for little less than 1% of the total household expenditure on food.[36]

According to the EFTA Report 1995, Italian ethical consumption per capita amounted to the 0,2% of the per capita income, and a similar situation was recorded in Sweden and Norway. Switzerland presents a very high rate (5%), UK, France and Spain (0,4).[37] However it is estimated that fair trade consumption is increasing to a rate of 20% each year.[38]

[31]Pellegrini, *Il commercio in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2001.
[32]ISTAT, *Stili di vita e condizioni di salute, Indagine multiscopo su 'Aspetti della vita quotidiana 2000,* 2001.
[33]Istat, *L'Italia in Cifre*, 2002.
[34]Osservatorio Consumi, *La spesa domestica per i prodotti alimentari Panel Famiglie*, 20 October 2001.
[35]ISPO, *Le opinioni degli Italiani sull'alimentazione, Forum Internazionale dell'agricoltura e dell'alimentazione*. Cernobbio, 25 and 6 October 2002: 3.
[36]R. Zanoli, University of Ancona: http://www.organic-europe.net/country_reports/italy/default.asp.
[37]Efta, *Rapporto sul commercio equo*, CTM, Bolzano, 1995.
[38]A. Perna, *Fair Trade*, Torino, Bolatti e Boringhieri, 1998: 91.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS

Participation in non-Governmental organisations and civic associations is small in Italy, and consumer associations are no exception. Recently there has been an increased participation in protest movements, especially linked to the G8 in Genova and the Firenze Social Forum in November 2002.[39]

Regional differences are significant also in this respect. In Emilia-Romagna 42.3% of the population in 2000 said they sought information on politics daily whereas the lowest percentage was in Campania with 16.8% and (18.5% in Calabria, where 30% said they never listened to news on politics).[40]

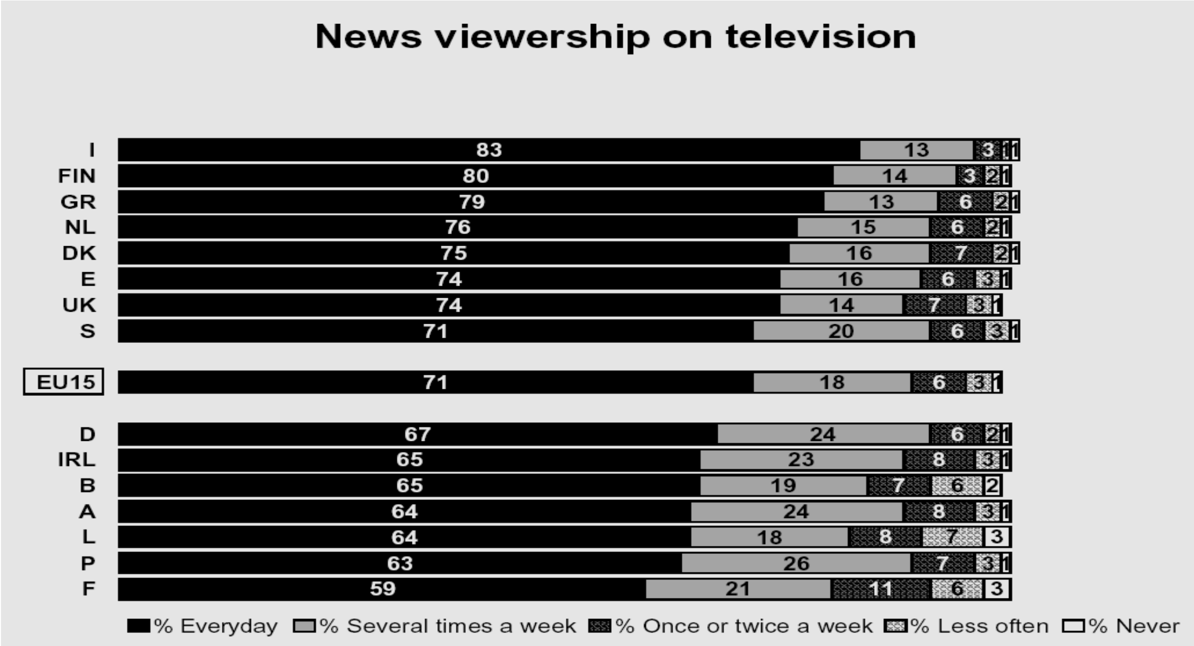
Such political indifference is probably reflected also in the figures of participation in consumer associations' activity and seems to be a common characteristic of Mediterranean countries. A report by INRA in 1999 on 'Europeans and consumer associations' clearly demonstrates that Italy, together with Spain and Greece, has some of the lowest figures in regard to knowledge and membership of consumer associations (though these were not high throughout Europe).[41]

THE MEDIA

Television appears to be by far the most important medium for the transmission of information in Italy - 97.7% of families having a TV (more than those having a phone line) while those having a computer are only 27.2% and of these only 14% have an Internet connection. Television is the most important media through which Italians receive news, well above the European average, as it is shown by Eurobarometer data.

[39]The European Social Forum (Firenze, November 2002) is probably the greater civil society mobilisation in the last years: more than 30.000 activists discussed during the three days of conferences and debates issue of globalisation, ecology, poverty, biotechnologies. More than half million of people took part in the final street demonstration which concluded the Forum (data from *La Repubblica*, 2-7 november, 2002).
[40]See, 'Social Participation', ISTAT Annual report 2001.

Figure 1: News viewership on television



Source: Eurobarometer 54, 2000

Newspapers are largely regional in Italy (though a number are owned by a small number of editorial groups), each large town having its own, though some broadsheets can claim semi-national coverage via the use of local inserts (i.e. Il *Corriere della Sera and La Repubblica*).

The impartiality and informativeness of the media system in Italy has been the subject of some international concern over recent years (the Council of Europe sent observers during the last elections) as a result of the fact that the market is dominated by 3 public channels (RAI) and by 3 private national channels (Rete 4, Canale 5 and Italia 1) of the Mediaset Group, whose major stockholder is Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. This situation represents an open violation of the antitrust law Law 249/97. Today (November 2003) the Italian civil and politic spheres are involved in an animated discussion in order to approve a new reform of the Italian media system, which will include television assets.

PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

As we shall discuss in Chapter 3, in Italy the public authorities and institutions acting in the food sector are many and not always easily identifiable. In Italy, food safety and quality is, in part under the competence of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, in part of the Ministry of Health. The Treasure supervises the financial aspects of the food industry, and

[41]Eurobarometer 51.1, Europeans and Consumer Associations Report by INRA (Europe), 19 July 1999

the Ministry of Education co-operates with the other competent authorities in campaigns regarding nutrition and consume education. In addition regions play an important role both in agriculture and health policy, which implies responsibility in food policy. Many local administrative and scientific bodies cooperate with the Ministries and the regions. Yet the way in which cooperation is organised between these different administrative and political levels will be one of the main objects of our analysis.

SCIENTIFIC EXPERTS

Scientific experts operate at many levels within the system. Nutritionists, chemists and veterinaries are hired by food producers, as well as by public bodies with various competences in food safety control and research, as we shall see in Chapter 3. In particular, The Ministry of Agriculture is supported by its subordinate institutes (10 in the national territory), which deal with the various aspects of agrarian research (zoo-technology, plant pathology, fruit growing, horticulture, cereal growing, viticulture, citrus-fruit growing, food preserves, mechanisation and so on.

The following are the main institutions where (or through which) scientists operate: the ISS, or Central Institute for Health; the INRAN (Istituto nazionale ricerca alimentare, or National institute for food research); and the CNR (National centre for research). These institutes are independent from the Government from the scientific, administrative and financial point of view. They act as advisors for the competent authorities, but also have the task of initiating independent research projects, education campaigns, and publishing guidelines, on, for example, how to improve health conditions or eating habits. Universities cooperate with these institutes, the Ministries and the food industry on the basis of specific projects.

1.4 The North and the South: Emilia Romagna and Calabria

During research design, it was expected that the federalist trend in agricultural policy (see *chap.3* for more details), along with the historical and cultural differences that characterised the two areas of the country, would have justified a special focus on two regional realities; thus according to this logic the regions Emilia-Romagna, in the North, and Calabria, in the South are taken as a sample. The North–South divide marks important economic, social and cultural cleavages that condition all aspects of life and therefore appears to be the most significant difference that must be considered when studying Italy. The geographic distinction North-South is thus used as an ideal container for many other differences (all relevant to the proposed analysis) that will be described in what follows. In order to give an account of these differences, the case study research will take into consideration two regions, selected as representatives of these differences. Particularly, the selection aims at accounting for the following factors:

- *Geography*: Together with the symbolic meaning of representing the whole set of differences, the North – South distinction carries also more substantial, and literally *geographical* differences that must be taken into consideration in our study. That is, the two selected regions give an account of differences regarding territory, soil characteristics and climate, the different relative centrality of the major cities in the country, communication and transport.
- *History:* The socio-economic divide North–South also reflects the history of the regions, characterised in the South by a series of invasions and foreign domination from medieval times up to the unification of Italy in 1886. Southern regions were for centuries part of the *Regno delle due Sicilie*, where the legitimate authority was monopolised by the king, and people were regarded as subjects rather than citizens, and this has been to the detriment of a sense of responsibility, mutual assistance and civic obligation among the vast majority of citizens. In the North all these virtues were strengthened by the experience of communal republicanism in the fourteenth century.[42] Since Southern regions became part of the Italian State at the end of the nineteenth century, development has been slow, marked by several political and strategic mistakes both on the part of local administration and Government planning.
- *Economic development:* The South is generally regarded as backwards with respect to the North. The disadvantaged condition of the South is reflected mainly in unemployment figures (official unemployment rates are extremely high in Calabria (29% ca.), especially concerning young peoples' unemployment, and very low in Emilia-Romagna (2.5% ca.). Moreover the slow implementation of innovative technology, the lack of development of social and economic infrastructures and high emigration rates mark the gap between the two areas. The *economic* infrastructures in Emilia-Romagna are amongst the most developed of the country, while Calabria remains one of the least developed areas.[43] The food chain in Emilia-Romagna is

[42]C. Cipolla, *Before the Industrial Revolution*, London, Methuen: 148.
[43]Emilia-Romagna is the fourth national producer of beef, with 700 animal units. Farming is linked to an important development of industrial slaughter, concentrated in the Modena area. The major slaughter group

normally highly integrated; agriculture is intensive and large manufactures have grown together with producers. In Calabria, by contrast, producers are extremely small and serve mainly local markets. Additionally, according to ISTAT data, one of the persistent problems in the South is the hidden or black economy. In the South, an estimated 22.6% of all working units operate outside the frameworks of fiscal and social security rules. Irregular contracting also means irregular conditions of work, violation of set standards for working hours, paid holidays, security rules, and labour law in general. The general economic situation is also reflected in the consumption attitudes of families living in different regions, which should be considered in our study together with the economic indices on the food market and the trust of people in official controls of food safety and quality in areas were many food production and transformation enterprises operate unofficially.

- *Institutional performance*: On the one hand, public power has been the main engine of social change in Southern Italy during the last 50 years.[44] This is to say that most of the development projects and funding arises from public initiative; that state and local administration absorb a very large part of the labour force; and that citizens expect innovative solutions to emerging problems to come from the public authority. On the other hand, it appears that the *success* of local governments in their role as problem-solvers and service-providers is much greater in the North than in the South. Indicators of success are, for example, the fulfilment of avowed political goals (such as effectively providing various services for citizens), pioneering on the implementation of innovative laws, the bureaucratic responsiveness to citizens' needs. According to these standards, Robert Putnam has observed that regions in the South demonstrate less institutional performance than those in the North.[45] This difference is an important element in the analysis of the role of the public institutions in the food sector, the control of industries, the incidence of frauds to the damage of the EU etc.
- *Civic Involvement*: Robert Putnam identifies a significant difference between regions of the North and regions of the South with respect to civic activities. In the North there is a

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is Cremonini with 51 firms, 1300 employees, and about 750 million Euro turnovers. The production of tomatoes is concentrated in the provinces of Parma and Piacenza and represents one of the largest contributions to the national production. Also Calabria produces tomatoes, which are the main ingredients of typical products such as tomato jam and dried tomatoes. The traditional preparation of conserves, which used to be strictly for use in the family, is progressively transforming into an important economic sector with small and medium-sized enterprises. In Italian beef production Calabria occupies the 10th position, with 2.6% of the national production.

[44] P. Bevilacqua, *Breve Storia dell'Italia Meridionale*, Roma, Doninzelli, 1993: 122.

[45] R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work,* NY, Princeton University Press, 1994: 63-82.

wide participation of citizens in local associations and public debates, and most citizens in those regions keep themselves informed on community affairs through the local press. Moreover, Putnam remarks a different quality of electoral turnout. This means that not only more people vote, but also that their vote seems to be less connected with the expectation of personal favours in exchange for electoral support.[46] In the inquiry on trust and food consumption these factors are relevant insofar as they mark a different problematisation of the issues at stake by civil society, a different impact of consumer organisations, and an unequal level of attention to scandals and media reports on food safety and quality issues.

Given these profound differences between the two regions we expected important differences in the strategies used by actors in order to maintain, restore or reinforce trust. In fact, these differences were found to be not as relevant as expected. The structural disadvantages in the South are reflected also in the ways people approach food issues, but we did not find huge gaps in the ways in which distrust is handled. The differences, as we shall see, concern measures, quantities, extent, and implementation time, but not the quality of the strategies deployed in response to the anxiety towards food. Both in North and South the need for being trusted on the international market and the habits to trust locally appear as the main feature of the food regime. In the South the need for technological innovation and logistical development is evident and pressing, and the dependence on public subsidies and investments is more prominent. However, as will be discussed in this report, people's demands regarding food, and the responses both from the public and the private sector, follow rather similar patterns both in the North and in the South of the country.

[46]R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work,* NY, Princeton University Press, 1994: 95.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Overall approaches

The two approaches set[47] to frame the data analysis build on social constructivist epistemology: *societal analysis*[48] and *discursive framing.*[49]

Following the society analysis approach, in order to understand and explain a complex phenomenon such as the 'institutional conditions of trust' one should look at the constitutive parts of such phenomenon across traditional analytical spheres, such as 'the political', 'the economic' and 'the social'. There is thus, in this approach a focus on interaction between the actors in the society, spaces in the society (e.g. contexts) and between 'actors' and 'spaces'. Accordingly we shall look at relations between food sector actors and different institutionalised 'spaces' and the institutionalisation processes of the food system.

The discursive framing approach starts from the assumption that different actors produce different interpretations on food issues. For example, on which actions are required facing a perceived risk issue. These interpretations are influenced by the preconceptions and interests of each actor, as well as by the broader discursive repertoires which actors draw upon in their argumentations, in order to frame their definition of problems. This approach is an appropriate tool to focus in on the actors' definitions of the problems relating to food issues.

2.2 Key operational issues

The data collection has been organised along three dimensions:

- The social distribution of responsibility for the following key issues: ethics, nutrition, quality, safety and value for money
- The institutionalisation of the consumer: what is the institutional place of the consumer? What are the legal provisions for consumer action? How is the

[47]See B. Halkier, L. Holm and T. Mohl, *Institutional determinants of consumer trust in Food*, TIF workshop in Copenhagen.
[48]M. Maurice and A. Sorge, *Embedding organisations. Societal analysis of actors, organisations and Socio-Economic Context,* Amsterdam, J.Benjamins Publisher Company, 2000.
[49]P. McNaghten and J. Urry, *Contested Natures*, London, Sage, 1998.

consumer thought of: as a citizen, as a shopper, as a chooser in the free market, as a co-producer?

- The institutionalisation of distrust that is the strategy to face deficit of trust (openness, safety control, precautionary principle, public accountability and so on...)

2.3 Institutional mapping and case histories

The first task of the **institutional mapping** was to establish who is responsible for what concerning the five issues (ethics, nutrition, quality, safety and value for money). A preliminary document was prepared in order to chart the main features of the agro-food system in Italy. Drawing mainly on secondary literature, an account of the public institutions dealing with the five key issues, of the economic situation of the country, of the sphere of the media and the features of the average Italian consumer was given. A **chronology** listing the main events concerning food issues was also prepared in order to better locate, in time, documents for analysis and actors' statements.

Moreover **two case histories** have been designed to focus the analysis on the informal relations between actors and their strategic discursive constructions and the media constructions related to the selected issues. The two cases have focused on two particular food sectors: beef and tomatoes. The questions that we have asked in each of these cases are: i) which issues are defined as problems in relations to the 5 key issues? ii) What are the strategies for the solutions to these problems?; and iii) What are the main turning points for the definition of problems and strategies for solution? These questions have been answered mainly by using data from interviews, text analysis and media analysis.

Mapping, chronology and case histories constitute the background materials that we used for the analysis presented in this report.

2.4 Text Analysis

The documents considered include policy documents, statistics, media reports, reports from other research projects, position documents, and transcripts of discussions in parliament and in Regional council formal meetings (giunte Regionali). Concerning public authorities we privileged parliamentary discussions on food issues such as biotechnologies, BSE eradication plans, nutrition, and organic products. This was particularly useful to look at the different ‘voices’ contributing to the decisions that have resulted in the national normative on food. Some statistics as well as project descriptions and reports were made available to us by scientific institutions, whilst private actors preferred to give us material prepared for the public (such as documents with statements on safety and quality, or position papers on GM food), or texts prepared by some of their representatives for conferences and public meetings. We analysed some position documents on the White Book on Food Safety and on Agenda 2002 produced by some category associations (consumer associations, primary producers associations, trade organisations). For all these documents we annotated the main themes and issues using a system of coding. This has made it possible to compare the various documents and extract from them the recurring themes that have thus formed the basis for the report.

Access to documents was not always easy, as a great part of materials was not available on the web or in public libraries. For statistics, we relied mainly on official statistics of the ISTAT (National Institute for Statistics) annual reports. More specific data on beef and tomatoes were found via publications of technical institutes such as the INEA (National Institute for Agricultural Economics). The available statistics are often heterogeneous and therefore difficult to compare, and specific data often are not accessible via web databases. Personal contacts were the most helpful way to get hold of these materials. The difficulties in data access reflect the general structure of the public authorities which, as will be discussed in *Chapter 3*, is pyramidal and little disposed for communication among the various hierarchical levels, and especially with outside bodies, such as scientific institutions.

2.5 Key informants interviews

The list of key informants was devised so as to gather information and to gain an understanding on how consumer trust/distrust is embedded in the social context and the institutional conditions within which the various actors operate. The initial idea was also to supplement through interviews the lack of data due to the difficulties in accessing documents not intended for the public (see the above section on documentary analysis). Indeed the interviews also revealed themselves as useful also for gathering documents.

We have sought to give accounts of:

- The five actors’ categories by interviewing 2 or 3 informants for each actors’ group

- The North-South Regional variation by interviewing people mainly in the Regions of Emilia-Romagna and Calabria. In Emilia-Romagna appointments were easier to fix as our department is based in the centre of Bologna, the main town in this Region. Thus both personal networks and a greater flexibility in arranging interview times have facilitated these contacts.
- The five key issues, trying to fix appointments with people responsible for different food issues. Thus we knew in advance that some informants will be more concerned with nutrition (such as people responsible for food education), others with ethics (such as some environmental associations), and others with safety (such as control bodies). Yet the interview analysis takes into account these interests and evaluates the relative weight of each issue for the various actors accordingly.

Unfortunately not all our desiderata could be satisfied. From the original list, which included health authorities at national level, we had to switch to the Regional level as it has proved impossible to arrange interviews with people in high positions at national level. As will be discussed later on in the report, this is a symptom of how difficult it is for the general public to get in touch with public authorities. Also at the local level, it has been mostly the people working in technical offices that have agreed to an interview, whilst people with more representative-political roles have been more difficult to approach. As regards the private sector, it was easier to interview people that we could reach through a personal network, and they often have chosen to have us to talk to their public relation officers, sometimes paired with people in charge for quality policies. We did not interview any representative from the media. We approached the journalist team of a popular television programme on consumer issues but we did not manage to arrange an interview. However we recorded one programme on the night they were discussing hormones in beef.

The actual list of interviewees (about 25) included:

- CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS: An interview with consumer associations representatives (public relation officers, food issue officer, project managers); two representatives of the Slow Food Association (one for Calabria and one for Emilia-Romagna); a representative of Green Peace (food issues officer); the coordinator of a buying group (organic and ethic food).

- FOOD MANIFACTURERS AND RETAILERS: A representative of a supermarket chain (quality department); two representatives of a self-service restaurant chain (public relations officer and representative of quality department); a representative of a slaughter house; a representative of the food market of Bologna; a representative of small food manufacturers (artigiani) in Calabria.

- PUBLIC AUTHORITIES: a representative of the agriculture department of Emilia-Romagna, a councillor for Food Education in Emilia Romagna, a representative of the health department of the Region of Calabria dealing with veterinary issues, two municipal councillors responsible, respectively, for environment and trade in Calabria.

- CONTROL AND CERTIFICATION BODIES: a representative of the Institute for Fraud Repression; the president of a biological control agency in Emilia Romagna; a representative of a control body on tomato preserves in Calabria.

- SCIENCE INSTITUTES: Two representatives of the technological innovation centre ENEA (a chemist; a veterinary).

- FARMERS: Two representatives of the primary producers association Coldiretti in Emila-Romagna (public relations officer and food education campaign officer); a representative of the primary producers CIA in Calabria; the president of the organic producer's political lobby Qualità Italia.

Interviews took place in an office chosen by informants at their work place, were tape recorded and eventually analysed. Due to problems with funding transferral (and thus unavailability of funding for contracting staff for transcripts) only some of the analysis could be done on the basis of fully written transcripts. In other cases only relevant parts were transcribed after listening several times to the recorded tape.

Interviews were conducted following an open interview method, which invites informants to express themselves in narrative structures. Different questions were tailored for each informant. However all interviews opened with asking informants about their role in the organisation in which they work, their task and responsibility. From that we tried to initiate a conversation on what food issues informants considered a priority (e.g. more worrying, which deserves more attention); how they and their organisation experienced the food crises of the 90s; which strategies were used by their organisation to face those crises; how they evaluated the strategies used by other organisations (public or private) facing the same circumstances; how they evaluated the role of the EU concerning food issues and regulations. Moreover we tried to ask for statements on how informants perceive issues regarding organic food, GM food, environmental sustainability, animal welfare and, most importantly the role of the consumer and consumer associations.

The analysis proceeded by isolating from the interview some themes such as “relevance of typicality”, or “lack of coordination” that were used as codes. In this way we had an overview of the interview and a list of the main themes and definition offered by the interviewees. The use of coding facilitated the work of comparing various interviews, searching for recurring themes, reflecting on the relations between the various issues and the similarities and differences in which the various informants approached the different issues. Notes on these observations were made and then confronted with notes from document analysis and the institutional mapping prepared on the basis of secondary literature. Some tables, or matrices, were produced in order to chart the recurring definitions of the five issues by the different categories of actors. Reflecting on these matrices has been the first input in defining priorities on themes to be treated in this report (see *section 2.7*).

2.6 Media text analysis

A further important tool of this research is the analysis of mass media representation of food issues, and in particular of the media coverage of the two BSE scandals in 1996 (the UK crisis and its reflection on our national level) and in 2001 (the discovery of the first autochthonous ‘mad’ cow). The two parts of the media analysis - general food issues representation and scandals coverage – have different purposes. In the first case, the main point is to find out what sort of food representation is presented in the public sphere and, consequently, what the main values, issues and questions related with food that attract media organizations and the audience are.

The second part of the analysis focuses on the coverage of two BSE scandals in 1996 and 2001. These analyses are aimed at understanding how media mechanisms influenced the ‘construction’ of the social crisis and how food actors entered into the public debate in order to present their own discourses. Additionally, a further purpose was to identify the discursive strategies which different actors produced in order to reassure the public opinion and to drive the public toward an interpretation of these events. Some of these questions will be considered in a greater depth in *sections 5.5* and *5.6.*

Media analysis was done by sampling articles of one of the two main Italian daily newspapers, La Repubblica.[50] This is an independent (i.e. not associated with a political

[50]The most important general Italian newspapers are two and their daily sales do not exceed one million copies: Il Corriere della Sera (based in Milan) and La Repubblica (based in Rome). Their daily circulation

party) newspaper which reaches a broad public. For the routine coverage of food issue, the sampling was effectuated over a period of 6 months (April-September 2002) and consisted of about 120 articles. As regards the two BSE scandals, sampling was realised over a period of 2 weeks for each crisis. Eventually, the articles were analysed in relation to the five main food issues, and by specifically considering the representations and the discourses of the main food actors.

Even if this analysis is only partially presented here, it was in fact very useful for gaining a clearer idea of the importance and the relevance of food questions in the public sphere. Thus, it was a helpful preliminary tool for many parts of this report.

2.7 Setting priorities

From the preliminary analysis prepared from document analysis, key informant interviews, and media analysis we identified the issues and the strategies that have priority for the actors, along the lines indicated by the 3 key operational issues illustrated in *section 2.2*. In this way we could better identify lines of enquiry that we thought could help us in providing a better picture of trust regimes in Italy. Thus, for example, the prominence of an interest in quality was immediately striking, and thus it has been appropriate to analyse this issue in a greater depth. Eventually the relationships between quality and the other four issues in the agents' discursive versions became the core of *Chapter 4*, which deals with strategies for restoring and maintaining trust. Another recurring theme was that of the lack of coordination and clarity in the division of tasks and responsibility, and therefore this issue has been explored in *Chapter 3*. Analogously, the passive role of the consumer deserved special attention and we deal with it in *Chapter 5*. Other themes, such as the division of responsibility concerning ethics, are important and interesting, but less relevant in illustrating characteristics of trust regimes in the country. These may become the object of further study, but in the present report occupy a more modest space.

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reached in 2001 respectively 700.000 and 645.000 (source: Federazione Italiana Editori Giornali: www.Fieg.it.

3. THE EU IMPULSE TO CHANGE

It is widely acknowledged that the most striking feature of the Italian institutional settings is complexity, and this concerns both the public sector (political authorities and control bodies) and the economic structure of the agro-food sector.[51] This chapter will start with charting this complexity, both drawing on secondary literature and analysing text documents and key informants statements on this subject.

As regards the public sector, responsibility on food quality and safety is highly decentralised amongst a multitude of bodies, institutes, councils and committees at national, Regional and municipal level, so that the boundaries of responsibility are extremely fluid.

The private sector responds to this lack of coordination with self-regulation in some cases (especially larger producers as we shall see in this chapter), or reacts as the victim of system which is too complex (this is normally the case of smaller producers).

The EU has been a major motor of reform and innovation in the Italian food sector. However, it seems that substantial reforms are needed in order to develop a national food safety system that is adequate to the current EU policy, with particular regard to the creation of a European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) in the near future, which will require the harmonisation of food authorities in all the member countries.[52]

3.1 Public authority and responsibility on food

The system of public control is one of **the most complex and fragmented in the EU**. This involves high complexity in the distribution of tasks and responsibility, but also remarkable costs, both in administration and in management, for the public administration and the food industry.

Indeed there is not in Italy an institution such as the Food and Drugs Administration responsible for consumer interests in the US. As was seen in the introduction, **the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Ministry of Health share the responsibility on food quality and safety**. Citizens' safety (but not exclusively food safety) is under the competence of a cross-institutional body, the National Sanitary Service

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[51] R. Fanfani, *L'agricoltura in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000.

(SSN). The Treasury supervises the financial aspects of the food industry, and the Ministry of Education co-operates with the other competent authorities in campaigns regarding nutrition and consumer education. Consumer protection is under the responsibility of the Ministry for productive activities (Consumer Protection directorate). The Directorate was established in 1997 in order to consolidate and coordinate consumer policies

Despite some legislative initiatives (e.g. Presidential Decree of 14 July 1995) towards the simplification and harmonisation of the control systems, a shared responsibility between national and local authority adds to the system complexity. The **progressive and rapid 'Regionalisation'** of the country in legal, structural and economic terms is such that over 50% of the income of Regional councils is now sourced locally (local taxes, etc.). Health service, and retail planning are localised (for instance councils decide on local planning permission for supermarkets) as well as agriculture, which is mainly a matter for Regional policy - agricultural subsidies come from the Regions as do plans on rural development, employment, etc…

This progression towards handing power to the Regions has been far from smooth, and many Regional Governments are well behind schedule in promulgating the legal instruments which would give the power to make the structural changes required by national law on the basis of local income.

The proliferation of EU legislation on foodstuffs in recent years has aggravated the problem. To give an example, EU inspections carried out in winter 2003 - in order to assess the arrangements put in place to implement the EU requirements for contingency plans for the major epizootic diseases - registered that the awareness of the action required for an effective response to veterinary emergencies were very different between Regions.[53] This is because the central competent body (the Ministry of Health) does not have the **legal authority to audit** the implementation of the measures required by the EU (e.g. contingency plans), which are under the competence of Regions. As a consequence, there are different Regional plans and manuals in place, which have not been notified to either the central authority, nor to the Commission.

Hence the security measures adopted may present **remarkable variations from Region to Region**. This increases the difficulties in charting the structure of the institutional

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[52]S. Cassese (ed.) *Per un'autorità nazionale della Sicurezza Alimentare*, Milano, Il Sole 24 Ore, 2001.
[53]See for example the inspection concerning the contingency plans for foot-and-mouth disease, classical swine fever and bluetongue DG(SANCO)\9078\2003\MR: http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/inspections/vi/reports/italia/vi_rep_ital_9078-2003_en.pdf.

structure of food safety and quality in Italy. Indeed the evaluation of the EU Commission Foodstuff Assessment Team in 1995, concluded that the Italian public control system is very complex and there seems to be an overlap of responsibilities between the various bodies in charge of food safety and quality control. [54] It is difficult to disagree with this judgement. However, the following is an attempt to map these responsibilities.

The safeguarding of food safety relies mainly on **the official control activity** performed by i) the Sanitary Authorities, ii) the Technical Agencies and iii) the Repressive agencies. These agencies are distributed at the central and the local level.

i) The **sanitary authorities** include: the Ministry of Health with its central and local offices, and by the Regional authorities and Autonomous Provinces through their local bodies (LHU Prevention Departments, Istituti Zooprofilattici Sperimentali or IZP, Local Prevention Bodies or PMPs, Regional Authorities for Environment Protection or ARPAs) and the Municipalities. Within the Ministry, food safety (included the whole veterinary planning and the management of peripheral offices) is completely dealt with by the Department for Food, Nutrition and Veterinary Public Health. Agricultural products are also under the competence of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MiPaf), which operates through its Central Inspection Service for Fraud Repression. The Treasury has important tasks in the control of financial matters concerning food products.

ii) **Technical institutes** include, first of all, the Istituto Superiore della Sanità (ISS), which is a scientific consulting body in the field of health policy. It performs analytical checks and technical examinations of patents and projects, it draws up technical provisions for drugs, foodstuffs, products and activities in the hygiene and health fields, promotes and organises meetings and technical-scientific training courses for health operators. Moreover the Istituto di Ricerca per gli Alimenti e la Nutrizione (National Institute for Nutrition) has the specific task of collaborating with the ISS on food quality and safety, information dissemination, and education on these topics. These tasks are fulfilled in collaboration with University based research centres.

The Istituti Zooprofilattici Sperimentali are regional and interregional agencies set up as instrumental agencies by the Government. They carry out veterinary experiments, and monitor the state of health animal and safety of food of animal origin. Finally, under the

[54]DG SANCO, European Commission Foodstuffs Assessment Team. *Results of the evaluation of the official foodstuffs control system in Italy*", 5 March, 1995.

aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture there are twenty-two scientific institutions for research and experimentation in the agrarian sector (Istituti di ricerca e sperimentazione agraria).

iii) **Repressive tasks** in Italy are under the responsibility of the police. The Carabinieri NAS (Anti-adulteration and Health divisions) are specialised police departments for the control of health and hygiene, under direct dependence of the Health Ministry. Intra-Community trade is dealt with by the Veterinary Offices for the Enforcement of EU provisions (UVACs), also dependent on the Ministry of Health. The control on imported foodstuffs is carried out by the Border Inspection Posts and Harbour or Airport Inspection Offices, which are health bodies directly dependent on the Ministry of Health. The Central Inspection Service for Fraud Repression (ICRF) of the Ministry of Agriculture is the competent authority for administrative sanctions, according to the normative on agricultural matters.

Table 2: Food agencies and bodies

Agency	Central	Peripheral
Ministry of Health	**DANSPV** (Dep. of food nutrition and veterinary public health) **ISS** (National Institute for Health) **NAS** (Sanitary Police Central Coordination office)	-**USMA** (Offices for **maritime and air safety**) -**PIF** (**Border inspection** post) -**UVAC** (Office for the implementation of EU regulation- **frauds against the EU**) -**NAS** (Sanitary police peripheral offices- **anti sophistication**)
Ministry of Agricultural Policies and Forestry	**ICRF** (Central Institute for Fraud Repression)	**ICRF** (Peripheral offices- **frauds**)
Ministry of Finance	**D.G. Costume** Finance Police	**Costume Chemical Lab**. (**chemical analysis**)
Ministry of Productive Activities		**UPICA** (Local offices for industry, **trade and crafts - financial matters, technical support** **logistic support**)
Region		-**ASL** (Local sanitary units - **human health**) -**SIAN** (National Agriculture **Information System**) -**IZS** (Zooprofilactic institutes- **veterinary health**) -**ARPA** (Regional authority for **environmental protection**) -**PMP** (Local services for prevention of **biotossicology**)

Table 3 summarise the different food safety control tasks, as divided between central and peripheral offices. However all the listed agencies and bodies have quite wide reaching tasks, often overlapping with those of others, so that locating responsibilities and coordinating activities is often very difficult.

A research promoted by the Teta[55] (Italian centre "From farm to fork") identifies four main structural weaknesses of the control system:

- The network between various control agencies it is rather loose and integrated co-operation difficult. This gave rise to the inefficiency of repeated and overlapping control.

- Records often exist only in writing, without IT support.

- The divulgation of information between agencies is very limited

- Control results are not available to the public as a form of public guarantee.

All this calls for the need of territorial coordination of the control bodies in order to further develop synergies and co-operation.

Despite this evidence, in our interviews we encountered a difficulty in critically discussing the problem, both from part of the public authority and from economic operators of the sector. The predominant attitudes are either to **deny the problem** and to claim that in fact co-operation and synergy exist, or rather are prepared to denounce the difficulties of operating in such a system but without being able (or willing) to discuss a possible solution. Most of the key informants were rather reticent to discuss what could be improved at the level of institutional reform.

Concerning the **transparency** and **openness** of the system, we ourselves experienced, in collecting data for this research, some **difficulties in accessing information.** Although many authorities are decentralised, often information communication must be authorised by the central office (as in the case of ICRF) and other bodies dependent from the Ministry of Agriculture. This pyramidal structure makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to get in touch with civil servants that operate in the ministries in the food sector (but there are reasons to think that for other sectors the situation is not different).[56] Both organising interviews and inviting people to our national seminar required a long process of

[55]"Sul Fertile Substrato dell'Emilia-Romagna" Syntesis of the report produced by Teta, in "Il divulgatore. Sicurezza Alimentare", Centro di Divulgazione Agricola, Bologna: 34.

[56] One interviewee stated that she has no direct access to the cabinet of the Minister of Agriculture, despite the fact that the institute for which she works is dependent on the ministry.

networking, as it is general practice not to answer e-mails and letters, and to get secretaries to deal with phone calls, thus rendering people permanently unavailable.

Data available on the web are very limited and not particularly informative, either too generic or too technical for the general public. This emerged also from our interview with the representatives of the consumer association Altroconsumo, who criticised the superficiality of the information available on governmental websites.

By Law 142/1990 and more specifically by the directive of the Consiglio dei Ministri 11/11/1994, all public bodies should provide an office for citizen's information (URP, Ufficio Relazioni Pubbliche), and in any case the role of these offices is interpreted as "answering the questions of citizens" rather than a proactive role of information dissemination, as our interviews demonstrate. However, statistics on the actual access to these services are not available, to the best of our knowledge.

3.2 Taking responsibility, attributing responsibility

In this section, we shall look at discursive versions of the complexity of the institutions dealing with food quality and safety, which was described in the previous section as one of the major obstacles to a clear division of responsibilities.

From the interviews, we have identified four dimensions of this complexity:

- Co-presence of **EU, national and Regional authorities**;
- Shared responsibility of many bodies under the rule of various ministries without a **central coordination** body;
- **Interpretation of the normative** on food produced by various bodies; and
- Widespread adoption of **voluntary control and certification** by large companies and the consequent existence of competing private certification bodies.

A first problem is the increased role of the EU on the one hand and of Regions on the other, with an uncertain coordination role left to the national State. To give an example, a representative of the agriculture department of Region Emilia-Romagna acknowledges that: *"We have difficulties of coordination. Sometimes it seems that there is competition between the Region and the Ministries. And this is a problem. We now are a hybrid; we do not have a central state management nor a European State, nor Regions with full power".*

The lack of a vertical coordination between the national decision centre and the many peripheral bodies is remarked on by several informants. Yet another important issue is also to develop horizontally a synergy between the various bodies of the territory, which are under the rule of different ministries. In the words of a representative of the ICRF (Central Institute for Fraud Repression):

"We would need coordination at ministerial level; a transversal body which might include all ministries so that this body might work as a reference for all subjects that directly act on the territory. A network that should already exist, but that in fact is not really developed".

Also from the point of view of consumer associations, the complexity of the division of responsibilities as well as the confusion created by the presence of many different agencies that are not always adequately coordinated is one of the major weaknesses of the system. In particular, a representative of the consumer association Altroconsumo has remarked that norms are subject to a plurality of interpretations from part of various bodies*: "Italy has, theoretically, one of the best laws on safety, but in practice it is a chaos. There are many bodies that do not communicate between themselves, and sometimes there are problems of interpretation of the normative, as one sector produces an interpretation that is different from the interpretation of another actor."*

Even if they agree on the relevance of these problems, normally representatives of local authorities tend to affirm that they do not affect the quality and the safety of checks and do not consider the data emerging from the statistics alarming.[57]

A further dimension of the complexity is represented by the division of tasks between the **private sector** that in the case of big companies takes on the responsibility of traceability along the food chain of certain products (this is the case of big supermarket chain, fast food companies and big slaughtering houses) and the **public control bodies** that make random and routine checks on products. Operators in the private sector tend to think that public control cannot guarantee adequate standards of safety and quality, as with private resources it is possible to have better and more frequent controls.

On the other hand, the businesses with more economic power have a leading role also in proposing new technologies such as in-house checks and quality standards. As a representative of Coop quality department candidly states: *"we can do a lot of checks and research because we make a big quantity of money".* So, the wide diffusion of voluntary in-house checks, and the consequent shift of responsibilities from public to private control, represents a problem for those companies, which are not in the position to invest in research. This means that if very high standards of safety and quality can be guaranteed, through control and certification by some companies, other companies, which rely mainly on public controls, can offer very different guarantees of standards. The widespread adoption of voluntary certification is an important mark of **distrust of public control**, but also reflects the choice of the public authority in demanding that private certification bodies fill the gaps of the public control net.

Yet, as was discussed in our 'national seminar', the widespread adoption of in house checks by private initiative has also been the cause of the proliferation of private certification bodies. Checks and controls are often entrusted to external laboratories and control agencies.[58] This creates a situation of competition between various certification bodies, which often does not work in favour of safety and quality (who controls controllers?). Moreover the presence of a plurality of certification standards creates confusion among consumers, as different brands offer different kind of guarantees, but reading this behind the labels is not easy. A homogenisation of safety and quality standards would certainly work in favour of the consumer.

Concerning **smaller producers** a representative of small manufacturers association, Federartigianato, in Calabria has explained that most of their members consider it extremely burdensome to comply with the requirements of the various bodies, which often give contradictory interpretations of the same regulation. One of the tasks of the association is therefore to mediate between the members, and the control bodies and public authorities.

To conclude, it seems that the situation of the division of responsibility is complex but not very controversial. There seems to be wide agreement on the fact that complexity is a problem. Yet, amongst actors, there is convergence on the idea that controls work and food is generally safe in Italy. Private companies present voluntary control as a matter of course. Public authorities, whilst agreeing that a more central role of public controls would be more effective in enhancing consumer trust by providing more homogeneity of safety standards, normally state that (also given the limited resources of the public) voluntary certification is a bonus with respect to the guarantees that public control can offer.

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[57]For some data on public controls and frauds, see box in 3.3.

[58]As a representative of Mc Donald's notes: "Controls are made during the production, cheeking the production chain. Then there is control over restaurants. An outside laboratory tests production. Over primary producers there is also an outside check".

3.3 Legislative approaches: from product to process

Italy is one of the countries that benefited most from the European directives in the food sector. Despite a certain lack of punctuality in effecting binding EU directives, **acceptance**, even if accompanied by a **lack of institutional debate** on the effects of EU policy, were the norm.

Most importantly, there appears to be some agreement among legal analysts in Italy that, mainly due to the obligation to conform to European law, a *new culture* has been installed in the sector of food legislation in the mid 90s.

Indeed, prior to the implementation of EU regulation, the main law on food hygiene in Italy was **Law n.288/1962**, enacted by a Presidential Decree of 1980, which was the expression of a culture of **repression of illegal behaviour**. The sanitary police was vested with the right to make inspections in food factories and selling points and granted the power to retire merchandise from the market or even order the closure of selling points where irregularities were found. Presidential decree n.224/1988 enacted Directive CE 85/374 on liability for defective products and states that whereas the producer is not identifiable, the seller is liable for the damage, for the sake of consumer protection. Agricultural products are excluded from liability, but the law applies to agricultural products whenever they are packed or transformed.

The evolution towards a **culture of prevention** is marked by the adoption of legislative decree D.L.155/1997, which indicates full acceptance of the relevant EC directives 93/43/CEE and 96/3/CE, on safety along the food chain, into national law. With this norm, the emphasis moved **from product to process**, and deterrence measures took priority over punishment measures.

Following WTO as well as EU orientations food sanitary control no longer focuses on specific products, but is distributed along the full production chain, from **´farm to fork´,** as stated in the 1997 *Green Paper*. Accordingly, the control system should be able to guarantee **safety in all stages**, from primary production, to processing, transport and trade. This brings in the international dimension of the food chain, in which international standards must be observed in order to offer cross border guarantees.

At the same time a control along the food chain calls for **improved integration** between the various levels of food production and distribution. The new systems of traceability demand technical and administrative innovation in the sector and, especially for small producers, an incentive to come together in co-operatives and associations in order to better face the economic burden implied by the new methodologies.

DEPENALISATION

One of the more recent legal changes which deserve attention is known as *depenalisation*. Through this legislative intervention certain types of crime that were susceptible of *penal* sanction have been transferred into the *administrative* sphere. In attempting to simplify the complex norms in the penal code the Italian Legislator in 1999 adopted a law (n.205/99), which 'demoted' dozens of crimes to simple 'illeciti amministrativi' or illicit acts to be punished with a fine rather than prison. Within this group were included many of the misdemeanours identified in the norms governing the hygiene and safety of food products. This provision considerably modifies the responsibilities of food producers.[59] Whilst the intention of the legislator was to make more certain and quicker the sanctions whose previous penal nature made them difficult to apply and extremely slow to effect, a recent author, Carlo Correra, believes this decision reflects "an expression of the 'institutional lack of culture with respect to norms safeguarding one of the first goods mentioned in the Constitution i.e. health as an individual and collective benefit".[60] Correra is thus on the side of those who believe that penal governance of foodstuffs is necessary to protect consumers against frauds and illegal practices.

In the first semester of 2000, 590 out of 4,802 agro-food businesses inspected by the ICRF (Institute for the Repression of Frauds) were found guilty of food adulteration and irregularities. This is the 12, 3 % of the visited business.

In 2002, the Carabinieri NAS have made 38,000 inspections finding 5,498 penal irregularities and 20,713 administrative infractions, and arrested 47 people. 39 arrests were made in the meat sector, and the value of the sequestered product amounted to 59 million Euros.[61]

[59]See for example, C.Tulumello, *Trasporto e vendita di sostanze alimentari e polizia veterinaria*. Rimini, Maggioli, 2002: 3.
[60]C. Correra, *Prodotti alimentari: sicurezza, igiene e qualità*, Rimini, Maggioli, 1998.

3.4 From the logic of emergence to a national food safety system

The many sanitary crises which occurred in Europe the 1990s (such as the BSE and the related vCJD, but also PBC contamination, dioxin and other chemical substances contamination, foot-and-mouth disease, classical swine fever and bluetongue) have affected the zoo-technical sector but also **challenged the capacity of the national safety system**.

In Italy, the crises were successfully addressed by means of extraordinary control measures and emergency unities, organised across the various control authorities. Data updated to April 2003 indicate that official cases of BSE in Italy have been 97, while checks made by official authorities have been more then 1 million.[62]

In our interview, a representative of the Institute for Fraud Repression (ICRF) has described the cooperation organised in occasion of the BSE crisis as an example of how **synergy between the various bodies** is possible, and it is increasingly regarded as necessary for an effective prevention system. However, she agreed that these **extraordinary measures** absorbed a great part of the resources available to the control bodies to the detriment of a more homogeneous and comprehensive planning of prevention, control and repression.

The *National Sanitary Plan for 2002-2004* of the Ministry of Health reveals awareness at institutional level that the national system is locked in a **'logic of emergence'** that can be overcome only by means of **important structural changes**. Indeed, according to the *National Sanitary Plan*, Italy has registered serious difficulties in adapting to the new approach to sanitary and phytosanitary measures adopted in 1995 with the SPS Agreement, in the framework of the WTO (G/SPS/10). According to this agreement member countries are encouraged to base their measures on international standards, guidelines and recommendations where they exist. These standards require de facto important changes in the traditional ways of dealing with hygiene and safety. The flourishing of the agro-food sector in Italy depends to a great extent on the added value of the raw material (national and imported) created by the processing industry.[63] According to the NSP, the safety of food product is therefore crucial not only for **consumer health**, but

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[61] Prontoconsumatore (Regione Toscana), *Sicurezza alimentare, ecco i dati:* http://www.prontoconsumatore.it/detail.asp?IDSezione=3&IDN=635.
[62] Website of the Ministry of Health: www.ministerodellasalute.it.
[63] In terms of added value, food manufacturing in 1997 ranks third (9%) in the national manufacturing industry after the mechanical sector (30%) and the textile industry (16%). Source: R. Fanfani, E. Montesor, F. Pecci, *Il settore agroalimentare italiano e l'integrazione europea*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2001: 28.

also for **economic development**.[64] Consumer trust must be conquered, maintained and sometimes restored across borders so as to **safeguard the typical market** area for Italian products (EU, North America), but also to **reach new markets**. In this sense the relationship between consumer trust and successful export activities has grown very explicit in these years, and consequently more explicit also is the **demand for an efficient sanitary system.**

In particular the absence of an **effective fraud prevention system** appears to be one of the main obstacles towards establishing a relationship of trust with the international consumer. A recent report by the US Department of Agriculture points to the fact that testing does not ensure a safe meat supply according to the NAS Carabinieri, who have documented extensive use of illegal hormone and drugs in farming.[65] To this is added the enormous number of non-registered farms and illegal slaughter houses, cattle theft and use of false certificates that make control activities particularly difficult.

Thus BSE is not the main hazard for health in Italy and preventing the use of illegal drugs probably requires stricter controls on the farms and, more in generally, reducing the estimated figures of the **hidden economy** (see Box in section 1.3). Although it is common wisdom that most fraud occurs in the South[66] where it is estimated that there are the greatest number of illegal food enterprises, Lombardy ranks in second place (immediately after Sicily) in the list of regions with the largest number of violations found in the food and feed sector.[67] It is estimated that 5% of Italian beef is produced illegally, and this can only increase the safety concern of foreign buyers towards Italian productions.[68]

Fraud concerns also the information that is passed on to the consumers, and often does not comply with the ministerial norms. Paolo Calisti reports in the *Bollettino Epidemiologico Veterinario* (a veterinary newsletter of the veterinary services in the Abruzzo Region) that often in Italy the format of beef register and labelling does not conform to the indications of

[64]Indeed consumer heath is mentioned twice in the NSP section devoted to food safety, always coupled with economic concerns.

[65]USDA, Foreign Agricultural Service GAIN Report #IT3005, *Italy Livestock and Products Scandals in the Italian Beef Livestock Indistry*, 2003.

[66]See for example a representative of McDonald's: "Big producers are ok, but when there are illegal slaughter houses in Sicily where you do not know what kind of animals they use…".

[67]From interviews it emerges that many actors think that frauds occur mainly in the South.

[68]USDA, Foreign Agricultural Service GAIN Report #IT3005, *Italy Livestock and Products Scandals in the Italian Beef Livestock Industry*, 2003. Critiques however do not come only from abroad: at the end of 2002 and was reported on all national press: the inquiry involved 35 persons of 9 different provinces (3 of north Italy and 6 of the south part of the country); 5 farms have been sequestered with more then 2.000 cows and 8 veterinaries of public checks authorities were accused of fraud and criminal associations.

the Ministry of Health (Ordinanza ministeriale n.600/VI/24436/AG12/3219 of 29 November 1999).[69]

Additionally, the rare use of databases, often not easily accessible, does not provide a reliable tool for veterinary services. Reports of the DG SANCO on a series of missions carried out in Spring 2003 in Member-States (in the framework of co-financed bovine tuberculosis eradication programmes) in order to assess progress with approved programmes for 2001-2 reveal that in some Italian Regions the information available is limited, incomplete and not organised in accessible databases, moreover co-operation with human health authorities is difficult.[70]

In the light of these worrying data, in *National Sanitary Plan (NSP) for 2002-2004* the Ministry of Health states that a consideration for the **international dimension** of the food market should be the guiding criteria for the reform of the agro-food system. Following the SPS Agreement, the *NSP* indicates as an objective the creation of a system that could guarantee transparent and scientifically documented phytosanitary and sanitary analysis, the use of risk analysis studies to justify safety measures and Government legislative action, and ensure the condition for the homogenisation of safety standards across the national territory. A reinforcement of certification procedures and border inspections are thought of as necessary for enhancing exports. Moreover a process of modernisation of laboratory services, of the procedures for registering and controlling agro food products, information surveillance and alert services are in the Health Ministry plan in the near future.

Finally the **homogenisation of safety measures across the national territory** seems to be necessary to guarantee the national standards. At the moment the Ministry of Health provides for a national system of monitoring inspection results in each Region. Yet there are no institutional means to sanction those Regions which fail to comply with deadlines

[69]http://www.izs.it/bollettini/sanitari/bev/bev99/bev_1_00.pdf, Directive 92/102/ECC on the identification and register of animals was enforced by Italian D.P.R. n.317 of 30 April 1996. From 1st January 2002 in the EU a new system of beef labelling has been introduced.

[70]DG (SANCO)/9091/2003-MR, *Final Report of a mission carried out in Italy from 3to 7 march 2003 in order to evaluate the bovine tuberculosis eradication programme* Final: “In general, good progress is being made with the eradication of the bovine tuberculosis in the Northern and Central Regions, but problems persists in the South. The controls over the implementation of the programme vary widely between the two visited Regions of Piemonte and Calabria; in the latter it is not possible to have confidence in the data presented. No clear oversight of the situation is available either at Regional or local level.”

for sending the results, or failing to send data at all. The Ministry acts only through formal recalls on control activities to Regions and Regional health authorities.[71]

A further input towards re-organisation and simplification of the system is expected from the establishment of the EFSA, which will require, to some extent, a harmonisation of food agencies across the Union. A campaign for a **national food safety agency** was presented to Parliament by the managers of Coop Italia and Sabino Cassese, Prof. of Administrative Law and former Minister of Public Affairs (Funzione Pubblica) on 8 May 2002.

Indeed at the moment the EFSA would be interfaced at national level by at least three ministries (Health, Agriculture and Productive Activities), and by three scientific authorities (The National Institute for Health, or ISS; the Food and Nutrition Research Institute; and the National Institute for Agricultural Markets, or ISMEA). This fragmentation, according to Cassese, is not compatible with the institutional development in this field envisaged in Europe in the near future.[72]

3.5 Value for money: public funding and agriculture competitiveness

In Italy value for money is regulated by the free market and by the direct or indirect support to prices through public funding.[73] Italian agriculture has for decades relied on **public subsidies**, both national and EU, which has, through time, offered support to product price and farmers' income. The economy of some Regions has been for decades alimented mainly by public interventions, both with direct subsidies and State investments. In Regions like Calabria, these subsidies have **been the main motor of regional development** and have surrogated almost completely market relationships.[74] Also, during our interviews in Calabria all actors referred critically to the ways funding is allocated at local level. In particular, food operators were very critical of how public money is managed by the Region, with lack of far-sight and economic planning. Some informants stated they would prefer either a more paternalistic form of fund management from part of the EU, or a regime of laissez faire to encourage entrepreneurial spirit in the private sector.

Indeed, after the Treaty of Rome (1958) direct subsidies come mainly from the European Communities whilst national intervention is limited to incentives and other forms of indirect

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[71] See the comments of the Ministry of Health on the draft report DG(SANCO) 1113\2000: http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/inspections/fnaoi/reports/pesticides/italy/fnaoi_rep_ital_1113-2000cm_en.pdf

[72] S. Cassese (ed.) *Per un'autorità nazionale della Sicurezza Alimentare*, Milano, Il Sole 24 Ore, 2001.

[73] Some other aspects of value for price, concerning consumers mobilisation will be discussed in Chapter 5.

[74] RIS, *Ritratto della Calabria:* www.calnet.it/RIS.

subsidies to farmers. The so defined Regions Objective 1 (Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Puglia, Sardegna, Sicilia) absorb about half of the EU funding destined to Italy.[75] The AGEA (Independent Agency for Agricultural Subsidies), based in Rome acts as the only representative of the EU in all questions relating to FEOGA (the economic instrument of the CAP), in line with Re. CE 1663/95.

At national level, agricultural policy suffered a period **planning deficit**, which led to a crisis in the early 1990s, and the subsequent transfer of 80% of agricultural funding, and many administrative tasks, from the Ministry of Agriculture to Regions.[76]

In recent years, a return to far-reaching programmes for the general orientation of Italian agriculture has been registered, with the aim of promoting the competitiveness of the 'made in Italy'. The document for economic planning 1999\2000 (Dpef) indicates as new objectives of national agricultural policy the development of multifunctional agrarian activities, the promotion of typical products, the promotion of technological and administrative innovation, the reform of direct producers associations. In order to favour the dialogue with the social parties, a "Green Table" (Tavolo Verde) and a "Food Table" (Tavolo Alimentare) have been established by presidential decree in 1999.[77] These are organs for the consultation of producer associations, cooperatives, and food companies in what concerns political planning and implementation of agricultural policy (Tavolo Verde) and concerning the development and regulation of the food industry (Tavolo Alimentare), so as to allow for a consultation mechanism.[78]

At EU level in recent years,[79] the task of revitalising marginalised areas has become an objective of EU policy together with the aim of increasing life quality preserving an

[75]M. Leonardi e F. Lunati, *Rapporto Filiera Alimentare, Enea-Nomis*ma, Progetto "Rilevamento elaborazione e analisi aggiornata e dettagliata di dati e statistiche relativi alla filiera agro-alimentare nel Mezzogiorno", 2000: 23.
[76]For a more extensive explanation on the causes and effects of this institutional crisis in agricultural policy see: R. Fanfani, *L'agricoltura in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000: 52-53.
[77]R. Fanfani, *L'agricoltura in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000: 42-50.
[78]http://www.coldiretti.it/vicenza/il%20coltivatore/febbraio99/tavolov.htm.
[79]In the past the CAP has offered economic support to products typical of continental agriculture, such as cereals, milk, beef and pork, whilst only a small portion (about 12%) of the FEOGA funding is destined to the typical Mediterranean products. As an effect the Regions that most benefited from these funding were those interested by continental products: Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna and Puglia.
In general the system of allocating funding has not encouraged agricultural choices that take into account the climatic and territorial vocation of each Region, but only the increment in production of those crops that enjoyed subsidies, with the consequent surplus in production. The more recent EU policies against exceeding production - together with the more competitive prices offered by Spain and Greece - have further marginalised the Southern Regions producing durum wheat (M. Leonardi e F.Lunati, Rapporto Filiera Alimentare, Enea-Nomisma, Progetto "Rilevamento elaborazione e analisi aggiornata e dettagliata di dati e statistiche relativi alla filiera agro-alimentare nel Mezzogiorno", Roma, 2000: 23.).

agriculture diversified according to the characteristics of each Region, and most importantly the *quality* of agricultural production is promoted, rather than quantity.[80]

The programmatic document "**Agenda 2000**" restates the centrality of agricultural policy in the EU agenda. In this document, the objectives are a **comprehensive rural development**, where environmental concerns are integrated with economic considerations of competitiveness, and incentives for technological and administrative development of agricultural enterprises. This policy is especially **congenial to the Southern Regions**, which by vocation present less intensive production models, and more environmental friendly agricultural structures.[81]

The CAP reform, devised in line with Agenda 2000, introduces, among other things, the 'decouplement' between production and subsidies, and bases funding assignments on considerations of quality and environmental impact of agricultural choices.[82]

It is moreover interesting to remark that EU regulation and economic incentives for **organic production** and environmental measures (**EC Reg. 2078\92**) have led in Italy to the conversions of an important number farms and a wide extension of agricultural land to organic, especially in Southern Regions and in the islands, where organic production may represent an important motor for development. In Calabria the Program for the Territory and the Environment (offspring of Reg.Ce n. 2078/92) gave the possibility to many agro-businesses to reorganise their activities with a greater attention to ecological issues.[83] The

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[80]F. Sotte, "Verso una politica agricola e rurale comune per l'Europa (Carpre). Quale riform della PAC attraverso e dopo Agenda 2000?", *Rivista di Economia Agraria* (1998), 53: 203-223.

[81]M. Leonardi e F. Lunati, Rapporto Filiera Alimentare, Enea-Nomisma, Progetto "Rilevamento elaborazione e analisi aggiornata e dettagliata di dati e statistiche relativi alla filiera agro-alimentare nel Mezzogiorno" , Roma, 2000: 36-37.

[82]This has been received with certain scepticism by the Italian food industry. In a document presented in May 2003, Federalimentare (Italian Federation of Food Industry) states that the principle of "decouplement" may bring about a deliberate lack of attention to market management and "the concrete risk of abandonment of production which, in some sectors, will be more important than what is envisaged by the studies made by the Commission". Federalimentare also criticises the reduction of funding destined to Italy (about 12% of CAP resources, whilst Italy represents the 16% of gross production in the EU) which will have heavy economic repercussion on the national economy. The practice of the "set-aside" (now made compulsory for 10 years) is judged dangerous for the economic interest of the country, as it will involve a further reduction of food raw materials. On the other hand, the federation judges positively the attention to environmental aspects introduced by the project of reform (Federalimentare, "Posizione sul Progetto di riforma della PAC"). Some representatives of primary producer associations are critical towards the funding allocation inaugurated with Agenda 2000. Indeed they claim that it favours the big industry against small producers who are the core of Italian traditional agriculture. According to the economist Simone Severini of the Università della Tuscia, the 'decouplement' could generate a contraction of the demand for labour force in agriculture, and should this happen in a short time rather than gradually this could bring about serious social and economical problems (R. Fanfani, E. Montesor, F. Pecci, Il settore agroalimentare Italiano e l'integrazione Europea, Milano Franco Angeli 2001: 27-38, p. 31).

[83]F. Gaudio (a cura di), *Programma territoriale ambientale- reg.CE n. 2078/92 Applicazione e valutazione economica e ambientale*, INEA Calabria, Cosenza, 2002. Gaudio notes that despite the encouraging results

Ministry of Agriculture estimates that the number of 'organic enterprises' has grown from 54,004 in year 2000 to 60,509 in 2001 with a variation of 12% in one year. As regards specifically the increasing of organic farms, we can see that the growth rate is even higher. Indeed, the number of zoo-technical farms that asked for organic certification increased between 1999 and 2000 by 204%, also due to the fact that the regulation of the issue was emanated only in 2000 with the *Decreto Legge 91436/2000*.[84] As regards **structural funds,** in the years 2000/2006 Italy will receive a sum of about 28 million Euros, which - it is estimated - will make possible investments of 50 million Euros, and hence represent an important occasion of development for the nation.[85]

Despite some critiques on the economic effects of EU funding redistributions the EU legislation effect on the national system is in general **valued positively** by representatives of the food chain in Italy. In particular the reactions to the *White Book on Food Safety* have been extremely favourable, as emerges from position documents released by the various organisations. A union of Coldiretti, Legambiente (environmental organisation) and the Coop (the largest supermarket chain and consumer cooperative) have recently declared themselves in favour of the EU initiatives expressed in the White Book, including the project of creating a European Food Safety Agency (EFSA), the traceability of products and risk analysis and communication. They hope that this will lead to an **alliance between consumers and producers** where the proximity of the two will force responsibility on producers in regard to safety and quality, and develop in the former a greater capacity for choice.

The consumer is the new actor in the agro-food scene, and public opinion has acquired "*an increasing political weight in agricultural political planning and implementation*".[86] Especially in Italy this represents an important change of perspective, since among the representation of interest groups consumer interest still has difficulties in finding adequate spaces of representation and dialogue with institutions, as we shall see in *Chapter 6*. Coop, Coldiretti and Legambiente are particularly concerned with the safety of food production, but this is directly connected with the need to safeguard typical and traditional products. As we shall see in the next chapter, there is awareness that the debate on agricultural subsidies will reinforce the role of traditional foods since these are the only

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given so far by EU subsidies, the long term impact of these, once the incentives will be finished has be evaluated.

[84]Source: www.biobank.it.

[85]R. Fanfani, *L'agricoltura in Italia*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1998: 78-79.

[86]Coldiretti, Area Ambiente e Territorio, *L'mpresa e gli OGM. Il Patto con il Consumatore*, July 2002: 16.

type of production able to compete on the international market without any subsidy, only via their recognition and protection from any form of unfair competition. Thus both from interviews and document analysis, it appears that an awareness of the **increasingly aggressive competition** of foreign products cannot be dealt with by means of protectionism and public subsidies only.

3.6 Animal welfare and nutrition

Both animal welfare and nutrition are, mainly, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. Also in this case the impact of the EU interpretation of the core issues is evident.[87] Italy follows EU definition of **nutrition**, as it appears in the Commission guidelines of the Codex Alimentarius. These guidelines define four kinds of claims (nutrient content; comparative, nutrient functions; and claims related to the dietary guidelines of healthy diets), in conformity to the EU Directive 90/496/CEE on the labelling of foodstuff and alimentary products. Accordingly, a nutritional claim is "a description or an advertising message which states, suggests or implies that a foodstuff has particular nutritional features" and this regards energetic value and the nutrients it contains. Nutrition is also the main subject of food education. In this field the Ministry of Health cooperate with the Ministry of Education, the National Institute for Food Research (INRA), as well as with Regions and municipalities.

Concerning **animal welfare** in 2002 the *Technical Commission for the Protection of Cattle* of the Ministry of Health has been established, inaugurating an institutional debate on the role of research on animal welfare and training of specialised professional figures for an innovative policy in this field. In particular the importance of veterinary consultants specialised in animal welfare, who can offer support to farmers and agricultures has been noted. However, so far the Ministry has not established uniform criteria for control, but only guideline principles, subject to interpretation. Animal rights associations press for a responsibility at national level to be taken, rather than leaving to the regions the responsibility of implementing the legislation in place, or relying on the ethical commitment

[87] In the fields of nutrition and animal welfare EU legislation is not complete (does not cover all aspects of the policy as happens for safety, for example). Nevertheless the transposition of EU rules seems to be the only legislative initiative in these fields. The decree approved by the council of ministers on 21 March 2001 (Legislative decree 146/2001) enacts CE Reg 98/58 concerning animal protection in farming. In the field of nutrition EU Directive n.90/496/CEE on the labelling of foodstuff and alimentary products was implemented by the Decree n.77 of 16 February 1993; and the Directive n.398/89 was implemented by the Decree n.111 of 27 January 1992, and it disciplines the labelling on foodstuff for particular uses (e.g. for sport or special dietary requirements), and these include foodstuff with added vitamins and minerals.

of farmers and manufacturers. [88] For animal welfare and other ethical issues such as environmental issues, employment of child labour and irregular labour, civil society seems to play an important role, mainly through information campaigns. This will be discussed in *section 4.6.*

[88] A.Veronesi, *Accordo Stato-Regioni sul benessere animale*:http://mail.ciaopet.com/lettera-accordo-stato-Regioni2.pdf.

4. THE STRATEGY OF QUALITY

Quality has emerged both from interviews and document analysis as a **central feature** in defining consumer preferences in regard to food in Italy, but most importantly is also at the core of a political and economic strategy to face scepticism about food safety.

In a recent report commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture (MiPaf) quality is considered as "*the element with most incidence on buying behaviours and, hence, on entrepreneurial choices of producers. In this sense, quality is the meeting point of the many expectations of consumers and producers*".[89] At the same time, as we shall see, **quality is identified mainly with local and typical natural, genuine and traditional,** and is therefore a **territorial idea of quality**. Food safety and quality is identified by the political authorities mainly with these elements rather than with technical innovation or control intensification. Traditional means and techniques of production seem to offer more guarantees than public control, in-house tests and traceability.[90] **Naturalness and genuineness reassure** the public on the quality of food products much more effectively than certification labels. A recent survey shows that 64% of Italians thinks that typicality implies quality and safety, and in some regions of the South, such as Calabria, 70% of the population associates typical products with safe products.[91]

This means, first of all, that the search for typicality is not any longer a matter of elites, but extends to the **general public**.[92] Indeed, looking at older documents it is possible to register a growing attention for quality, both from part of public authorities and private stakeholders. It is at the beginning of the 1990s that quality food is not only an exclusive of specialised shops and restaurants, but becomes part of the public discourse and object of general attention: "*Desire of good and healthy stuff, desire of a cleaner world, desire of nature: the demand is increasing and the market is prepared to satisfy it. Until recently it was an issue for specialised shops* (...)".[93]

Second, the **equation typicality and quality** is not simply a naive, unconscious and non-mediated reaction to food scares. It is instead an **explicit strategy** endorsed by public

[89]"La sfida della qualita. Agricoltura e Alimentazione in Italia: il punto di vista dei calabresi", indagine SWG for the Ministry of Agricolture, 2002: 5.
[90]MiPaf, *L'agrolaimentare italiano. Il valore della qualità*, 2001.
[91]"La sfida della qualita. Agricoltura e Alimentazione in Italia: il punto di vista dei calabresi" indagine SWG for the Ministry of Agricolture, 2002.
[92]"La sfida della qualita. Agricoltura e Alimentazione in Italia: il punto di vista dei calabresi" indagine SWG for the Ministry of Agricolture, 2002: 5.

authorities and operators in the food sector in order to face consumer anxiety and restore confidence in food products. The strategy of quality, as we shall see, responds to emerging sanitary and economic demands. Accordingly, in what follows we shall explore the relationship between other values, such as safety and value for money.

It has been remarked that the definition of the concept of quality changes constantly, according to social, cultural and economic changes: *"Many are the objective and subjective factors that contribute to determine what is quality, which per se is an abstract concept, in constant evolution, influenced by social changes, by personal values and scientific discoveries acquisitions"*[94] and in the following section we shall explore what those circumstances are in the case of Italy.

4.1"Us" and "the others"

Pride (of their own products and eating habits) and prejudice (towards imported food products) are the vices-virtues that make the attitude of Italians towards eating particularly striking.

Most of our key informants have stated that "our" (i.e.Italian, Mediterranean) idea of quality is different from what is considered as quality food in the Northern countries. **"Their" concept of quality identifies with safety** (for 'them' "*what is important is that it does not give me a stomach-ache*" to put it in the words of a representative of the producer association Coldiretti). The underlying idea is that Italians and Mediterranean people are in general more demanding. **They want their food to taste good,** and of course to be **safe and healthy.** Thus safety is perceived as a component of quality, which is what really matters*: "(...) one could say that food safety is one of the factors that determine quality. And it is towards the realisation of comprehensive quality standards that all efforts of people interested in food matters should converge"*.[95]

According to a significant number of our interviewees, the (EU/international) discourse on safety, considered on its own, does not take into due account the aspects of **taste**, which are entangled with the 'pleasure' of eating. These aspects can be appreciated only by those who have been socialised in a certain way, and thus have absorbed a culture of food, and know how to distinguish between different sorts of olive oil and cheese. This

[93] Altroconsumo, "Prodotti Biologici: il regno della confusione", 1995.
[94] ACU & Federconsumatori, "La salute vien mangiando" 2001: 3.
[95] ACU & Federconsumatori, "La salute vien Mangiando" 2001: 3.

explains perhaps the extraordinary popularity of food fairs in Italy[96] and the remarkable press coverage they have. The media analysis of the media coverage of food issues during six months (April-September 2002) shows that food fairs and regional and local meetings are the main occasion in which reports on food appear in the press.[97]

In this vein, food education is in part organised around these fair events, in which schoolchildren are invited to taste different products, to learn how to cook them, or to visit farms on Sundays with their families, and to learn how food is produced. The logic behind this is that there is no way to compensate the **wisdom on food** that comes from concrete personal experience with the **abstract knowledge based on scientific information.**

Yet there is a flipside of the coin: Italy is a country of gourmands, apparently, but also a country in which people still have not learnt how to organise for themselves and their families a **balanced diet**. Data from ISTAT have registered an increase of obesity of 25% in the last 5 years. Compared to the rest of Europe, Italian kids are among those who suffer most from obesity (13%). So, what is wrong in the diet of Italians? Meat consumption exceeds widely the quantities recommended by the WHO, explained an informant responsible for food education in Emila Romagna, and consumption of vegetable proteins is very low. A series of educational campaigns promoted by Regional authorities, consumer associations, and producer associations aims at modifying eating habits both in schools and in families.[98]

Thus, we meet a first ambivalence: Italians like their food, but somehow independently of their own health. One thing is to be able to appreciate good food, which has to do with **aesthetic values**; another is to be able to combine it in a balanced diet, which has to do with **health values**. Hence an effective food education, note responsible for education, should conjugate knowledge of the history of food, of nutritional properties of different foodstuffs and of how to combine them into a balanced diet.

If quality food is not necessarily healthy food, even more interesting is to see the **complex relationships attributed to safe food and quality food**. Most Italians consider traditional methods of transformation and preservation of food products healthy, and of high quality

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[96] The most important food fair is the *Salone del Gusto of Torino* organised by Slow Food. The last edition in November 2002 counted 138.000 visitors in 5 days. 2100 journalist were registered, 1.000 of which from abroad. The press coverage was enormous. (Data from: www.slowfood.it .

[97]Media analysis of La Repubblica coverage showed that in some periods the coverage of food fairs occupied half of the space given to food issues. For example in April and May 2002, at least one article per week was on food fairs.

[98]See for example: G. Lo Feudo (INCA, Cosenza) “I giovani e l’alimentazione”, *Il Mezzogiorno Economico,* 2 January 2003.

by definition. This has not encouraged the development of adequate and innovative safety control systems. Indeed, hygienic national and international standards are often perceived as the imposition of a **trade off between hygiene and sensory quality**.[99] Accordingly, products such as the ´pecorino di fossa´ or the different varieties of raw milk cheese have to be defended against the hygenising trend in the EU, so that many producers came together in the lobby *European Alliance for Artisan and Traditional Raw Milk Products*. Carlo Petrini, president of the movement Slow Food, explains this phenomenon as follows:

"The new hyperhygienistic tendency of rules in the agro-food sphere and the pressure for homologation and homogenisation (deriving from the large mass production) jeopardise the artisan production of raw milk cheese. Milk pasteurisation kills microbes but kills taste as well, cancels the memories of the fields that every variety of milk 'document` in itself. In other words, it mortifies cheese, taste and the pleasure of those who eat it."[100]

A more radical attack to these **hygenising practices** comes from groups opposing the politics of industrial production, which is considered the first cause for food scandals: *"The patrons of the agro-food and their politicians are not contented with poisoning us; they are daring, as if that was not enough, to lecture us on hygiene and impose on us their absurd conception of it. They approve laws and rules against the few remaining peasants and artisans, while the latest catastrophic results of industrial agriculture are served in our plates"* [101]

Also, from the point of view of industrial producers, the growing emphasis on safety has questionable effects on production. A representative of INALCA, the largest slaughtering industry in Italy, remarks that a great deal of innovation resources is nowadays destined to certification and traceability. Yet this penalises taste: *"we are spending a great amount of money to improve safety checks, but our checks already offer the maximum warranty and we could invest in other kinds of aspects of beef quality, such as the improvement of the taste quality of our production".*

[99] I. Iacoponi, G. Brunori, V. Colosimo, A. Loi, M. Miele, R. Moruzzo,V. Parisi, M. Rovai, F. Ventura, *Meat Quality Policy in Italy*, The University of Pisa: 108.

[100] La Gazzetta Web, 10 settembre 2001: "Un manifesto per il formaggio crudo", http://www.lagazzettaweb.it/Pages/rub_conv/2001/tavola/r_conv_67.html; another case of unjustified law proibition is quoted amongst the varieties of cheese that is found in Sardenia: "Su Casu marzu o Giampagadu, a cheese with worms: this cheese was never cause of problems (of any kind) for those who have eaten it, but is considered a deteriorated product and therefore it is prohibited by law to eat and sell it." : http://www.saporisardi.com/formaggio.html.

[101] This quote is taken from a text presented by the libertarian movement to fight capitalism "Guerra Sociale: Alcuni nemici del migliore dei mondi tecnologici. Bruxelles, agosto 1999: http://www.guerrasociale.org/index.htm.

In our interviews such scepticism towards the emphasis on safety norms is expressed mainly by private stakeholders, whilst the representatives of public authorities and certification bodies express favourable judgement on the intensification of regulation and control, as emerges from the interviews. Despite these statements, strategies to face food scandals reveal a different attitude. As we shall see, if producers proudly present the efficacy of their in house checks and control systems against heath hazards, the public authority uses a sort of rhetoric which focuses on territoriality and tradition.

Indeed the reaction of public authorities to the big food scares seems to reproduce the logic according to which only *"our product"* is general by thought of as safer, and this due to its being traditional, locally sustainable, natural, and moral.[102] Certificates and regulation can be a good way to ensure that what is sold as national product is actually so, but origin is treated as a major source of quality guarantee. The case of BSE is paradigmatic in this respect. When the case went across the threshold of public alarm in 1996, the immediate reaction was to blame it on the foreign market, and consider the Italian product safe. The same attitude was maintained when BSE cases were found in France. Newspapers, and especially the TV, which is the most influential media, presented day after day images of cows affected by the disease. Public authorities concurred to create panic amongst consumers. However, the message that passed was that the local product was safe and there was no reason to doubt Italian meat. The EU ban of the steak at the bone was perceived as a useless and bureaucratic prohibition, which was not justified by the real risk at stake. No risk was perceived because the most famous Italian steak, the *Fiorentina*, is made out of local cattle (the *Chianina* variety) and was therefore thought of as absolutely safe. Private operators in the sector, such as McDonald's and INALCA, state that they were predicting that the BSE crisis would have affected Italy soon and started a campaign reassuring consumers on meat testing methodologies and product preparation, but the example was not followed by public authorities.

The discovery of the first national case, in 2001, was bound to create the collapse of **the rhetoric of local products**, and beef consumption fell by 40% that winter. Yet the revival was quite fast, and the rhetoric of the 'international fraud operated by unscrupulous international merchants' came back on the scene.[103] On the one hand, the speeches of politicians spread alarm amongst citizens, also by giving false information, for example on

[102]See R. Sassatelli and A. Scott, "Novel food, wider markets and trust regimes", *European Societies*, 3,2 (2002): 211-242.
[103]See R. Sassatelli and A. Scott, "Novel food, wider markets and trust regimes", *European Societies*, 3,2 (2002): 211-242.

the meat component of certain products.[104] On the other hand, the dossier on BSE prompted by the Ministry of Health - which soon disappeared from the Ministry's WebPages - had a reassuring timbre, inviting the public to buy and eat preferably organic meat, trust the local butcher and wait for an appropriate labelling and traceability system.[105]

Thus, despite the favourable judgement expressed on international and national regulation, the solution indicated by Italian public authority in a moment of crisis was to be found in trust in personal acquaintances, organised around a **one-to one relationship**, such as the butcher-customer. The problems, on the other hand, were blamed on the foreign, anonymous, distant, unknown operator in the international market.

4.2 The one-to-one sell and buy strategy

The motto *"Trust your butcher"*, far from being a sign of naivety, correctly interprets the channels through which trust is diffused and reinforced in Italy. Despite the remarkable growth of hypermarkets and discounts in the 1980's, small shops have an impressive resistance (see *section1.3*). Small family owned food and grocery outlets still dominate the market, even if over 30% of the business in this segment have closed in the 1990's and others have joined associations for centralised services in order to increase efficiency and offer competitive prices.[106] Often families shop once a week at supermarkets and hypermarkets in order to stock up on food, but buy on a daily basis fresh products, such as meat and vegetables. This is because people tend to trust more the owners of small shop (who visit the wholesale market each morning to choose the food to stock their own shop and satisfy their costumers), than the modern supermarket distribution.[107]

Small and medium size supermarkets often try to reproduce the one-to-one relationship that people used to build up in small shops. The butchery counter, the cheese counter and the bread counter often reproduce these relationships.[108] The butcher (or the baker) is **personally acquainted** with the consumer, is able to recommend recipes and **give**

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[104]This was revealed in informal conversation before of after interviews both by producers and retailers, but none of them wanted their observations to be recorded.

[105]See R. Sassatelli and A. Scott, "Novel food, wider markets and trust regimes", *European Societies*, 3,2 (2002): 211-242.

[106]R.H. Curtis (Agriculture Trade Office Milan), *The Italian Food and Grocery Industry*, USDA GAIN Report N. IT9714, 2001.

[107]This behaviour seems to be confirmed by data of TIF survey.

[108]A representative of COOP sated that the employment and professional training of butchers, bakers and grocers in supermarkets is part of an explicit company strategy.

advice on what to buy. Consequently, **in-store promotion** of food products is still considered by retailers the best way of communicating with the consumers, and persuading them into buying, both in small shops and in supermarkets (where promoters demonstrate products). In the latest years, **fidelity cards**, **preferential treatment to regular consumers**, **information leaflets** on offers and discounts, and consumer feedback forms have also been introduced.[109]

These strategies seem somewhat at odds with the progressive concentration of industrial groups and the leadership of multinationals. Multinationals such as Nestlé, Phillip Morris, Unilever and Danone have a global income that is greater than the joint income of the Italian food industry.[110] It is undeniable that their strategies to convey ideas of safety and quality, based mainly on **branding**, **certification** and **homogeneity of quality standards,** are efficient.[111] Also, there are industrial labels that are carriers of guarantees for consumers.

However, at least concerning distribution, some elements of the **small shop strategy** have been transferred to the big distribution. Indeed Coop, with its co-operatives strongly tied to the territory, which strongly promote local products and initiatives to make the consumer feel involved in retail strategies (members' assembly, and the '*Approved by members*' (label given to products judged of excellence by a sample of consumers[112]), is the most successful supermarket chain in Italy. .

Hence, the winning model is still that of **personal trust between seller and buyer,** which is institutionalised and reproduced in new forms of distribution. Paradigmatic in this sense are the initiatives by the producer association Coldiretti and some Regional councils to create occasions for people **to meet producers and buy directly from them**. Abbreviating the chain between the producer and the consumer seems thus a strategy to obviate the problem of impersonal trust, which is more difficult to put in place, requires lots of technology, paper work, and as a representative from the institute for technological innovation ENEA has remarked, also knowledge and ability.[113]

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[109]All the biggest italian Supermarket chains (Coop, Conad, Esselunga, Pam) have their own member card, which sometimes includes credit card services or some kind of payment by instalments.
[110]M. Leonardi e F. Lunati, *Rapporto Filiera Alimentare*, Enea-Nomisma, Progetto "Rilevamento elaborazione e analisi aggiornata e dettagliata di dati e statistiche relativi alla filiera agro-alimentare nel Mezzogiorno" , Roma, 2000: 18.
[111]In Italy, about 8% of foodstuffs sold by chains are own-brand.

[113]Sandro Misiti from Enea (National institute for technological innovation in agriculture) is involved in a project on traceability. In his interview he stresses the need to make information on the package

This is what we have called the ***one-to-one sell and buy strategy*** that seems to be the leading model for distribution in Italy, bureaucratic and disjointed at times from the small shop round the corner or the street market (which was its original place), but still framed around personal relationships of trust. Indeed, where the relationship of trust is lost, the way to regain confidence is to re-establish the link between producers and purchasers through other means, including labelling and traceability, but not excluding the creation of new forms and spaces for encounter such as food fairs: "*For a long time consumers have lost their ties with the sphere of food production, and knowledge of production mechanisms may help to tie again that connection*".[114]

4.3 Traceability

The structure of big distribution, as was seen in the previous section, imposes that products go from the farm to the fork through a long chain, rather than through the short chain envisaged by supporters of the one-to-one sell and buy strategy. **Modern distribution** seems to require such a long chain. In this context the ways of conveying the idea of safety and quality pass through certification and traceability. Data disseminated by Coop show that so far only 15% of businesses active in the food sector adopted the control procedures specified by ISO 9000.[115]

However it seems that a number of agro-businesses have started to make provisions for a system of product traceability, which will be compulsory starting from 2005, according to Reg. CE 178/2002. In Italy traceability is disciplined by norm UNI 10939 of 2001 which defines traceability as the "capacity of tracing back the history of a product with documented information".

According to a recent research by the specialised journal *Parma Economica,* processing industries, especially in the North, are aware of the seminal importance of safety and quality control and traceability.[116] For example in the tomato industry chain, the processing plants normally adopt a traceability system in a rather formalised way, susceptible to further improvements. Traceability is linked to the company quality system, as most of the

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understandable and accessible to people, but also to develop more effective ways to join HACCP systems and traceability measures.

[114] Daniela Guerra, Councillor for food education and consumer orientation in Emilia-Romagna. *Guida a Fattorie Aperte*, Bologna, 2002.

[115] Coop, *Il nuovo lessico della sicurezza alimentare*, http://www.e-coop.it/notizie/visualizza_notizia_Home_page/1,6198,11650,00.html .

[116] "Pomodoro trasformato" in *Parma Economica, speciale obiettivo rintracciabilità*, 2001: 99-104.

industries visited by Parma Economica adopt the ISO 9000 certification system. Thus, traceability must be considered an added value to the HACCP, that is the existent standards.

The traceability system includes both the transcription of information by hand and the IT elaboration of that information. According to *Parma Economica*, the weak point of the tomato chain is the lack of consistency and uniformity in approaches along the chain. In particular, products coming from various suppliers often have different standards of control, and are gathered together in the processing plants so that traceability data concerning the field of production is often lost. However, traceability is increasingly recognised as an important factor of discrimination in the selection of suppliers, and thus growing attention is given to this aspect of production.

For a complete traceability of the *tomato industry* all these phases must be respected:

<u>Agricultural farm</u>: product homogeneous in quality and production techniques.

<u>Vector</u>: transport documentation must include a code of the supplier and the gross weight of the lot.

<u>Processing plants</u>: recording of the various phases of the production process.

<u>Semi-manufactured products for industry</u>: must carry label which indicates lots, plant of production, ingredients, product typology.

These requirements vary from various sectors of the food industry. Yet a constant element seems to be the need of homogeneous standards, and the availability of up to date technology in order to guarantee effective traceability data recording. This always requires important investments.

In order to encourage the process of structural innovation required for an efficient traceability system some regions, such as Emilia-Romagna, give funding to those agribusiness that adopt a traceability system. Food companies and agribusiness have access to this funding, along with producers organisations and companies specialised in the production of traceability systems.[117] The costs of traceability implementation appear as a major problem for those sectors and Regions characterised by high fragmentation. In Calabria this is the case of small oil producers[118], whilst beef producers (even if very small)

[117] Region Emilia Romagna Official Journal, n. 55, 16 April 2003 (Giunta Regionale 502/2003).
[118] Concerning olive oil, the implementation of traceability will be compulsory starting from 2004, which requires important investments that in many cases cannot be sustained without public subsidies. This is stated by Diego Soracco, editor of the Slow Food Guide on Olive Oil. (http://www.ilportaledellolio.it).

have come together in a zoo-technical organisation (*Associatione agricoltori zootecnici della Calabria*) that has already implemented traceability.[119] Some public institutes, such as the already quoted ENEA, offer technical assistance to small and medium business in the South in order to implement traceability systems.[120] Most of these traceability systems are implemented by private bodies, yet a public auditing of the work of these bodies has not been organised yet.

Developing new and more effective methods for traceability, conjugating them with the HACCP system (this is part of a project lead by Sandro Misiti at ENEA), seems to be the mediated means through which the encounter of the consumer with the producer can be reconstructed without actually taking the consumer to the farm. The information contained in the traceability documents should include, amongst other items, indications of the methods of production, the use of chemicals and preservatives. Both representatives of public institutions and of big agro-food companies see in traceability the potential for locating problems and tracing back responsibilities. Yet, as we shall see in the case of typical products, this mediation is not easy. Often operators in the sector cannot help noticing that 'something is lost' (even if often necessarily so) with certification and paper-works.

4.4 Typicality

Issues related to typical products are a good example to see how the rhetoric of tradition and territorial identity, on one hand, and innovation strategies such as certification and traceability on the other, meet, entangle and sometimes enter in contradiction.

The idea of restoring the food tradition of the past, and to go back to **non-mediated relationships with the territory** and its symbols and archetypes support also the idea that traditions should be preserved and typical food protected and promoted. The reasons are with no doubt cultural (preserving and re-designing a food related identity), but also tradition and natural characters of foodstuff are thought of as a mark of quality. The knowledge of the local agents that have learned by tradition how to make a product, and the specific plants that grow in a certain Regions or the animals that are bred there are the

[119]Source: http://www.apz.it/index.asp.
[120]Source: http://www.enea.it .

main guarantee of the value of the product.[121] "*Typical products are liked, are a guarantee of quality, and tell a story about authenticity; they make explicit a mix of images (soil, habitat, climate and territory) which constitutes a valid antidote against the risk of homogenization that is brought with globalisation".*[122]

Accordingly, the Italian Government has welcomed the introduction of ECC laws 2081 and 2082/92, which widen the interpretation of food quality and states the **inherent value of products whose quality is linked to specific local origin**.[123]

However what actually constitutes a traditional food product is far from uncontroversial. Carlo Pompei, of the University of Milan, defines a typical food product as follows: *"A product elaborated since remote times, in a particular area, according to a technology that remained unchanged during the time and using raw materials produced in that area…"* but he specifies*: "These are necessary but not sufficient conditions: it must be possible to distinguish this product from other similar products".*[124] Finding distinctive features for typical products is necessary when typicality constitutes the 'added value' to the product. It is necessary to identify some objective features of the product, linked to a particular territory, so that it would be impossible to reproduce the same product elsewhere, or with raw materials coming from elsewhere.

Indeed the strategy of typicality is a strategy to enhance and secure quality, but its **economic impact** should not be underestimated. Efrem Tassinato, representative of the CIA (Italian Confederation of Agricultural producers) explains: *"It is not always possible to trade the cultural aspect or the preparation of a product (…) This is instead an extremely important aspect in order to state the product quality and make it recognizable. Risk of destruction of medium and small business are represented also by the EU enlargement, which could nevertheless be transformed into an advantage by means of quality certification, and thereby of promotion, of traditional Italian products. This certification may*

[121]AAVV, *The role of typical products in fostering rural development and the effects of regulation (ECC) 2081/*92, paper presented at the 73rd Seminar of the European association of Agricultural Economists. Ancona, 28-30 June 2001.
[122]SWG-Mipaf "Relazione Regione Calabria", Agricoltura e alimentazione in Italia - la sfida della qualita, 2002: 10.
[123]A. Morelli ans S. Cicoria, "Le denominazioni protette italiane e il sistema dei controlli", *Agricoltura*, n.299, 2000.
[124]C. Pompei "Il prodotto tipico. Per legge. Fuori legge" on the difficulty of avoiding mendacious reproduction of typical products by means of laws and regulations: http://www.arcigola.com.

on the one hand safeguard the product, and on the other hand communicate in an unambiguous way its quality."[125]

Yet, in order to guarantee an economic return from the commercialisation of typical products, it is necessary to **protect them from being produced in other areas,** especially in areas outside the national territory. In order to prevent this there are norms that specify the localities where the production may take place, but also the area where the raw materials may came from, the aspect and taste of the product, the weight and so on. Consortia, registers, and sanctions against unfair competition are all measures intended to protect typicality. In fact frauds are really difficult to avoid, unless a product is genuinely typical, that is: it can be produced exclusively in a certain place. However this begs the question: how does one define a typical product?

Carlo Pompei suggests that scientific research should be aimed at identifying chemical, physical, organolectic and microbiologic criteria that characterise the product. Moreover the analytical method for evaluating and **standardising these parameters** should be identified. Finally a high number of control tests should be made in order to collect data through the years, which could be analysed, so as to produce an identikit of the typical product. This research should be funded by all those who benefit from the commercialisation of the product, that is, consortia, producer associations, but also retailer associations, regions and, ultimately, the State. [126] It goes without saying that only a small part of products (if any) will have such features as to make them actually typical, that is producible only in a particular area. We are assisting thus in the 'creation' of ' the typical' product for commercial purposes.

Indeed, it appears from this reasoning that what can be an economically rewarding typical product is rather different from the definition of typicality with which we started off, linked to a specific cultural tradition. The idea of quality that attached to the products we would buy, for example, when travelling to some particular regions, is linked probably to the idea that those products are produced in a certain way and taste in particular way. Hence buying them in a certain place and tasting them is enough to be assured of their quality. The criteria are vague and a variety of tastes and physical aspects were compatible with an identical denomination (as in the case of the various typologies of the 'formaggio di fossa'),

[125]Lecture in Rimini, 22 February 2003 (Notizie Stampa n° 14, *Tutela e valorizzazione dei prodotti tradizionali*: http://www.miafiera.com/it/press/file/mia14.doc, patrocinato da Unioncamere Nazionale.
[126]C. Pompei "Il prodotto tipico. Per legge. Fuori legge" on the difficulty of avoiding mendacious reproduction of typical products by means of laws and regulations: http://www.arcigola.com.

but the expert eater would know how to recognize good quality product, and where to buy it from in order to have guarantees of quality.

By contrast, standards, **parameters and certification constitute a mediated idea of typicality**. We can buy them in any supermarket, almost everywhere in the Western world. It is the label of typicality that reassures us of the quality and safety of the product. If the label gives us the guarantee that a product is made according to a certain procedure and with certain ingredients, why should I be concerned that it is made in a specific location? The reason for insisting on typical labels seems therefore predominantly economic, that is to protect local producers and to better market their products. *"...it is not any longer the product to generate a competitive advantage, but the features of the organisational system that have developed in time to determine that a product can be recognised on the market, thus perpetuating its typicality*"[127]

Yet the Italian gourmand would not be content with this conclusion, and would protest that a typical product is something different, which cannot be captured by a label. Labelling and promotion have in some cases distorted the very idea of a typical product, as it is quality that makes a typical product valuable, and not typicality a value in itself, or even a guarantee of quality.[128] Certifications complicate the life of honest producers of genuine typical products and encourage dishonest producers that want to make profit from fraudulent use of labels.[129]

From these considerations, it appears that the strategy of **regulation of product reputation** is an ambiguous one at least in relation to consumer trust.[130] On the one hand it differentiates certain products from mass products, certifying them as typical products. On the other hand it transforms the typical product into a mass product, in the sense that it

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[127]R. Fanfani, E. Montesor, F. Pecci, *Il sistema agroalimentare italiano*, Milano , Franco Angeli.

[128]This concept is expressed as follows by Antonio Tombolini, founder of Experia (Italian food Experience) an online shop for Italian typical products:" When the emphasis on typicality is not accompanied by the actual quality of the product, here you are: you have a risk product. Paradoxically I believe that the risk zones today are the most well known zones, as in Tuscany and Umbria, for example. These are areas in which typicality is taken for granted. Instead, to find a good Pecorino di Pienza, even if it is very famous, is a hopeless almost attempt. (...) often producers have chosen (also with the complicity of EU subsidies) the way of the 'average production`, which trivialise the product." Interview in "La bottega elettronica del gastronomo digitale" *La Repubblica*, 24 December 1998.

[129]Carlo Pompei "Il prodotto tipico.Per legge. Fuori legge" on the difficulty of avoiding mendacious reproduction of typical products by means of laws and regulations. http://www.arcigola.com/; see also L.Berard and p. Marchenay, Lieux, temps et preuves: la construction sociale des produits de terroir , *Cets du patrimonie ethnologique*, n. 24 (1995): 53-164.

[130]AAVV, *The role of typical products in fostering rural development and the effects of regulation* (ECC) 2081/92, paper presented at the 73rd Seminar of the European association of Agricultural Economists. Ancona, 28-30 June 2001.

makes it widely available almost everywhere and to everybody, betraying some of the features that make it attractive and reliable.

Table 3: Regulation of quality products in Italy.

REGULATION OF QUALITY PRODUCTS IN ITALY Two ministerial decrees set up the control system in Italy: i) MINISTERIAL DECREE of 3.11.95 which endowed the ICRF as the national authority of control. ii) MINISTERIAL DECREE of 18.12.97 (successively slightly modified in Art. 53 of Community Law n. 128/98), which assigned the Ministry of Agricultural Policy as the national authority in charge of coordinating control activities	The Consorzi di Tutela (which had previously played the control function for Italian Denominations prior to IGP and DOPs) were entrusted to control the origin and typicality of the products, and where these were lacking, the associations 'most representative' of the product in question. Where even this was lacking then the Regions or Provinces, or in the last instance the Ministry itself would nominate the control body. Control bodies were authorised to use third parties for some of the checks on the condition that these were also in conformity with the standards for the control bodies themselves. Via a D. M. of 25 May 1998 a Technical Group was further authorised by the Ministry to check on that control bodies were in fact up to standard. By 2000 the system was more or less complete with 20 bodies (overwhelmingly in the North) being authorised to carry our checks and 6 public authorities (mainly chambers of commerce).

4.5 Simply 'good' and simply 'bad'

Along with DOP, IGP and typical products in general, the **organic sector** constitutes one of the greatest economic opportunities, especially in those areas, such as the South and the Islands, where intensive agriculture never developed fully. In these Regions support for economic development has been understood recently in terms of support for organic agriculture " …*especially in those protected areas of our territory where agriculture and farming are organic by vocation and definition"*.[131] In the last years the organic market has grown remarkably (with an increase of 20% with respect to the previous year purchasing of

[131]Regione Calabria, *Proposta di legge Regionale per il consumo di prodotti biologici nelle mense scolastiche, negli ospedali, nelle case di cura e di riposo*, 2001 (Proposal for a Regional law on organic canteens in schools and hospitals).

organic products) and this has been, to a large extent, an effect of the economic incentives offered according to the already quoted EC 2078/92.

From the point of view of the consumer, **organic products seem to be a straightforward solution** to the difficult task of discerning food safety and quality. Organic food is perceived as naturally healthy, tasty, suitable for young children, and therefore a secure defence against the possible health treats of industrially produced food.[132]

This line has been endorsed by a number of public administrations, in the North as in the South, which have introduced organic canteens in schools and hospitals. In this vein, organic menus in schools have been sometimes understood as integral part of an educational programme: "*We don't want and we do not believe that it is very useful to give funding to a municipality or to a canteen as it produces, or has kids to eat, organic products. We are interested in creating comprehensive projects (...)The project consists in a theoretical part (...) to explain the correct diet and the correct kind of approach to food, and a practical part that is managed and applied everyday at lunch*".[133]

Hence, organic products are regarded by some local councils as the **engine for a general change** not only in the way fruits and vegetables are grown and animals are farmed, but also in the food culture. *"We think that the conversion of (…) school, hospital and retirement house canteens is not only possible, but it is also a duty because of all the benefits that this will produce to the direct advantage of consumer health and to the indirect advantage of the regional economy, and, lastly, because of its long term incidence on the saving of the community, due to the lower cost for the treatment of food related diseases"*[134]

However, the economic impact that public incentives have on the local and national economy have given rise to important discussions among the public authorities and producer organisations, which press for priority to be given to products that are organic, but also local, in order to "*promote those productive activities that, in the full respect of*

[132]M. Miele, C. Neri, *Literature review 31 July 2001*, Università degli studi di Pisa: 47.
[133]Councellor Salomoni, Regione Emilia Romagna, discussion on the local regulation on "Norms for comsume orientation and food education and for the qualification for public catering services", 2003.
[134]Regione Calabria, *Proposta di legge Regionale per il consumo di prodotti biologici nelle mense scolastiche, negli ospedali, nelle case di cura e di riposo*, 2001 (Proposal for a Regional law on organic canteens in schools and hospitals).

nature and territory, are trying to find a possibility of economic and occupational growth…"[135].

Indeed the perceived benefits of organic food for health and for the environment cannot be separated from a preoccupation with economic growth and an **interest in promoting national production**. Organic products are presented most of the time as the natural vocation of Italian agriculture, a secure means of environmental, health and economic advantages both for the community and for individual producers. Relatively undeveloped Regions, such as Calabria, have found an incentive to development in organic production. Indeed, its geographical situation, not very favourable to extensive agriculture, is such that (contrary to common sense) the use of chemicals and pesticides is lower than in other Regions.[136] This let us think that organic is the way of development of these regions. Organic production is perceived as the portal to an **environmentally sustainable** agriculture, and for a farming that is respectful of **animal welfare**.

By contrast, **GM products are associated with globalisation**, with **multinationals**, with **out-of-hand technology** and an "*invasion of the field of nature",* as one Senator described biotechnologies.[137] In its stronger version, the opposition to GM food links to a more general economic problem (patenting of biotechnological products) and to an environmental problem, along with the uncertainty about the long term effects on human health. Most of our informants have stressed the uncertainty dimension in this field: until we do not have certainty on the effects of GM food we cannot accept them: *"only when it will be ascertained without any residual doubt that these products are harmless in the short and in the long term both for heath and environment, and absolute safety can be assured"*. [138] Yet, it must be remarked, such absolute certainty that is required for GM food is not, in fact, required for conventional food.

Starting from the first parliamentary debates on biotechnologies, in the mid 1990s, the Italian Government has taken a **cautious approach** to the issue. Ethical questions, concerning in particular the **ethics of reproduction** (and therefore how to create and recreate living beings, but also concerns for a respect of life and for human beings), have

[135]Regione Calabria, Proposta di legge Regionale per il consumo di prodotti biologici nelle mense scolastiche, negli ospedali, nelle case di cura e di riposo, 2001 (Proposal for a Regional law on organic canteens in schools and hospitals).
[136]F.Gaudio (ed.), *Programma territoriale ambientale- reg.CE n. 2078/92 Applicazzione e valutazione economica e ambientale*, INEA Calabria 2002: 25.
[137]See the contribution of Senator Monticane in the discussion on biotechnologies, Senato della Repubblica Italiana, 329 Seduta Pubblica (10 Marzo 1998).

been at the core of the political debate. Every **ethical claim** is backed up by the tacit presupposition that **if people were adequately informed about biotechnologies, they would reject them.** In fact until year 2000 a **public debate on GMO was virtually non existent,** even though important parliamentary debates were taking place, in the name of the people, on the duty of the Italian Government to oppose EU initiatives towards the patenting and commercialisation of GM food. In those years Italy supported the appeal of the Netherlands against the adoption of EU directive 98\44 (rejected by the European Court of Justice in 2001, aff.C-377\98), and in 1999 the Italian Government signed a declaration against the authorisation of the commercialisation of GM food. At the beginning of 2000 some regional councils (such as Lazio and Friuli-Venezia Giulia) have adopted some restrictive legislation on GMOs. Yet during these years there was very little media coverage on the matter, mainly dominated by reports of environmentalist NGO, such as Greenpeace and Lega Ambiente. Only after the protest of various NGOs against the conference exhibition on biotechnologies organised in Genoa in May 2000, an event widely covered by the press, did GM made its entrance in the public debate and become an everyday conversation topic.[139]

Today the public attitude towards genetic engineering tends to be **sceptical**, especially as concerns food production and animal breeding. A recent survey shows that a large percentage of Italians holds **strongly negative attitudes** towards eating tomatoes produced by gene technology (36.4% of the sample declared gene technologies are 'strongly harmful' and 39.4% judged these technologies 'strongly bad').[140] People continue to profess **little knowledge about genetic engineering**, and hence consumers are asked to react on an issue they have little information about, and on which it is widely acknowledged that there is a lot to be learned.[141] However data from the Eurobarometer[142] show that even in cases where public knowledge has increased in the field of biotechnology, people are less optimistic that these can have a beneficial impact on their living conditions. The idea that **consumers will be the ultimate judges of biotechnologies** is rather difficult to defend as it seems that NGOs, politicians and even

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[138]Discussion on biotechnologies, Senato della Repubblica Italiana, 329 Seduta Pubblica (10 Marzo 1998) motion1-00095.

[139]See AA.VV: "Public perceptions of Agricultural Biotechnologies in Europe", Final Report of The PABE research project funded by the EU Commission: 42.

[140]A. Saba and M. Vassallo, 'Consumer attitudes toward the use of gene technology in tomato production', Food Quality and preferences, 13 (2002): 13-21.

[141]A. Saba and M. Vassallo, 'Consumer attitudes toward the use of gene technology in tomato production', Food Quality and Preferences, 13 (2002): 19

some producers have interpreted the will of the people before they even have the means to form an opinion. In an issue as complex as GMOs it seems very difficult to form an opinion and act consequently. Reflexivity applied to GM food questions seems to imply too many elements to be taken into consideration, and rejection of GM food seems to be the safest solution, a refuge in familiarity.[143]

According to some **scientists**, who are generally more open to biotechnologies, Italian consumers are the victims of bad information on this subject. Political scepticism towards gene technologies and prejudices have been used **to stop research**, thus penalising, for example, the diffusion of some traditional varieties of vegetables, which could have benefited from the application of gene technology, to the advantage of other varieties which are the outcome of breeding activities financed abroad.[144] Many scientists criticise the way in which the **biotechnology debate is simplified** and passed on to the people through politics, the lack of critical sense and the capacity to distinguish between various applications of biotechnologies, thus reducing the whole debate on GMOs to a fight against it.

The most flexible position on GM food, not surprisingly, is held by industrial producers and retailers. A number of them (such as the supermarket chains Coop Italia and Esselunga and the food industries Barilla and Galbusera) have excluded GM food from their range of products "*anticipating the preferences of consumers*" (from the interview with a representative of COOP). Yet from our interviews it emerges that even COOP which has

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[142]Eurobarometer 46.1 Europeans and modern Biotechnology. Report written for The European Commission DGXII/E/1 by INRA, 1996.

[143]Luhmann, N. *Trust and Power: two works*, John Whiley and Sons, Chichester.

[144]Vitangelo Magnifico, director of the Istituto Sperimentale per l'Ortocultura, remarks that gene technologies are the object of many prejudices. In his opinion, these technologies are the correct and efficient answer to the problems caused by viruses to some Italian traditional plant varieties. Take as an example the most well known Italian tomato variety, the San Marzano, which with the tomato industry in Southern Italy identifies. This is a very delicate variety, often subject to virus infections, causing high production cost and sometimes disastrous consequences for local agriculture. This problem, it is claimed, could be solved only by means of hybridisation, but many research projects have been paralysed by restrictive norms both at national and EU level. (See the interview: "Il pomodoro giallo annulla il nostro 'oro rosso'" on www.Iniziativameridionale.it).

Of the same opinion is Chris Bowler of the vegetable molecular biology department of the Zoological Station Anton Dohrn in Naples, who thinks that the Italian Government should support a more focused research in this field. He remarks that nowadays transgenic plants can be generated without the use of antibiotic resistant genes, which are derived from other non-vegetable organisms, and which have represented one of the justified worries of environmental organisations. These plants will be equivalent to varieties generated through traditional breeding techniques, with the added value of a better capacity to produce the desired features. These techniques could contribute to the ideal of a modern sustainable agriculture, and indeed many prejudices are unjustified by scientific evidence.

A different opinion is held by the President of Associazione Civiltà Contadina Alberto Olivucci and expert on traditional seeds: "Today only ten varieties of tomatoes have an Italian name and they have a history that goes back no more than 30 years. Not to mention that more than 86% of Italian typical varieties have disappeared.(…) Traditional seeds give results far beyond those of GM products." Speech in Rimini, 22 been very active in this field, does not hold an attitude of '*tout court closure*' towards GMO, but it rather **adopts a precautionary outlook.**

Representatives of McDonald's stressed that the **concerns today are of a legal nature** (there is a ban on GM food in the EU) and there are no reasons not to offer the GM option, when trade barriers will be abolished, providing that adequate labelling is offered. The meat industry INALCA is devising a labelling and traceability systems that will allow for differentiation between GM and GM-free products, envisaging a change in the market rules in the near future. Primary production associations express concerns of an economic nature. Indeed multinational and foreign companies will benefit most from GM products; the scarcity of acreage and its costs make it difficult to think of extensive GM production in Italy; and GM products may open up an **unfair competition** between the new products and national products, produced according to traditional methods.

Thus the **strong opposition between organic and genetic food** may be brought back, once again, to the opposition between the traditional, local, natural and familiar versus the global, unknown, complex, industrial product. In this sense food risk, for Italians, is an integral part of the 'risk society', which is made by human actions and decisions, rather than from nature and tradition.[145]

Tomato production in Italy
Tomatoes are one of the most important crops in Italy, and are an ingredient of many traditional dishes: not only pizza, but pasta sauce, salad and meat sauce recipes include tomatoes. Tomatoes are used in large quantity either fresh or in a range of processed products. Nevertheless they have been included rather recently in the Mediterranean diet. They were imported to Europe 450 years ago and, because of their reputation of being poisonous they were cultivated in agriculture only 250 years ago, and in Southern Italy from the beginning of the nineteenth century.[146] However, it has been possible to reach current levels of production only through with an important development of the processing industry in the twentieth century. In Italy about 91.000 hectares of land is occupied by tomato groves, distributed mainly in

February 2003 (Notizie Stampa n° 14 *Tutela e valorizzazione dei prodotti tradizionali:* http://www.miafiera.com/it/press/file/mia14.doc .

145 U. Beck, *Risk Society.Towards a New Modernity,* London, Sage, 1992.

146 C. Bowler, "Passato, presente e futuro del pomodoro San Marzano", *L'Informatore Agrario*, n.24, 2001; A. Crescenzi and G.D'Agrosa, *Patologia e difesa integrata del Pomodoro*, Regione Basilicata 1999.

the Regions of Puglia, Emilia Romagna and Campania. As regards the South, Puglia is the biggest producer of processing tomatoes. However, still not many factories have been set up in this area, so that the fruits have to be transported by lorry to Campania (200/300 km away), where processing plants have been established since the eighteenth century. In Northern Italy, processing tomatoes are mainly grown in Emilia-Romagna, around Parma and Piacenza and in some areas around Ferrara. The climate is ideal for this cultivation, as it presents a wide difference between day and night-time temperatures, producing a pleasant colour in the fruit. Here the production of processing tomatoes is fully mechanised and subject to expert control. The processing threshold allocated by the EU is 4350 000 tonnes of fresh tomatoes. This volume is significantly lower than the demand of the Italian industry.In the last two years the national harvest has decreased by 7% from 2001 to 2002, peaking in Puglia (minus 15%). For the current year a further decrease of 30-35% in production is expected. This is due to unfavourable meteorological conditions that have compromised the harvest in the last two years, and the bacterial diseases that destroyed the harvest in Campania. Yet, a trend towards the import of half-processed products from third countries, in particular from China, is responsible for this crisis. In 2001 Italy has imported processed tomatoes to a value of 36,5 million Euro. The increase of import is due in part to production costs. Indeed, a kilo of tomatoes for processing rarely reaches the cost of 0.50 Euro, and this means that a huge harvest is needed in order to compensate production costs.

Table 4: Tomatoes: Import-export - *Source: Ismea*

YEAR	Import		Export		Net	
	000 Q.Li	1000 €	000 Q.Li	1000 €	000 Q.Li	1000 €
1999	474.9	38,094	1,153.5	107,256	678.6	69,162
2000	473.1	45,825	1,221.9	141,304	748.7	95,479
2001	461,8	38.524	1.298,2	148,993	836.4	110,469

From the legislative point of view, Law n.96/1969 made provisions for quality control on export of peeled tomatoes and concentrate tomatoes and the application of those quality standards to the internal market. A D. M. of 18 February 1984 regulated the use of cans for preserving foodstuff.

Both fresh and processed are generally a safe product that has not reached the headlines with scandals. However, some problems have been raised in specialised circles concerning the application of chemical substances to the production cycle; the quality of containers (after some consumer association revealed that an anomalous presence of tin was released by cans, many manufacturers adopted enamelled cans, using a white paint); the possible presence of GM products in semi-manifactured products imported from China).

4.6 Quality, value for money, ethics and nutrition

In this chapter we started off by saying that quality emerges as a concept with many definitions, which subsumes many other values, such as safety, taste, nutrition. Yet with a closer look to statements and definitions from the interviews it appears that the relationship between the value of quality and the other issues that we have identified is rather complex, and in this section we shall look at such complexity. In part this complexity was explored above when talking of sanitary rules, hygiene (section 4.1) and perceptions of quality, yet other dimensions deserve attention.

QUALITY AND NUTRITION

Public authorities and representatives of consumer associations strictly relate quality food with nutritious food and stress that quality food which is not simply food that does not threaten consumers' health, but also food adequately nutritious. For example, the consumer association ACU recalls that consumers should claim: "*The guarantee that what we intake in our body does not offend it, but feeds it (nutre).*"[147] Rather different is the idea of private food companies such as McDonald's. Their on-line booklet on quality does not mention the nutritional qualities of the product. This was confirmed during the interview, when their representatives stated that quality and nutrition are two separate concepts. Indeed they stress the importance of **private initiative and market self regulation in promoting quality and safety,** against the confusion emerging from the political handling of food scandals. Concerning **nutrition** they see instead a relevant **role of the public authority** that should educate citizens so as to enabling **informed choice**.

QUALITY AND VALUE FOR MONEY.

Quality products cost more. Even supermarkets like COOP, which are rooted in cooperatives where consumers came together in order to obtain good quality products at lower prices, may be very sensitive to swings of the market in favour of quality. Still, the representative of COOP that we interviewed stated that given that COOP products are of

[147] ACU & Federconsumatori, "La salute vien mangiando", 2001: 3.

high quality, safe and ethical and in fact they offer better prices than the competing products on the market.

Apart from McDonald's that makes value for money one of the central items of company policy, it seems that all other actors agree that quality imposes higher costs than the discount products in vogue in the 80s. This is the opinion, for example, of the president of the agricultural lobby Qualità Italia and representatives of the organic sector in general. They think that people are prepared to pay a lot for expensive cars and designer clothes, so it is difficult to understand the fuss about increases in prices concerning quality food.

For the representatives of the farmers association Coldiretti the question of value in relation to prices is mainly a problem of information on the relationship price-quality: *"we think that correct and objective information is not available to the consumer in order for them to choose how they want to spend, for example considering the advertising we see on the television."*

Also the public authorities seem to think that quality has a price and consumers should get used to paying it: *"We estimate that the percentage of food expenses decreased in time from 30%-40% to something like 8%, a very low percentage. How did this happen? This was because there was a plan in order to favour other kind of family expenses. This situation has led families to prefer quantity rather then quality, also regarding food, in order to have more money for cars and holidays. An important aim might be to rediscover the habit to spend for quality food."* (Representative of Regione Emilia-Romagna).[148]

Consumer associations reaffirm instead the right to have quality products at reasonable prices and lament that often quality labels are used to justify prices that do not correspond to the actual value of the product. They ask instead that quality products are accessible to consumers of all social backgrounds. Indeed it is especially on the question of process that consumer associations have in the last year played an important role in the public debate (see box, below)

[148]National statistics from Istat are something different from the data here of the Regional representative. Nevertheless official data confirm the decrease of the percentage of family income that is spent for food. Indeed, in 1974 Italian families spent over 40% of their total income for food, this decreased to the 25% in the middle of '90, and below 20% in 2000. It is also to be remarked that while domestic consumption constantly decreased, extra domestic food consumption has increased. (A. Montini, *I consumi alimentari delle famiglie italiane: un modello per le decisioni di consumo extradomestico utilizzando i microdati di spesa familiare:* http://www.dse.unibo.it/wp/364.pdf.

The increase of prices and the consumer strike

The question of prices and of value for money in the food sector has been characterized in the last two years by a debate regarding the increase in prices after the introduction of the Euro.

Public opinion, consumer associations and many other observers blamed the Government, the official statistics office ISTAT and many shopkeepers, and denounced that prices doubled for consumers after the introduction of the new currency. A different point of view was presented by national authorities, which denied that prices had increased by such rates and confirmed the correctness of the official inflation rate, which is periodically measured by ISTAT, and which remained on a regular level of 2% or 3%.

Since the beginning of 2002 consumer associations pointed out the risk of an unjustified growth of prices due to the rounding up of selling price. The increase of prices mainly regarded food products and particularly fresh vegetables and tariffs in bars and restaurants. In order to face this problem, the Government decided at the end of 2002 to undertake actions such as the reintroduction of the double prices (Euro and Italian lira) on the shelves the shops and supermarkets.[149] These actions did not satisfy consumer associations, and did not modify the prices. Under these circumstances the divergent perspectives of consumers and official statistics grow into a virulent struggle. Indeed, at the beginning of 2003, a union of consumer associations commissioned a survey to the independent research centre Eurispes[150], in order to measure the price increase as it had been perceived by Italian families during 2002. In the first days of 2003 Eurispes disseminated the results of this research. According Eurispes's data, food prices increased for families by 29% during 2002, with a peak for vegetables and fruit (51%), eggs (34%) and fresh fish (28%)[151]. This research was based on a different statistical system compared to that of ISTAT because it took into consideration the effects of prices on family incomes rather than the measure of an official and more abstract national rate of inflation. These results finally represented for consumers the scientific evidence they needed in order to contrast the Government's policy of prices; Eurispes' data were used against the Government itself and its official statistical institute, ISTAT.

[149] E. Occorsio, "Contro i rincari torna il doppio prezzo", in *La Repubblica*, 30 December 2002.
[150] www.eurispes.it
[151] "Pasta carne e verdura più cari del 29 per cento", in *La Repubblica*, 2 January 2003.

The reaction of ISTAT was an attempt to undermine the correctness of Eurispes's work, while the Government tended to defend status and legitimacy of the official statistical source of ISTAT, and confirmed that it is the only institution entitled to make official statements on the level of prices.

Note that, while the prices of food products have definitely been affected by the change of currency, it is also true that food products also suffered from damage due to bad weather. This had an impact on prices, particularly for vegetables. In any case, at the end of the same month ISTAT announced a change in the 'basket' used to measure price increase. Among food products that have been introduced in the basket are chicken, cream and honey; products that are not longer considered are flour and frozen goods for frying. But these minor changes did not convince consumer associations about the correctness of ISTAT's results. For consumers, these changes "only constituted smoke in our eyes".[152] These criticisms became more and more intense when ISTAT admitted that some minor errors occurred due to technical mistakes during the January survey.[153] Official apologies from ISTAT did not satisfy consumer associations, but also shopkeeper associations, and the trade unions, which criticized the lack of transparency in the measurements of prices.

The controversy did not seem to stop or weaken, also due to a new independent survey by consumer associations regarding the first six months of 2003, from which it emerged that food prices had increased by 11,9% for final consumers.[154]

The debate on prices was based on the relation between the credibility of science, the political management of the crisis, and the economic interests involved. The debate on prices reached newspapers' front pages when others aside from official institutions produced their own scientific evidences of price increase. In a similar way, the Government's point of view was widely contested especially when the common

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[152]"I consumatori contro l'Istat: solo fumo negli occhi", in *La Repubblica*, 28 January 2003.
[153]"Istat ammette un errore a gennaio carovita al 2,8%", in *La Repubblica* 18 February 2003
[154]S. Bianchi, "Un anno di aumenti nascosti e la spesa costa sempre di più", in *La Repubblica*, 12 August 2003
[155]M. Bucchi, "La democrazia alla prova della scienza", in *Il Mulino*, 6\2003:1050-1057.
[156]"Istat ammette un errore a gennaio carovita al 2,8%, in *La Repubblica,* 18 February 2003.
[157]"Guida pratica allo sciopero dei consumi del 16 settembre", www.intesaconsumatori.it, (09-09-2003)
[158]"Prezzi, sciopero della spesa: è guerra di cifre sulle adesioni", in *La Repubblica*, 16 September 2003.
[159]The Minister Antonio Marzano declaration reported in "Prezzi, sciopero della spesa: è guerra di cifre sulle adesioni", in *La Repubblica*, 16 September 2003.
[160]www.altroconsumo.it
[161]"La spesa è sempre più cara è boom per gli hard discount",in *La Repubblica*, 16 October 2003.
[162]S. Bianchi, "Un anno di aumenti nascosti e la spesa costa sempre di più", in *La Repubblica*, 12 August 2003.
[163]L. Cillis, Natale, shopping in frenata spesi 880 milioni in meno, *La Repubblica*, 27 december 2003.

perception found support in scientific evidence: when public opinion coincided with scientific data, institutions could not deny this public feeling.

This situation appears in some aspect similar to the relation between science, policy and public opinion in the GMO debate. As the sociologist Bucchi points out, "the condition of policy today is characterised by polyphony of experts, which sometimes offer very different and contrasting valuations. […]. [Probably] we are faced with a crisis of legitimacy of procedures, which connects scientific expertise, decision-making and politic representation".[155] Scientific processes (also in social science) are today more open than before, and now consumer associations can employ economic experts that discover errors in official scientific surveys done by institutional centres, and on this scientific basis they can criticize institutional evidence, as occurred in February 2003 for price surveys.[156] This appears to be a strong advance in consumer associations' activity during these last few years.

The most important episode concerning the debate on prices is constituted by the strike of consumers organised on 16 September 2003 by the union of consumer associations that had commissioned the Eurispes's study. The instructions that associations gave to consumers for the strike were, for example, to avoid breakfast at the bar or dinner at the restaurant; to buy food before or after the day of the strike and even not to do after bank transactions during that day.[157]

The reactions to this consumer strike were very different, and different camps reported different adhesion rates to the strike. While consumer associations assessed participation at 47%, Confercercenti, the shopkeepers association, registered only a purchase decrease by 10%.[158] The Government's held a position of neutrality. In fact, it could not deny consumers' perception sustained by (alternative) statistical evidence; but at the same time supported shopkeepers, who constitute an important part of its electorate. The Minister of Production Activities attempted a mediation (the Ministry coordinates the activities of the consumer association and other professional associations at institutional level, *see section 5.1*), and stated that "indiscriminate strikes against all business do not make sense. We should instead penalise dishonest shopkeepers and choose the honest ones".[159] Shopkeeper associations could not freely criticize the consumer strike, as they considered a clash between shops and consumers the most dangerous of all possible outcomes. In the words of the president of Confcommercio Sergio Billè: "strike is legitimate, but it should be directed toward other subjects". It is also to be noted that an important consumer association, Altroconsumo, declared itself to be contrary to the strike, defining it a “demagogic tool”.[160] This strong dispute, independent surveys, consumer strikes, errors in official calculations and the ephemeral proposition to reintroduce the double price despite a confused situation, was a cause of great confusion amongst consumers. However it revealed that during the last two or three years, the question of prices is not been a main focus of politicians and administrators. Italian authorities overlooked the question value for money, and paid more attention to high-price food quality rather than to Italian families’ real power of purchase. This perspective is clearly confirmed by the remarkable developing rate of Italian discount supermarkets in 2003. Indeed, despite a general situation characterised by economic stagnation and contraction of purchasing rates, in 2003 the number of discount supermarkets increased by 5.5%, reaching a total of 3.100.[161]

As the president of Eurispes Gian Maria Farra pointed out in presenting its own research, an important effect of such strong increase of prices was the shift of consumer choices towards less expensive - and as a consequence lower quality - products.[162] This aspect of the relationship between level of prices and level of quality seems to have attracted little attention in the national debate on prices and value for money, however it seems to be a decisive question for the Italian food market.

This situation was clearly confirmed in the last days of 2003, when the shopkeepers association Confesercenti presented data on Christmas consumption, which in 2003 was been 3% less then the preceding year (with a loss of 880 millions of Euros).[163]

QUALITY AND ETHICS

The growing attention for ethical (fair traded and environmentally sustainable) products in Italy seems to accompany a more general attention for quality. Indeed, in Italy, food constituted in 2001-2002 about 80% of fair trade balance, raising 20,000,000 Euros.[164] Indeed, following the EFTA report of 1995, Italian ethical consumption per capita was 0,2% of the per capita income, showing the same rate of countries such as Sweden and Norway. Italy does not appear very different than other European countries such as the

[164]CTM-Altromercato, *Rapporto annuale 2001-2002*: www.altromercato.it.

United Kingdom (0,4), which present a higher rate, and France and Spain, which remain on a rate of 0,04.[165]

In particular, organic products are conceived as a guarantee of environmental sustainability, but also as the motor for initiating a more general change in the way food is produced and commercialised (see also *section 4.5)*. Respect for animal welfare and the environment are often perceived as intrinsic in the conversion to organic farming and agriculture.

It is interesting to remark that consumers and civil society in general seem to have a greater impact (or at least are being attributed greater impact by other actors) on ethical issues than on other food issues. As it was seen in the above discussion on biotechnologies, ethical statements were made in the name of 'the people', and the impact of civil society organisations in raising the issue was officially acknowledged in Parliament.[166] Along the same lines private companies such as COOP state in their position documents on OGM that their costumers "are against GM food".[167] Thus it seems that to the citizen-consumer is given, at least rhetorically, the task of making ethical demands of food production. The same can be said for animal welfare, where animal rights associations have been the main group of interest in pressing the Government to sponsor a special committee on animal welfare (see *section 3.6*).

4.7 Some general consideration on strategies for restoring trust

What Luhmann calls '**familiarity'**[168] seems to capture best the strategy that Italian have to protect themselves against possible food hazards, by buying food from friends or acquaintances, or through buying groups with whom they share not only tastes but also, often, ethical commitment. Even if it seems that quantitative data about food buying groups do not exist, in every medium-size Italian city there are one or more buying groups.[169] It is difficult to estimate how much food is actually acquired through informal channels, as official statistics are not available. However political institutions as well as producer

[165]Efta, *Rapporto sul commercio equo*, Bolzano, CTM, 1995.
[166]Discussion on biotechnologies, Senato della Repubblica Italiana, 329 Seduta Pubblica (10 Marzo 1998) motion1-00095 motion nn. 1-00081 e 1-00204 " By welcoming also the requests of some Italian associations such as Greenpeace, the Centro internazionale crocevia, the Comitato scientifico antivivisezionista and the Verdi ambiente e società, which promoted an intensive sensibilisation campaign on such an important and complex subject , that we ask to you and to the Government a committment (…)".
[167]COOP, *La posizione di COOP sugli OGM*, Coop Italia position document on GM food.
[168]N. Luhmann, *Trust and Power: two works*, Chichester, John Whiley and Sons, 1979.

associations consider this a way to institutionalise distrust. Our interviewees, especially in Calabria, have stated that people generally prefer to consume food produced by themselves or by their acquaintances. Homemade food is by definition considered safer and of better quality. Thus there is a substantial portion of production that escapes official control, but enjoys the trust of consumers. If industrial food has brought about uncertainty, then consuming the food that we know where it comes from will reassure citizens. Yet there is a plurality of actual strategies to know 'where the food is coming from'.

The **institutionalisation of distrust** is effectuated, on the one hand, through what we have called **'one to one sell and buy'**, that is putting the consumer in touch with the producer, shortening the chain and thus bypassing the need of trust in traceability procedures. On the other hand, because it is very difficult to organise large scale models of "one to one sell and buy", the link is reproduced (along the 'long chain') via the modernisation of the system of **labelling, traceability** and **certification of quality products**. Interestingly, institutional efforts and public funds both in the long and in the short chain are being directed at differentiating the **national product** (via quality labels and traceability) from other products, coming from abroad, implying that, along with economic and development consideration, Italian consumers would trust their food better than any other products.

[169]Often buying groups are connected via national networks. The major network is GAS (www.http://pages.inrete.it/cocorico/gas.html) which links more than 70 groups across the national territory.

5. THE CONSUMER: DISCURSIVE VERSIONS OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITY

5.1 Consumer rights and the legal framework

In order to give a description of the Italian legal framework on the consumer and on consumers' rights, it is useful to consider at least three questions related to the development of this framework:

1) Europeanization: the European impulse towards consumer protection preceded the development of the national legislation. National regulation followed EU directives.

2) Fragmentation: the legal sources are many and a distinction can be made on the one hand between European sources and national sources, and on the other hand, at national level they operate at different levels (e.g.: national, regional, municipal).

3) Harmonisation: the process of implementation of EU directives at national level is facing, and will have to face in the next few years, some obstacles and challenges in order to meet international standards.

<u>THE IMPULSE OF EU REGULATION</u>

As the jurist Guido Alpa points out "EU legislation has been the real engine for the realization of consumer legislation in national legal systems, where such a legal sector did not exist. For our country it has been essential, or even better one could say that only because of the membership of Italy in the Common Market consumer rights could develop".[170]

Hence we will now briefly consider the major steps of EU legislation towards the protection of consumer rights. The first important contribution of the EU towards an elaboration of consumer rights was resolution 92/1 of the European Council in 1975. This resolution (preceded by the European Charter on consumer protection in 1973[171]) stated the main objectives of the European Community in relation to consumer rights. These specifically include issues related to safety and security, consumers' economic interests, advisory activity for consumers, improvement of education and information on these themes, and the development of organizations for consumer representation at institutional level. In Italy,

[170]Guido Alpa*, Il diritto dei consumatori*, Bari, Laterza, 2002: 10.
[171]*Carta Europea dei consumatori*, Resolution, n. 543, 973.

these guidelines constitute the starting point for many initiatives in consumer legislation. However, until 1997 such interventions were not realised on a large scale, via structural laws, but rather it was preferred to modify each legislative sector with minor adjustments.

The Maastricht Treaty, in force since 1993, contains a special title for the protection of the Consumer (title 10 of the Treaty).[172] This regulation identifies specific areas of competence of the EU for consumer protection, for eample in article no. 100 it is affirmed that the EU "contributes to the achievement of a high level of consumer protection".[173] In the same period the EU decided to launch triennial programmes specifically dedicated to consumer right, in order to develop and reinforce consumer rights. The first programme took place in the years 1990-1992, whilst the current one (2002-2004) is inaugurating a 'new strategy' which aims at improving the protection of consumers especially concerning asymmetries of information between consumers and other actors, such as producers.[174]

With the Treaty of Amsterdam the EU programmatic guidelines made - in the words of Guido Alpa - "a decisive change of direction in order to coordinate the objectives of the European Union".[175] Article no. 153 reaffirmed the specific competence of the EU for consumer protection. Moreover, it introduced for the first time the right of the consumer to be represented. More specifically, it underlines the importance of consumer associations as relevant actors for contributing to consumer protection, and the need to favour the presence of these associations at institutional level.[176]

In order to be translated into practice, the EU programmatic guidelines should be enacted through the national legislation. Therefore, firstly we have to consider when European legislation was adopted by Italian laws; secondly we have to look at questions connected with the real possibilities of an introduction of new norms into the national legal framework. A major problem identified by observers is that, while targets are clearly indicated at the EU level, the implementation of legal 'procedures' is entirely left to the national authorities, which act in full authonomy. Indeed it has been noted that EU rules on consumer rights can be adopted, even if with some difficulties; to the contrary, the efficiency of the legal

[172]Signed on 7\2\1992 (Law 3.11.1992, n. 454)
[173]Law 3.11.1992, n. 454, art.100.
[174]G. Alpa, *Il diritto dei consumatori*, Bari, Laterza, 2002: p. 45
[175]Amsterdam treaty, in force since 1\5\1999.
[176]A. Bartolini, *Guida ai Diritti dei Consumatori*, Roma D'Anselmi Editore, 1999:12. Also see Alpa Guido, *Il diritto dei Consumatori*, Bari, Laterza, 2002.

apparatus for the application of such rules or to the process of remedying infringements of consumer rights is very limited.[177]

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ITALIAN LEGAL FRAMEWORK

As explained in the previous section, national legislation on consumer protection was well preceded by European directives. Even if primary legal sources of consumer rights can be individuated in the Italian Costitution and other legislative sources[178], some specific laws have been produced as implementation of EU directives.[179] This legislation is characterised by a high degree of fragmentation because is composed by different laws intended to reform only certain aspects of each single sector (e.g.: advertising, tourist rights, commerce sector etc). This preliminary implementation gained new ground with Law 281\98, an organic legislation on consumer rights which reorganised all consumer concerned rights in a unique text. It is comprehensive of the list of rights elaborated in the EU resolution of 1975, with the addiction of some original elements, which offer a characterization of the national context. One of the most interesting new elements is, for example, an explicit reference to 'quality', as well as to 'security' and 'sanity', which are explicitly considered in the EU resolution. This reference seems to reflect the wider interest of the Italian food system in the concept of 'quality' compared to a purely safety point of view, in particular in the food sector, and its strategic importance in the national food system.[180]

Law 281\98 defines consumers as "consumers and users": everyone who buys a good or a service for purposes not directly connected to a business or professional activity.[181] This distinction between consumers and professionals is interesting, as the consumer is here defined only through a negative characterisation (neither a business, nor a professional or

[177] S. Ferreri, "L'intervento dell'Unione Europea a tutela dei consumatori e le possibili reazioni di sustrato negli Stati membri", in *Rivista di diritto civile*, 2002, fasc. 5, pt. 2: 633-57.
[178] The sources of Italian legislation on consumer right are the Italian Constitution, order laws, Regional laws, local administrations and independent authorities acts, such as those from the Antitrust Authority, the CONSOB (consumer right in financial investments), ISVAP (for private insurance sector) and the Privacy Authority.
[179] Most important national laws on consumer rights that actuate communitarian directives are: d.l. 25.1.1992, n.74, on deceptive advertising; d. lgs. 15.1.1992, n. 50 on producers' responsibilities; d.lgs. 25.2.2000, n. 63, on consumer's right for bank loan; law 6.8.1990, n. 223, on television's activity and audience rights; d.lgs. 17.3.1995, n. 111, on rights concerning travels and holidays services; d. lgs. 30.12.1992, n. 514, on medicines' advertising; d.lgs. 9.11.1998, n. 185, on consumers' rights in distance transactions.
[180] G. Alpa, *Il diritto dei consumatori*, Bari, Laterza, 2002: 71.
[181] G. Alpa, *Il diritto dei consumatori*, Bari, Laterza, 2002: 69.

an association, thereby a consumer).[182] The consumer rights recognized in this law can be divided into 7 categories[183], which are listed in the table below.

Table 4: Consumer rights

Consumer rights
1) right to health
2) right to safety and quality of products
3) right to have fair information
4) right to a correct advertising
5) right to consumer education
6) right to correctness and transparency in commercial transactions
7) right to be represented by consumer associations

THE LEGAL DEFINITION OF THE CONSUMER AND CONSUMER ASSOCIATIONS

Law 281\98 specifically defines the status of consumer associations and the way in which these associations can act in order to defend consumers. Consumer associations are those social formations devoted exclusively to the rights and interests of consumers and users. It is to be noted that the use of the form "exclusively" excludes all those groups with a multiplicity of aims, such as political parties and trade unions as well as consumer cooperatives.[184]

The law also established the CNCU (National Council of Consumers and Users). This national council brings together all the most important consumer associations (today there are 14). It is the implementation of EU directives promoted by the Amsterdam Treaty about consumer representation at institutional level. The CNCU is part of the Ministry of Productive Activities (and the Minister chairs the meetings), and its members include the representatives of Regions and autonomous provinces. Even if traditionally consumer

[182]M. Esposito "La tutela dei consumatori tra codice civile e costituzione, in *Giurisprudenza di merito*, 2000, fasc. 1 pt. 4: 191-3.
[183]G. Ghidini, V. Guolo, P. Mariotti, *I tuoi diritti di consumatore e utente*, Milano, Editore Ulrico Hoelpi, 2000: 266-7.
[184]Even if consumer cooperatives are not members of the National Council of consumer associations they could be invited to council's activities. As G. Alpa points out, many have been hesitant in excluding consumer cooperatives by the National Council, considering the fact that those cooperatives have been the first formations to sustain consumer rights in Italy. G. Alpa, *Il diritto dei consumatori*, Bari, Laterza, 2002: 71.

protection has been a task of the Ministry of industry (rather than to the Ministry of Health or of the Economy), this affiliation is widely criticized as it creates a situation of conflict of interests with the industry and other productive sectors the interests of which are also represented by the Ministry.[185]

The main purposes of the CNCU are those of expressing opinions, formulating proposals, promoting research, and more in general represent consumer interests at Government level.

A very important change produced by law 281\98 concerns the right of consumer associations to act in courts representing general consumer rights.[186] With this law all consumer associations certified by the Ministry Productive Activities are qualified to defend consumer rights. It is also to be noticed that Italian courts interpreted this rule in an extensive way and many courts accepted other associations which were not legally entitled to act.[187]

CONSUMER RIGHTS IN THE FOOD SECTOR

The legislation on food reflects the wider development of the general consumer rights. As we have seen, the EU directives gave a strong impulse to the national legislation which, in any case, has developed in a fragmented way. This fragmentation is at first produced by two different tendencies in producing rules.[188] On the one hand, legislation has followed horizontal criteria: regulations have been formulated fixing the rules regarding food products in their characteristics. On the other hand, the legislator acted with a vertical approach (the food production-distribution chain) on processes of production and commercialisation of specific products such as fresh products, frozen food, etc. This duality, although was a generalised problem throughout the EU, produced some difficulties in food legislation at the national level. The first "mad cow" crisis constituted an example of lack of coordination, but it also revealed the importance of initiating a process of legal harmonization. At EU level, the most important attempt in this direction is represented by

[185] A. Bartolini, *Guida ai Diritti dei Consumatori*, Roma D'Anselmi Editore, 1999: 19. Also the Directorate General For the Harmonisation of the Market and Consumer Protection works within the Ministry for Productive Activities.
[186] Law 30.7.1998, n.281. Then developed with D.L. 23.4.2001, n.224.
[187] In this way acted the courts of Rome, Turin and Palermo. G. Alpa, *Il diritto dei consumatori*, Laterza Bari, 2002: 429.
[188] A. Bartolini, *Guida ai Diritti dei Consumatori*, Roma, D'Anselmi Editore, 1999: 35.

the 1997 Green Paper on general principles of legislation on food matters, which was received in Italy with great enthusiasm (*see section 3.1*).[189]

5.2 Participation and tasks of consumer associations

Eurobarometer data on the consumer associations and on the level of information among citizens on their own rights are not encouraging: 77% of Italians thinks that they are not well informed about their rights as a consumer (in third place behind Greece and Spain both on 80%). Of those who think themselves well informed, the vast majority receives information mainly via the media. Most remarkably, 75.2% of Italians did not know of any consumer associations in their country.[190] The consumer association with the largest membership is Altroconsumo with 300.000 members. A representative of this association, asked about the association priorities stated that: *“The primary aim is to inform consumers about the rights they can claim, our activity is to inform and we inform consumers through our five different publications*”. Thus Italian consumers appear to be little aware of their own rights, and this is mainly due to lack of information and education on consumer rights.

Table 5: tasks of consumer associations.

Consumer associations nationally active coordinated by the National Council of Consumer and Users (CNCU).	***Tasks***
ACU Adiconsum ADOC ADUSBEF Centro tutela Consumatori Utenti Onlus-Verbraucherzentrale Sudtirol Cittadinanzattiva Codacons Altroconsumo Confconsumatori Federconsumatori Lega Consumatori Movimento Difesa del Cittadino	1) Health issues 2) Safety and quality 3) Genuine information and advertisement 4) Consumer Education 5) Transparency and regularity of contracts concerning good and services 6) Promotion and further development of civil society associations 7) Efficiency and quality standards in public service

[189]On the importance of the *Green Paper* in relation with communitarian and national legislative situation A. Bartolini, *Guida ai Diritti dei Consumatori*, Roma, D’Anselmi Editore, 1999: 35.

5.3 Italian consumer, European consumer

A further question to be considered is the perception of specific characteristics of the Italian food consumer in relation with other European food consumers. As was seen in *Chapter 4*, the idea is relatively diffused among Italian food actors that food quality is perceived by Italian consumers as a question related with taste, while other international consumers are considered as more interested in food safety. As a representative of the producer association Coldiretti puts it, *"for us quality means 'good', for English or Americans quality means 'safe'*". This attitude confirms a point of view apparently strongly rooted in Italian food actors: the national **food culture** is importantly distinguished from foreign food culture. A quality officer of Coop states that *"...Italian consumers have a particular palate; Italian consumers are more aware of the seasons' cycle. English and Swedish consumers for example are not so influenced by seasons in buying products*".

Yet another distinctive character of the Italian consumers, as emerges from the interviews, is that they do not have a thorough knowledge of healthy food habits and of problems related to food. For representatives of public authorities, such as for the region administrators, this fact constitutes a lack of responsibility of the consumer, which is seen as an essentially irrational actor: "*[*in the mad cow period*] the consumer reacted sometimes in a way I could define not scientific, because, for example, he found a refuge in the chicken meat and we know that also the chicken has many problems; the consumer only thought to avoid the question of the beef, he didn't think of, for example, reducing meat consumption in general" (from the interview with the councillor responsible for food education in Emilia-Romagna).*

Similar opinions have been expressed by an official for quality checks on food preserves in Calabria, who states that in her experience consumers have very little knowledge of the adopted measures for safety and quality, they hardly read the labels, or are interested only in the description of nutritional qualities of the products they buy.

Indeed, other companies, such as McDonald's, see the consumers as extremely manipulable by the incorrect information diffused by the press and boycott groups, and states that one of their major tasks is to handle the distrust thereby produced: "*In the perception of the customer the 'metropolitan legends' about the label does not help. This is our task. To face fake discourses, for example the utilization of GMO in McDonald's, that is not true"*.

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[190]Eurobarometer, 51.1: 7.

Thus the Italian consumer seems to be, on the one hand acknowledged with an insight into food culture, but on the other hand is depicted as very manipulable, superficial, and not appropriately informed on the main food issues. In other words is seems that the Italian consumer is perceived as a lazy one: by culture he has an insight on food but is not proactive in finding information on new food issues and seeking out how to face emerging problems, but rather tries easy solutions finds easy refuge in kinds of food that are not the object of scandals or possible hazards, as we have seen in the case of poultry as an alternative to beef in the case of BSE.

Food education

In 1996 (C.M. 5854), 1997 (directive 487) and 1999 (C.M. 279) the Ministry of Education initiated a policy of food education with special attention to health issues. Regions and provinces play a central role in devising local programmes of food education and implementing them in schools. The main focus of food education is on nutrition.

5.4 Weak consumer, strong consumer

The rhetoric on consumer power and responsibility expressed by the various actors in the food chain may be understood on the basis of the dichotomy weak/strong. This difference in the appraisal of the consumer role depends to a great extent on the perspective through which the different actors consider the food system and most importantly, their relation with consumers. Thus, while consumer associations, public authorities and also producer associations tend to underline the weakness of the consumer, in different way private companies tend to describe a more vigilant consumer, able to choose those brands that can guarantee effective quality/safety.

<u>THE WEAK CONSUMER:</u>

From the point of view of consumer associations, consumer education and economic disadvantage with respect to, for example, producer associations, are two main points of weakness of the consumer.

For the consumer association Altroconsumo, the main problem is that consumers are very poorly informed about their own rights and they are weak because of this unawareness or better because *"the school didn't give them an education on critical consumption"*. Another issue is that that in order to be “critical”, maintaining a relative economic independence from public institutions is necessary. This is why most consumer associations accept from institutions, “*no more then 50% of funds they need, finding the others with membership fees*” (Altroconsumo). Yet this often makes it difficult to organise a comprehensive action, as many associations work mainly on targeted ‘projects’ for which is easier to rise funding.

Concerning the public authorities and producers, the perception of the consumer associations is dominated by a very consensual point of view: consumer associations would like to assume a role in the debate as well as in the activities destined to the improvement of the food quality, but they do not succeed in giving a concrete contribution. The president of Qualità Italia, for example, explains that *“Consumer associations are interested in quality production, but there is no propulsive activity. Consumer associations are very wea*k”. The perception of the representative of Emilia-Romagna Region is similar: *“Consumer associations are present, but they rotate around these themes, rather than assuming a propulsive role”*. Hence the weakness of consumer associations, which also results from the public debate analysis (as we shall see later on in this chapter), is confirmed by the perception of the other food actors interviewed.

On the other hand the consumer outside the association seems to have even less power, and is normally regarded as scarcely informed and hardly able to face food scares.

THE STRONG CONSUMER:

The image of the consumer emerging from private companies is in many respects very different. First of all, whilst public authorities tend to refer to consumers as to 'citizens', for these companies consumers are almost invariably 'our costumers', indicating a special relationship between producer and purchaser.

Thus for the McDonalds's quality officer, the costumer is someone who freely chooses among different menus of the restaurant chain, a buyer who can elaborate different strategies to deal with McDonald’s food, and this is done merely switching from time to time from fried potatoes to lighter salads. Indeed introducing a wider menu variety has been for McDonald's one of the main strategies to face the decrease in sales related to the BSE. This approach has been described by the quality officer with the symbolic image of “*going towards the customer”*. Thus, concerning the private sector the free market idea seems to prevail: companies offer choice, the Government has the role to educate consumers. Indeed, in another statement, the officer suggests that there may be a difference between the actual quality of the product (i.e. according to the company HACCP standards) and the quality of food as perceived by the consumer. Indeed the consumer-chooser "*maybe cannot understand the nutritional information of our products" (McDonald's),* and therefore one has to infer that preferences are elaborated without taking into account quality standards*.* Hence, also the strong consumer is a chooser but is not described as vigilant, informed, and attentive.

Thus, stronger or weaker, there is a consensus on the fact that consumers lack appropriate knowledge and information.

A construction of the consumer that lies in between the strong and the weak is that that suggest identification between the consumer and the producing company. This is the approach of Coop Italia, in which the prevailing strategy is the identification of the company with the consumer (and costumer). Member assemblies and membership cards are strategies to re-enforce this idea of identification, which is bluntly exposed in their commercial slogans: "La Coop sei tu" ("Coop is yourself"). Through this rhetoric the consumer is presented as able to make choices (against considerations of price, quality and safety and even ethics) and to contribute to the company quality policy.

5.5 Public institutions and consumer issues

In this section the guiding question is: how is consumer and consumer policy understood by the public authorities?

A representative of agriculture department of the Regione Emilia Romagna identifies three main elements of the Regional food policy: i) the attention for the safeguard and the development of the territory; ii) the consideration of private economic operators and in particular for small local producers; iii) and a 'deep interest' for consumers. Asked more specifically on what the Region is doing for the consumer, education is the first item mentioned by different representatives of the Region: *"Probably the main goal is to give the consumer the clearness and information about food"*.

An educational aim is one of the main preoccupations also for the Regione Calabria. As a representative of the National Institute for Food Preserves points out, food education is very important in order to enable citizens to read labels, understand certification and make informed choices.

The councillor for food education of Region Emila-Romagna remarks on the complexity of this task: *"We have learned from the work we have done until now that the relation with* *food is very complex, I noticed in the seminars that we organised that there are many very deep psychological mechanisms. The education of taste is not the education to flavour, but is an education to the relation with food. And this is a very complex path to follow."* Thus the public authorities seem to perceive their role mainly as educational.

However other actors question the effective role that the public authorities have. In particular the president of Qualità Italia, an organic agriculture lobby, explains that the way in which food and consumer issues are considered by the public authorities is going through a transitional phase. According to the typologies of politicians and civil servants that he draws, in Italy there are many 'cynics', who are not interested in the food issue unless these can be instrumental to their direct interests; there is a small circles of 'enthusiasts', who would be able to give important inputs to the system but are rather isolated; and there is finally a growing category, 'receptive people' who are starting to understand the relevance of consumer policy. This leads us to think that the way the public authority approaches consumer issues will undergo important changes in the near future.

From the point of view of consumer associations, the perception goes along the same lines: consumers are not yet a priority for the Italian public authorities. For example, the consumer association Altroconsumo states that the relationships with the EU authorities are much smoother than those with the national ones: *"Sometimes it is easier to get feedback from EU institutions than from national ones. Sometimes it is seems to be a problem to have simple feedback. I think this is a structural problem, and last but not least a lack of a predisposition to acknowledge the interlocutor they have in front of them."* Thus the problem is as basic as recognising consumer associations as a political subject, rather than consumer simply as objects of food policy. This is evident in the consumer association stories about how difficult it is to get in touch with Governmental institutions: "*If we made a statistic of reply rate to our letters by the various Government institutions in the last year of the last year, in each single case the rate will be lower than 1%."* (Altroconsumo).

What clearly appears from these statements is that, besides a strong rhetoric on attention to consumer issues, for Italian public authorities the consumer still does not have a clear identity as a political interlocutor. Openness and public accountability seem to be still the issue on which a lot of work has to be done; this is the main message emerging from the interviews on the subject of the relationship between consumers and public authorities.

5.6 The consumer as victims of the media

An important problem, widely recognized by almost all the actors, is the lack of correct information and an appropriate knowledge in relation to food questions. This is generally regarded as contributing to a great extent to a deformed attitude of consumers towards food.

A number of key informants directly accuse television and the media of creating disinformation. It should be remarked that all these accusations are very generic, and refer to 'the media' rather than attributing specific responsibilities. Thus it could be that 'the media' are an easy scapegoat in the attribution of responsibility

For example, a very common attitude is that of accusing some television programmes of creating false or excessive alarm on certain food issues, rather than providing information. As a representative of Coldiretti points out: "*There are some television programs which often present agro-food issues, but generally they deal with the aesthetic side of the question rather than safety. Also there are some 'terror programmes' by which the consumer is scared*." Similarly representatives of McDonald's criticised the way that a film sequence of a cow affected by BSE was repeatedly shown in the evening news to impress the audience rather than presenting information on the actual risks related to the BSE crisis.

Also many actors object to the strategies of communication management adopted (through the media) by the public authorities. These actors normally are those who have been affected during important food scandals in the last years, such as beef producers and retailers: "o*bviously the perception of customers is different from the reality, and this is especially because of the way journalists and public authorities managed the problem". (interview with McDonald's).* The criticism points particularly to the impressionistic manner of communication of politicians, stressing *"the fact that some politicians in a TV programme said that hamburgers constitute a possible hazard, as they are made with discarded parts of the animal – while the law states otherwise* (i.e. there is a regulation according to which only some specific part of the animal can be used to prepare hamburgers and these were not the parts declared at risk) – *this leads to a distorted perception of the problem " (*McDonald's).

Another important criticism to the authorities on the topic of communication management comes from Inalca. Their representative believes that in case of crises and emergency there is a lack of coordination and planning of risk communication from part of the public authorities. There is instead always a plurality of political voices, not always consistent.

Between the market operators Coop seems to have a different perspective towards the inclination to scandals, typical of Italian media. Their representative says that for Coop, which is one of the companies most attentive to food quality, all food scandals had a positive input. Indeed the amplification of food scandals operated by the media has not favoured food companies, but has drawn the attention to some important issues, which have been appropriately dealt with by the company with a greater attention to safety and quality policy.

5.7 The consumer in the media

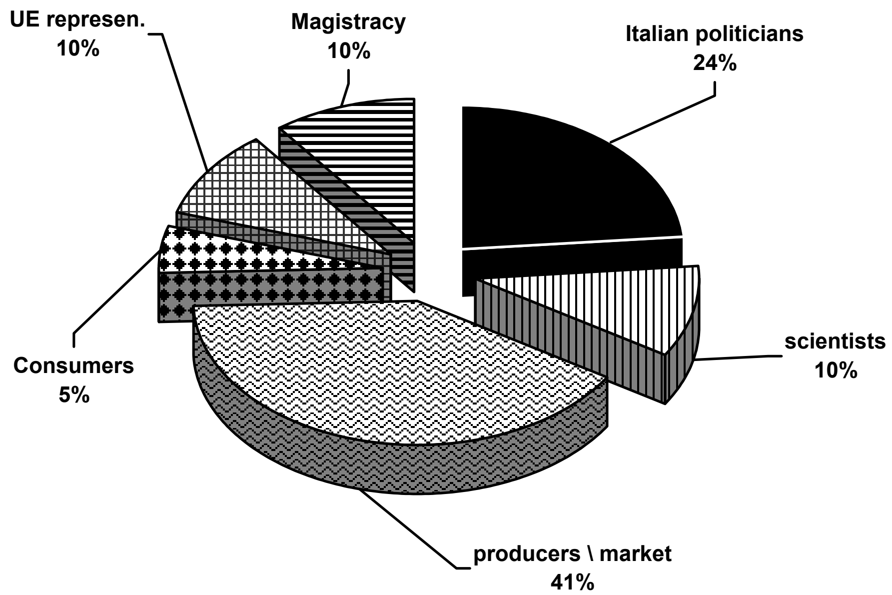
This section will present a case of responsibility redistribution by analysing a particular case: that of the mad cow crisis as presented by the press and particularly by one of the most important national newspapers*,* La Repubblica.

The media analysis of the 2001 EBS crisis was realised through the sampling of articles regarding the question during the week preceding and the week after the discovery of the first mad cow case in Italy. Articles was analysed considering at least three aspects: 1) the analysis of the 'constructed' discourses of the different actors involved in the debate, 2) the quantity and quality of visibility and the relevance of opinions and statements of different actors, 3) the general representation that constitutes the interpretative output of the crisis into the public sphere.

January 2001 was the year in which the first 'Italian mad cow' scared the public opinion. Public authorities and the market were not unprepared to deal with the communication aspect of the crisis. The most controversial matter was instead a political one. On the one hand Government was committed to ensure measures for consumer health protection, which entailed measures for eradicating BSE from Italian farms, including the slaughtering of all cattle in those farms where infected animals were found. On the other hand producer associations pressed for economic compensations to farmers invested by the BSE crisis, and retailers were worried about a further collapse of selling rates.

Considering the first week of media coverage of La Repubblica we can look at the proportion of actors presented on the basis of the categories represented. In *figure 2* appears that the dominant category during the first part of the 2001 crisis is that of producers and market sector representatives. Indeed, more than 40% of actors interviewed or considered in the media were to farmers, manufacturers, butchers or shop holders, while Italian politicians – the second most represented category – are presented only in a proportion of 24% of the total. Among Government representatives, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Agriculture are the main actors and their exposure is quite balanced even though they adopt different positions during the crisis. Indeed, the action of the Government was in this situation characterized by two different tendencies. On the one hand, there was a more technical position, assumed by the Minister of Health, Sandro Veronesi, who interpreted in a strong way its role as guarantor of consumer safety, and explicitly required the elimination of the cattle that constituted a risk. With this attitude, the Minister of Health was aiming at reassuring the citizen and to avert further waves of panic, following the argument that *"we did not think we were free from the risk, but now, with checks, we are well guaranteed*".[191]

Figure 2: categories of actors which express opinions in press articles – 14\20 March 2001 – (La Repubblica)



During the 2001 crisis, on the other hand, we have the action of the Minister of Agriculture, Alfonso Pecoraro Scanio. His approach somewhat counterbalanced the reassurances of the Minister of Health, and tended in an explicit way to ride the common sense of people. The discourses of the Minister of Agriculture, in fact, stressed an opposition between

[191]*La Repubblica*, 15 March 2001.

industrial food production and artisanal food and, together with this, an opposition between the EU and Italy. The first public interview of Alfonso Pecoraro Scanio was based on logic very different from that of the Minister of Health: "*Too much industrialisation is bad, the future is the farm*" was the slogan of the Minister of Agriculture.

In this regard, it is also to be noted that many of our key informants underlined – sometimes privately or with the recorder switched off – that the attitude of the Minister of Agriculture was interpreted by the actors directly involved in the crisis as a populist position, very harmful to the Italian foods system.

Also on this occasion consumers confirmed themselves as a very weak category, being the least represented in the media with a rate of 5%. This figure reflects quite strongly the perception of the weakness of the Italian consumer associations (see also *section 5.3*) and reflects the lack of power of consumers both in the institutional and economic domains.

Scientists and medical informants had little impact on the debate (10%), less than they had in 1996. This is a further indication of how the crisis has evolved from a sanitary emergency into a political problem. In fact politicians took the place of scientist concerning risk communication, and farmers replaced the consumers as the relevant victim of BSE.

The proportion in which the various categories of actors are represented during the crisis reflects the development of the scandal in the public sphere. From sanitary crisis, where the victim was the citizen, the scandal soon developed into an economic problem where the "constructed" victims were those operators of the beef market that received strong economic damage from the crisis. The strong representation of these actors in the public debate suggests a connection between economic power and the power of the institutional system as possibly influencing the development of the public interpretation of the BSE crisis. Thus, economic interests prevail over health concerns and, if shaping this issue was also a way to find a solution to it, then farmers, producers and retailers must have been better reassured than consumers.

5.8 Some general considerations on the role of the consumer

From all the perspectives analysed (in relation to the public authority, the media, the consumer associations, the market operators) the consumer emerges constantly as a weak actor. Consumers are normally excluded from public debates and policy-making, and normally do not have access to data and information about food issues, if not through the media, which most of the interviewees consider as giving misleading information. Normally depicted by the actors as superficial and manipulable, the Italian consumer appears instead from the survey as sceptical and critical about what she eats. Indeed, data from our TIF survey says that only 13,3% of Italian people consider that foods bought for their own household are unharmful (the European average is about 30%). But, above all, Italian consumers seem to demand an activity of monitoring of what institutions and markets actors actually do. What the TIF survey reveals is that Italians recognize – at least from a normative perspective – this role as belonging to consumer associations (74,6% of interviewed say this, the highest rate among TIF countries), food scientists (71,7%) and, to a lower degree, mass media (41,1%).

6. SOME CONCLUSIVE REMARKS ON THE PRODUCTION OF TRUST IN ITALY

6.1 Consumer distrust and institutional conditions of trust

The survey findings reveal that the level of consumer trust in food in Italy is consistently very low. From the analysis presented in this report, we can start with identifying at least three institutional factors that may influence consumer distrust.

- First of all the **distribution of responsibility** between national and local authorities, public and private actors is far from clear. There is a plurality of bodies and institutions but these are not appropriately coordinated. This gives rise to a lack of synergy and therefore to a relative inefficiency of the system so that, as it was seen in *section 3.4*, private and voluntary controls seem to offer more guarantee than public ones. Yet the lack of coordination reflects negatively also in the risk communication strategies as we have seen in *section 5.5*, as several actors declared that the public authorities lack shared strategies of communication through the media.
- Second, estimates of non registered farms, plants, and slaughter houses are not reassuring. Data on the **hidden economy** let one think that an important quantity of food arrives on the markets eluding controls. On the other hand data on food frauds are rather high.
- Third **public accountability** seems to be a major problem. It is difficult to get in touch with institutions, to acquire information, to receive feedback. This is not only for private citizens, but has been experienced by consumer associations and by ourselves during the process of data collection.

6.2 Who sets the issues?

Looking at the 5 key issues, from the present study it emerges that quality is at the core of the debate in Italy, and all other issues are defined in relation to or in contrast with quality. Yet an interesting exercise is to see who has the greatest interest in the promotion of quality, as described in *Chapter 4*. As emerged from the media analysis, the actors that have more money are those with more visibility. They are in a better position to express their views, and to advertise them through the media. Also the discussion on voluntary certification has shown that those with more resource availability are in a position to set the quality standards, to offer more grantees, to initiate campaigns promoting their own values. Also some interviewees suggested that who has more resources is in a better position to influence policy-making (e.g. interview with Qualita Italia and Coop).

In the light of these very generic considerations we should reflect on the economic import of quality products (especially of typical and traditional products) in the framework of the Italian economy. Indeed, quality production has to be considered not only from the perspective of a reaction of consumers and public authorities to the effects of the free market and technological developments on citizen safety and security. Rather, we should also investigate the importance that a policy of food quality could have in order to revitalize the national food market with new kinds of more expensive products. What seems even more evident is that, at international level, the defence of quality production constitutes a new tool for improving national exports. The recent EU proposal of protecting European quality products through WTO law is a good example of how economic protectionism can drive food quality policies.

6.3 Strategies for the production of trust

The **strategy of quality** was identified as the main strategy indicated by actors in order to restore, maintain and enhance consumer trust in food. Yet has we have seen there are different components of this strategy, not always mutually consistent.

On the one hand, the identification of quality with traditional and typical products seems to indicate a simple strategy of going back to a way of production and distribution that is not compatible with industrial societies and urban life. What we have called the **one to one sell and buy** has been described as a plurality of strategies to put in touch purchaser and producer. The model behind this strategy is that of a very short food chain in which the traceability of the product is achieved without the intermediation of labels, certification and paper documents, but just going to the place of production, or meeting the producer.

On the other hand, the main challenge for the Italian agro-food sector is that of reaching new markets, and thus gaining the trust of distant purchasers. This can be done only by means of **innovative methods** such as traceability systems and methodologies for the certification of typical products.

Both these kinds of strategies are indicated as a possible way to enhance consumer trust, often with little awareness on the part of the agents that these are indeed very different and perhaps even in contradiction with one another.

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