

CRITICAL EATING:
GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FOODS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
(A STUDY IN PUBLIC RISK MANAGEMENT)

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the problem of how to handle complex issues of scientific uncertainty in international relations. Using genetically engineered food as an example and looking at it from the broader perspective of public risk management has two main objectives. First, it sheds some light into the often-chaotic dialog between politics, the public, scientists, the industry, and the legal efforts to handle genetically engineered foods. Second, it proposes a multifaceted extended socio-economic approach to dealing with the risks of new technologies in our increasingly globalized world. The proposed approach goes well beyond the methods of decision-making in use today. It allows considering a much longer perspective of time and a broader set of relevant factors.

Part One provides an overview of the issues surrounding genetically engineered foods from different perspectives and explains the main points of the current discussion.

Part Two focuses on the legal issues of international trade by considering whether measures for labeling or banning genetically engineered foods can be justified within the World Trade Organization framework. Abstract arguments that refer to convergence, divergence, globalization, the precautionary principle, sustainable development, and civil society concerns are made more concrete.

Part Three specifies the proposed approach by applying it to the European Union labeling requirements for genetically engineered foods and puts it into the broader context of public risk management. It tackles the question of who should decide about technological and social change in times of globalization and individual right consciousness. Should it be scientists, multinationals, politicians, or the public or all of them together in a new kind of dialog? What does it mean that risk perception and decision-making under scientific uncertainty are inherently subjective?

The work tries to transfer this insight into the decision making process in law and politics. With respect to the substantial rules of international trade law, it proposes allowing countries to justify broad labeling if those correspond with the needs and preferences of their people. Regarding the process of public risk management, it proposes *inter alia* to create common forums on the national and international level. To avoid disguised protectionism for trade related measures, it suggests requiring sufficient

empirical evidence regarding what people want and why within a multifaceted, communicative and participatory approach that allows critical decision making.

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