

# On Public Accountability, in relation to Technoscientific Food

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## A Brief History of Food Production

1. basic food, till about 1800
  - low inputs of science and technology
  - regional systems of distribution
  - direct procedures of accountability
2. industrial food, from about 1800 to 1970
  - high inputs of chemicals and machinery
  - national systems of distribution
  - formalized procedures of accountability
3. technoscientific food, from about 1970
  - based on technoscience (IT, genetic engineering)
  - global systems of distribution
  - problems with public accountability

## **A Brief History of Technoscientific Food**

pre1970s: research and invention

- from DNA to rDNA

1970s: experimentation and innovation

- from basic research to applied science

1980s: development and production

- from the laboratory to the field and factory

1990s-: distribution and sales

- from the field and factory to the market

## **The Story-lines of Technoscientific Food Assessment**

ca 1975-1984: scientific story-line

concern with lab safety, long-term implications

ca 1985-1996: environmental story-line

concern with field tests, environmental risks

ca 1996: ethical story-line

concern with appropriateness, accountability

## **What is Public Accountability?**

- How producers satisfy consumers
- How production is made as safe as possible
- How public concerns are taken into account
- How production is made acceptable
- How legitimization crises are resolved

## **Problems with Technoscientific Food**

### **Economic**

- Competition with other food producers
- Concentration, high capital investment

### **Environmental**

- Threats to biodiversity, ecosystem sustenance
- Unintended, uncertain side-effects

### **Cultural**

- Hubris, "playing god"
- Challenge to traditional beliefs

## Different Ethical Positions

	utilitarian	moral	dialogic
Worldview	mechanical	organic	pragmatic
Evaluation criteria	human benefit	integrity of life	case-specific
Attitude to TS foods	positive	negative	ambivalent
Type of argumentation	rational	emotional	"synthetic"

## Public Accountability Procedures

### Commercial procedures (public relations)

- carried out by firms ("the market")
- promotion, advertising

### Administrative procedures (policy and law)

- carried out by public authorities ("the state")
- regulation, control

### Political procedures (debate and assessment)

- carried out in broader culture ("civil society")
- participation, deliberation