

## Introduction

Thomas Potthast<sup>1</sup> · Simon Meisch<sup>1</sup> · Franck Meijboom<sup>2</sup>

Received: 28 May 2015 / Accepted: 28 May 2015 / Published online: 16 June 2015  
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2015

A common perception in many countries of Europe and North America seems to be that consequences of climate change are something to be expected in the future. Yet, if one moves the attention to developing countries of the Global South, e.g. to Southeast Asia and the Oceanic islands, climate change is the reality of adverse conditions that people struggle with now. While rich countries still debate proper mitigation efforts, perhaps slowly moving towards measures of adaptation and resilience, poor countries focus on justice in damage compensation and controls, and restoration efforts—a debate that potentially involves burden sharing with a special responsibility of the rich countries, since their lifestyles caused or at least disproportionately contributed to the problem in the first place. Nowhere is this more evident than in the agricultural and food sector, extending into the overarching questions of sustainable land use under conditions of climate change. This whole complex of issues demands ethical reflection. The community of scholars involved in the *European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics* ([www.eursafe.org](http://www.eursafe.org)) hence dedicated the 10th EurSafe Congress to *Climate Change and Sustainable Development: Ethical Perspectives on Land Use and Food Production*.

---

✉ Franck Meijboom  
f.l.b.meijboom@uu.nl

Thomas Potthast  
potthast@uni-tuebingen.de

Simon Meisch  
simon.meisch@uni-tuebingen.de

<sup>1</sup> International Centre for Ethics in the Sciences and Humanities (IZEW),  
University of Tuebingen, Tübingen, Germany

<sup>2</sup> Ethics Institute, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Climate change is a major framing condition for a sustainable development of agriculture and food production in a double sense. Global food production on the one hand contributes eminently to global greenhouse gas emissions, and thus amplifies climate change. On the other hand, global food production is also among the sectors worst affected by climate change. Ongoing changes in and of land-use practices on local, regional and global scales—often dubbed as ‘glocal’ situations—are placing a particular strain on sustainable development. Forestry and fisheries are similarly affected, thus adding to the number of people who are directly affected.

In this context, agricultural and food ethics (and adjacent fields) once again need to address well known, but aggravated, ‘old’ problems. These are, among others, desertification boosted by temperature increase, changing precipitation regimes, unsustainable and/or unfair land-use and water regimes, pressure on arable land due to the loss of coastal areas, soil degradation and suburban sprawl, and the strain placed on both environment and animal welfare as a consequence of a growing worldwide demand for animal products. Furthermore, the promise of new technologies to pave the way towards sustainable food production and food security needs to be examined critically and evaluated ethically. Certain consumption patterns may become more and more unbearable in the light of global sustainable development. All these phenomena and their manifold socio-economic implications on justice and fairness need to be investigated and reflected on from ethical perspectives.

At the same time, however, climate change also creates some specific difficulties: There are and will be new irreversible changes of natural and anthropogenic systems, which are associated with a high degree of uncertainties with regard to their consequences. Furthermore, mitigation and adaptation measures to counter or slow down climate change have already resulted in considerable changes in agri- and silvicultural land-use. This is mainly but not only due to the significant increase in growing plants for energy supply (‘biofuels’). Another perspective is the purchase or long-term tenancy of arable land or of water rights in the countries of the global south by wealthy nations and by transnational enterprises. In the case of animal production, specific dilemmas arise when a narrow focus on carbon efficiency favours intensive production systems that are decoupled from traditional agricultural considerations. The coupling of demands of high efficiency in food production systems with demands on ecologically and socio-economically sustainable practices places particular challenges to future developments, also in the light of the global nature of food trade and markets. Finally, citizens’ values and preferences in regard to both governance frameworks as well as lifestyle and consumption patterns with regard to adaptation and mitigation will in any case be crucial for choices that will dominate the marketplace as well as industrial and political realities.

The 10th EurSafe congress took place from 30 May to 2 June 2012 in Tuebingen, Germany, and was organised by the International Centre for Ethics in the Sciences and Humanities (IZEW) of the University of Tuebingen. Founded in 1990, IZEW is an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental unit of Tuebingen University devoted to the whole range of application-oriented ethics research and teaching. In 2012, EurSafe for the first time gathered for a conference in Germany. Previous meetings were successfully held in Bilbao (2010), Nottingham (2009), Vienna (2007), Oslo

(2006), Leuven (2004), Toulouse (2003), Florence (2001), Copenhagen (2000) and Wageningen (1999). More than 80 papers of contributors from around twenty countries of Europe and farther abroad were presented at EurSafe 2012; they were included in the conference volume *Climate Change and Sustainable Development: Ethical Perspectives on Land Use and Food Production*, edited by Wageningen Academic Publishers (Potthast and Meisch 2012). The themes and perspectives are manifold. General issues of climate ethics and sustainability, of the anthropological-political dimension of animal ethics, of agricultural and food ethics and governance were raised. One further line of themes was linked to global questions of property rights and commons, of debates on global warming and climate change, the ensuing ethical issues of adaptation and mitigation as well as of non-agricultural land-management. A second line treated the contested question whether—in the light of climate change—intensive or extensive production shall be sought. Here animal welfare, efficiency and environmental implications were discussed. Another topic of high significance linked to this land-use issue was, of course, agro-energy. In a third line, food policy and broader contexts of food and nutrition were at stake, including one of the major future issues (not only) of protein recruitment, i.e. fish for food and, more generally, food and sustainability. The latter already was linked closely to the fourth line, the societal perspectives on consumers and consuming, on science and governance and, again more broadly, values for governance. In regard to the fifth line we expected many more contributions on the issues of biotechnology, both in agricultural production and on the food sector. What we instead found were that questions of animal ethics have in comparison gained much more attention. Last but not least, ethics teaching, ethical methodology and learning instruments have been presented and discussed.

This Special Issue of the *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* brings together selected contributions from EurSafe 2012; we have asked some authors to further develop their research themes from their conference contributions for extended and more inclusive papers. The first paper, by Joyeeta Gupta (Department Government and Development at the University of Amsterdam) sets the stage by providing an overview of the agenda on *Normative Issues in Global Environmental Governance: Connecting Climate Change, Water and Forests*. She clarifies the interconnectedness of issues reaching far beyond the agricultural and food sector and identifies, on the level of governance, strong normative and architectural inconsistencies between the fragmented and plural issue-specific regimes. She suggests that some degree of normative coherence may be gained through the adoption of global constitutionalism and rule of law. We see here important links and mutual influences between legal (governance) discourse and underlying ethical reflection as desiderates for future research as well as international deliberation.

The second paper by Leire Escajedo San-Epifanio (Law Department of the University of the Basque Country, Bilbao) also tackles governance perspectives: *Challenging Food Governance Models: analyzing the Food Citizen and the emerging Food Constitutionalism from an EU perspective*. She argues for the need to transform the governance of the EU present-day food system regarding who makes decisions, how those decisions are made, and which changes need to be made

to empower food consumers. The normative basis—both ethical and legal—of suggestions are food sovereignty, the human right to food and the acknowledgement of a ‘food citizenship’. In this vein, ‘food constitutionalism’ is suggested and discussed along with the opportunities and obstacles inherent in the current EU Legal Framework.

In her paper on *Reasoning Claims for more Sustainable Food Consumption. A Capabilities Perspective*, Lieske Voget-Kleschin (Philosopher at the University of Kiel) establishes the link between the capabilities approach as a major conceptual pillar of sustainable development and specific claims for more sustainable lifestyles. Food choices are a paradigmatic example for the tensions between individual lifestyles on the one hand and societal consequences of such lifestyles on the other. It is argued that neither societal governance nor the individuals’ freedom of choice alone are plausible solutions. An interconnection of both can be achieved by using the capabilities approach.

Wouter Peeters, Jo Dirix and Sigrid Sterckx (Philosophy Departments of the Free University of Brussels and Ghent University) strive *Towards an Integration of the Ecological Space Paradigm and the Capabilities Approach*. They argue for combining the advantages of the ecological space paradigm (on the necessary spatial environmental basis of human conduct) regarding the allocation of the responsibilities involved in environmental sustainability with the strength of the capabilities approach regarding people’s entitlements. Specifically trying to operationalise this justice-based approach, departing from a capability threshold, ecological space should be provided sufficiently, and the remaining ecological space budget could then be distributed according to the equal per capita principle.

The fifth contribution is a paper by students from the Universities of Tuebingen and Hohenheim: *Agriculture and Food 2050—Visions to Promote Transformation Driven by Science and Society*. Elisabeth Gebhard, Nikolas Hagemann, Loni Hensler, Steffen Schweizer and Carla Wember develop a student’s vision on agriculture and society, followed by an examination of potentials, limits and practical implications. They argue for developing small scale, locally adapted solutions as answers to challenges such as climate change. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), as competence-oriented educational approach, is identified as one of the key factors to enable current and future generations to become actors of change. The paper provides as part of the vision some positive case examples on the way towards this goal of societal transformation, opening up perspectives that might eventually develop from local to global scales.

After five papers on governance, ethics and human justice with regard to sustainable development, the following two papers focus on animal ethics perspectives on climate change and food. Mickey Gjerris (Bioethicist from the University of Copenhagen) presents his critique of *Willed Blindness. A Discussion of our Moral Shortcomings in Relation to Animals*, departing from a dystopian narrative. He provides a strong moral claim by showing the detrimental consequences of intensive meat production and consumption to animal welfare and environmental degradation. He then discusses different strategies to overcome what is dubbed ‘willed blindness’ (because facts are on the table) focusing on the

development of either a new moral vision of our obligations or new visions of what a good life—for both humans and other sentient animals—shall be.

The growing demand for protein supply by fish under conditions of global change—regarding both climate conditions and nutrition patterns—is the starting point of Helena Röcklinsberg (Bioethicist from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences) on *Fish consumption: choices in the intersection of public concern, fish welfare, food security, human health and climate change*. Bringing together the issues listed in the title, fish welfare appears to be a neglected case also for governance and legislation, despite the growing importance for food supply. By combining empirical findings and moral considerations, an argument is made for integrating sentient fish into the moral community. In addition, drawing on the European Union's own values, implications for improvement of governance to safeguard fish welfare are suggested.

Fish production, more precisely in aquaculture, is also addressed in the last paper by Stefan Bergleiter (*Naturland*, organic food certifier) and Simon Meisch (Ethics Centre of the University of Tuebingen): *Certification Standards for Aquaculture Product. Bringing together the Values of Producers and Consumers in Globalised Organic Food Markets*. The literally necessary global dimension of developing and safeguarding organic certification standards is discussed with regard to underlying goals and values is analysed. In order to bring about organic aquaculture, it is argued that consumers' choices alone are not sufficient and that successful transformation to sustainable aquaculture also needs to take into account values and preferences of producers.

Of course, these eight papers cannot cover the whole range of themes around climate change and sustainable development in agricultural and food ethics. Just as an example, the important issue of food waste is not present. However, the diversity of contributions collected here provides important insights into the contested ethical issues of agriculture and food in the light of global change and shifting land-use patterns. We would like to identify three major themes and challenges for further research and reflection, which have emerged in the papers of this volume:

- All contributions converge in one way or another on the conclusion that a separation between agriculture/agricultural ethics on the one hand and other domains of land-use does not make sense under conditions of climate change and global political change. Although we do not intend to uncritically affirm approaches such as the water–energy–food–security–nexus initiative (for a critique cf. Leese and Meisch 2015), we do see the need for much more integration between the different land-use related domains: agriculture, forestry, fisheries; energy; water; climate change and biodiversity; human migration and security.
- In a similar vein, reflections of agriculture and food may not stabilise but criticise the global systems of injustice, be it on the level of nation-states, or be it on the level of rich and poor classes in one state. The issue of injustice may also be extended—in whichever difference in detail—to other sentient forms of life, which are connected to human food affairs.

- The normative interface between ethics, law and governance: Not only, but especially when dealing with truly global questions like climate change, the need for international, intercultural and interdisciplinary perspectives is at hand. But the relation between ethical analysis of general moral issues and legal and also the broader field of governance (hard and soft law, rules, professional guidelines etc.) discourse is far from clear. We see a spectrum of separate treatments as well as strong linkages from ethical insights to their governance implications. Legal positivism is no appropriate answer. However, agricultural and food ethics will not be able to contribute to improvement if they do not address their relation to the rule of law on all scales and the whole spectrum of 'glocal' governance.

As guest editors of this Special Volume, we would like to thank the authors for their commitment. Thanks to the reviewers and all other persons involved on the side of the *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* for making this publication possible under difficult conditions. Richard P. Haynes (1931–2014) guided the preparation process for this publication until his untimely decease; we thankfully commemorate Richard's great work as editor-in-chief of JAGE.

## References

- Leese, M., & Meisch, S. (2015). Securitising sustainability? Questioning the 'water, energy and food-security nexus'. *Water Alternatives*, 8(1), 584–598.
- Potthast, T. & Meisch, S. (Eds.) (2012). Climate change and sustainable development: Ethical perspectives on land use and food production. In *Proceedings of the 10th conference of the European Society of Agricultural and Food Ethics*. Wageningen: Wageningen Academic.