

CHAPTER SIX: From ‘politics in the stable’ to stable politics: Food (safety) policy in the Netherlands

6.1 Introduction

In his 1999 book *De Virtuele Boer* (‘The virtual farmer’), Jan Douwe van der Ploeg critically addressed the evolution of the Dutch ‘expertise-based’ intensive agriculture, which, according to the author, had constructed an image of the farmer as focused on profit-maximizing and as virtually indifferent to the societal and environmental impact of intensive agriculture. Upon its publication, commentators referred to it as ‘not discussable’ (*onbespreekbaar*) at Wageningen University (Strijker 2000: 8), the long-standing agricultural university and breeding ground for the exceptional rate of success of Dutch agriculture - one of the largest exporters of agricultural products. What makes such criticism ‘not discussable’, and how does it compare to the desire to ‘remove the smell of stables’ from food (safety) policy in England and Germany, following the series of food scares during the 1990s?

The present chapter explores the ways in which food (safety) has been taken up as a policy issue in the Netherlands and addresses the underlying contextual specificities in the following ways: Following this introduction, section 2 provides an account of the developments in the area of food (safety) policy in the Netherlands roughly over the past century in order to trace out some of the discursive-institutional foundations that still carry weight in today’s policy discourse. As in the previous two country-based chapters, section 3 recounts the range of food scares that occurred in the Netherlands over the past decade and highlights the key moments in which particular interpretations of ‘what food safety means’, and what the food scares stood for, were articulated. Here, I shall highlight three institutional moments of transformation: the commissioning of two post-crisis evaluation reports - by the consultancy firm Berenschot and a Commission led by politician and economist Herman Wijffels, respectively - and the establishment of a new food safety authority.

Section 4 forms the chief part of the chapter and is devoted to the discourse analysis of the current Dutch food (safety) policy. By means of the exploring the composition of the current policy discourse, I seek to demonstrate how and to explain why, despite the *politics in the stable* caused by food scares such as the dioxins incident, one can observe a comparatively *stable* policy discourse. The composition (captured here in terms of ‘notions’) and interaction between the following empirical discourses will be discussed: ‘good governance’; ‘market efficiency’; ‘environmental sustainability’; ‘consumer protection’; and ‘public health’. Section 6.5 draws out

conclusions; a schematic presentation of the key notions governing this context is contained in table 6.1 in that section.

6.2 A history of food (safety) policy in the Netherlands

6.2.1 Food (safety) in the 19th century

In the 19th century, increasing mechanization, scientific breakthroughs, and new energy sources facilitated processing and conserving food products. In the latter part of the 19th century, the increasing availability of bread and meat also implied the growing industrialization of production, and new quality and safety controls were called for, such as for public slaughterhouses in Amsterdam (van Buuren, de Wit, and ter Kuile 2004). Besides these new challenges to keeping food safe, the Netherlands became increasingly involved in world trade, not least by way of the improvements in transport systems. Dutch agriculture profited from high cereal prices and the increasing import-dependence of its neighbor countries, particularly England, Germany, and Belgium. The food shortages of the mid-nineteenth century and the Agricultural Crisis of the late 19th century (1878-1895) inspired a new wave of protectionism in some countries, whereas in the Netherlands, which had typically been reliant on export,¹¹⁹ trust in the functioning of a free market was largely sustained among key politicians (Bieleman 2008: 279; Wintle 2000: 155-6). In such a vein, and encouraged by the English anti-corn-law-league, the Dutch *Graanwet* (a piece of legislation that regulated the cereal sector) was abolished in 1847 and gave way to a renewed trust in liberalization and free trade as a means to tackle food shortages (Bieleman 2008: 275ff).

In addition to liberal trade instruments, education and the development of agricultural knowledge were seen to promote the Dutch agricultural position, together with technical advances, innovation in livestock breeding, and the intensification of agriculture (Vermeulen 1966: 45-49) - just two years before the beginning of the crisis, in 1876, the state established an agricultural school in Wageningen. In the face of the Agricultural crisis, however, a group of actors, primarily agricultural associations, in 1885 called for government intervention in order to stimulate the development of the Dutch agricultural sector (Bieleman 2008: 280; Wintle 2000: 155ff). In response, the government installed a commission to evaluate the requests, as a result of which the government initiated intervention in the form of state-financed agricultural

¹¹⁹ Dutch food exports (in particular butter to England) date back to the 17th century and even led to the introduction of private quality control systems against food adulteration, when farmers used water to increase the quantity, thereby harming competition with Denmark on the English market. I owe this information to an anonymous referee at *Science as Culture*.

teachers, agricultural winter schools, test farms, horse breeding, and dairy consultation (Bieleman 2008: 280ff). In consideration of this renewed state support, the Agricultural Crisis formed a key moment inasmuch as it provided an opportunity for the government to reformulate its role towards a more interventionist set of responsibilities (Wintle 2000: 155).

As far as public food safety controls were concerned, however, the inspection system remained fragmented, as there was no uniform definition of 'food safety'. Local inspection agencies were installed, yet their definitions of 'bad food' (be it adulteration or spoiled food) differed and led to varying results (van Buuren, de Wit, and ter Kuile 2004). The definitional fragmentation, though not uncommon at the time in Europe, indicates the fragility of the concept of 'food safety' at the time, while its meaning was being informed by trade considerations as well as early, more indirect forms of consumer protection by way of controls for adulteration and swindling, such as in the introduction of the 1919 *Warenwet* (Product Inspection Law). In the same year, the *Vleeskeuringswet* (Meat Inspection Law) was passed without much debate, and food producers decided to take on the expenses for the abovementioned *Warenwet* inspections (van Buuren, de Wit, and ter Kuile 2004), which added a 'producer-led' aspect to food (safety) policy at the time. New inspection practices in Britain regarding Dutch meat turned inspection into a trade issue (Vijver 2005: 29), which further accentuated the meaning of food safety as a matter of trade efficiency rather than a matter of public health (Vijver 2005). Moreover, in the organization of ministries, agriculture was not set apart from other economic activities; these all fell under the section 'trade and industry' and were represented by seven civil servants (Vermeulen 1966: 53-56, cited in Vijver 2002: 25). This suggests that, at the time, food (safety) was not linked to public health, as it was in Germany, or environmental protection, or consumer policy, but was primarily considered an economic policy area.

Another important development of the late 19th and early 21st century consisted of the formation of agricultural associations. Three major organizations representing the agricultural sector existed in the policy field, reflecting the diverse population of the country at the time: the Royal Dutch Agricultural Committee (*Koninklijke Nederlands Landbouw-Committee*), the Farmers' Union (*Boerenbond*), which in 1929 was transformed into the Catholic Dutch Farmers' and Horticultural association (*Katholieke Nederlandse Boeren- en Tuindersbond*), and the Christian Farmers' and Horticulturalists' Association (*Christelijke Boeren en Tuindersbond*) (Bieleman 2008: 306ff.). This variety in representation necessitated the construction of agriculture as a *national* interest, defended and embodied in what came to be referred to as the 'green front' (ibid.), a corporatist constellation between the bureaucracy, agrarian and industry representatives, and

professional groups. Politically, this ‘corporatist’ consensus implied that technical innovations and the intensification of agriculture could be pushed more effectively and that those who opposed their approach to agricultural food production (for instance, the use of fertilizers) arguably tended to remain more marginal.

At least until the 1970s, the Green Front sustained a decisive role in agricultural and food (safety) policy (Bieleman 2008: 472), whereas the OVO-triptych [*drieluik*] of *onderzoek*, *voorlichting*, and *onderwijs* (hereafter OVO), or research, information, and teaching, which formed the primary policy strategy at the time, continues to be seen as the basis for Dutch agricultural success, as will become clear in section 4 of this chapter (see, for instance, Bieleman 2008: 472). The significance of this Green Front resembles the findings in the English and the German case, where – as part of the ‘Iron Triangle’ - the NFU and the *Deutscher Bauernverband*, respectively, came to occupy a privileged position in food (safety) policymaking in the post-WWII agricultural and food (safety) policy discourse, which focused on maximizing agricultural productivity.

At the same time, agricultural and food sciences gained increasing importance, scientists were in close contact with both government and food producers, and efficiency and health were counted as ideals of progress (van Otterloo 2000c: 267). These ideals came to be shared across a variety of discursive premises, including the private sector, governmental institutions, science and research, and well-to-do households (ibid.).¹²⁰ Whilst the development of agricultural ‘scientization’ (Bieleman 2008: 22ff.) and the expert-centered policy approach only took off after WWII, the national agricultural school in Wageningen (now known as Wageningen University and Research Centre)¹²¹ had already been established in the late 19th century, as mentioned above, shortly before the agricultural crisis. The prestige of these agricultural experts and the technocratic policy style contributed to a policy discourse that constructed agriculture and innovation as a scientifically founded necessity and beneficial for all, hence again a common objective beyond societal diversity (cf. van der Ploeg 1999).¹²²

¹²⁰ During the mid-twentieth century, a number of institutes were founded: *Nederlands Instituut voor Volksvoeding* (Netherlands Institute for Public Nutrition), *Centrale Organisatie voor Natuurwetenschappelijk Onderzoek* (Central Organization for Natural-scientific Research), *Rijksinstituut voor de Volksgezondheid* (Institute for Public Health), and the *Instituut voor het Voedingsonderzoek* (Institute for Nutrition Research). The food shortages of the Second World War placed agricultural food production and food security high on the political agenda and inspired the establishment of key institutions such as the *Voorlichtingsbureau voor de Voeding* (Nutrition Information Centre) and later the *Voedingsraad* (Nutrition Council) (van Otterloo 2000c: 273).

¹²¹ From this point onward, I refer to this institution as Wageningen University.

¹²² This is reflected in interviews conducted for this study where people frequently refer to ‘Wageningen’ as not a place, but an institution: for those opposing the status quo, ‘Wageningen’ represents the embodiment of intensified agriculture and its ‘side effects’, while for officials it seems to represent merely an extension of what they are doing (part of the Ministry LNV is actually situated in Wageningen, rather than The Hague).

To sum up, the emphasis on the functioning of free trade (cf. Van Waarden 2006: 40-41), the increasing institutionalization of food (safety) control mechanisms, the formation of the ‘Green Front’, and the rise of scientific experts shaped the hegemonic policy discourse in the late 19th and early 20th century, which remained relatively stable until World War II, which will be discussed below.

6.2.2 Post-war food (safety) policy

The food shortages during World War I and II inspired renewed state intervention in food production and nutrition policy in the Netherlands, much like in the rest of Europe. By the time the agricultural sector had recovered from World War II and the worst food shortages had been overcome, food (safety) policy focused on two parallel objectives: availability and affordability. Policy shifted from a focus on nutrition to increasing production, intensification, and improving efficiency and specialization, an important exponent of which was the Dutch Minister of Agriculture at the time, Sicco Mansholt, with his slogan ‘Hunger – never again!’ [*Honger, nooit meer!*] (cf. van der Ploeg 1999; Bieleman 2000).

At the same time, frugality as a value was reinforced by the focus on increasing spending power by keeping food prices low. As elsewhere in Europe, after WWII, food production increasingly industrialized, and household management practices refocused on efficiency and convenience – leading to what Anneke van Otterloo (1990: 163) describes as an ‘increasing intertwining of households and the market economy’. This is crucial here, as it indicates the transportation of values associated with market concerns into the home, leading to the internalization of these values in the population. Gradually, van Otterloo (2000c) argues, frugality came to be seen as a *rational* way of handling food, if not a core value.

Policymakers understood these objectives to require a knowledge- and technology-intensive ‘modernization’ framework, as it is embodied in institutions such as the Agricultural Information Service (*Dienst Landbouwwoorlichting*) and the Information and Knowledge Centre for Agriculture (*Informatie- en Kenniscentrum- Landbouw*). Consistent with the ‘OVO’ approach of research, information, and teaching, the Dutch authorities emphasized knowledge dissemination and agricultural expertise, a strategy that led to an increase in domestic production from around 15-20% of the domestic demand in 1945 up to typically 200-300% only half a century later (Grin 2006: 65; cf. Bieleman 1992). Furthermore, increasing rationalization and the quest for ‘efficiency’ and ‘innovation’ brought about a growing separation between different production processes, arguably constructing food production as a mechanistic enterprise (cf. Loeber and Hajer 2007: 51; Bieleman 2000).

The following decades were strongly shaped by the developments associated with the EU CAP, such as the introduction of guaranteed prices and subsidies, in the design of which Mansholt, who was to become EU Commissioner for Agriculture, is said to have played a major role. Whilst the Netherlands grew to be the third largest agricultural exporter world-wide despite its geographical circumstances and its extremely high population density, in the 1960s and 1970s, critical voices emerged regarding industrialized food production, the use of pesticides, and intensive livestock farming. Environmental groups allied their concerns with those of the consumer movement and jointly positioned themselves vis-à-vis the food industry (Reijnders and Sijmons 1974: 162, in Vijver 2005).¹²³ The particular issues that formed the basis of this alliance included the sedimentation of chemical residues from fertilizers, hormones, and other chemical substances used in intensive agricultural food (and particularly meat) production: Consumer groups understood these to aggravate disease proneness, whereas environmentalist campaigners expressed concerns about environmental pollution (see Briejèr 1968 for a popular account of the environmental effects).

During the same time period, organizations such as the *Ekologische Beweging* (Ecology Movement), *Milieudefensie* (which later came to be Friends of the Earth Netherlands), *Kleine Aarde* (Small Earth) and the Macrobiotic Movement were founded (Otterloo and Sluyter 2000: 287). The *Kleine Aarde* movement is interesting here, as its adherents called for an alternative society and suggested that the advantages of industrialization had in fact turned into risks for environmental and personal health – going against the dominant discourse on food production at the time. The 1972 *Club of Rome* report certainly gave new momentum to the environmental movement in the Dutch context, and the national *Landelijke Voedseloverleg* (a food think tank) was set up, in which – amongst others – the environmental group *Milieudefensie* participated. Last but not least, the national Consumer Association *Consumentenbond* began to consider food industrial practices such as those related to pesticides and additives in foodstuffs (van Otterloo and Sluyter 2000: 287). Egg production and animal welfare became a focus of attention during the 1970s as well, as a result of which most retailers introduced free-range eggs in their assortments.

The environmental movement additionally raised concerns regarding the impact of animal feed imports from South East Asia – in terms of soil erosion and poverty in that region – as well as the overproduction of food and manure in the Netherlands. Other issues taken up in the 1980s included the use of biotechnology in food production, although it appears that these

¹²³ Notably, this was also a time when the consumer movement gained considerable momentum internationally, albeit primarily in the UK and the USA.

critical voices remained marginal and did not lead to any fundamental changes in the meaning of ‘food safety’ in the hegemonic policy discourse. The ways in which the food industry reacted to these voices again resembled the ‘OVO’ tradition, whereby ‘Research and Development’ became a key term, as well as ‘technological innovation’ and ‘innovation policy’, which were to be supported by the government in order to secure the Dutch market position in light of competition in the food industry at the time (van Otterloo and Sluyters 2000: 288).

Yet criticisms persisted, certainly outside the Netherlands. In the 1980s and 1990s, a wave of (mainly German) consumer protest against Dutch *Wasserbomben* tomatoes (‘water bombs’) led to a reorientation in tomato-growing in the Netherlands. Another challenge to the hegemonic policy discourse at the time consisted of the realization of the impact of nitrogen in farming practices in the 1990s. Yet, as van der Ploeg (1999) points out, the 1990s still saw an expert and knowledge infrastructure that was locked into the ‘modernization trajectory’, leading to crucial gaps of knowledge that did not seem possible or functional beyond this course.

The inadequacy of the system as described above came to the surface in the debate around minerals and fertilizers. The debate exposed the disconnectedness between ‘knowledge’ and ‘practice’ (van der Ploeg 1999: 431) and, from a discourse perspective, revealed the constructed, ambiguous nature of the policy discourse (and hence also food production practices) at the time. This potentially dislocatory moment, however, did not lead to an encouragement of sustainable consumption, and policy continued to focus on ‘product innovations’, for the technocratic, modernizing trajectory was not substantially challenged (Martens and Spaargaren 2005), even though the environmental movement had been growing.¹²⁴ The first National Environmental Policy Plan (*Nationaal Milieubeleidsplan*) in 1989 addressed households as potentially critical units able to influence environmental policymaking towards sustainability, which indicated a shift in policymaking towards a stronger discursive link between environmental protection and consumer policy. Yet a decade later, in the third National Environmental Policy Plan, the sustainable consumption policy discourse shifted towards ‘product innovations’ – hence moving away again from what was constructed as the ‘target group’ of policymakers at the time: the consumer (Martens and Spaargaren 2005: 29). This (re-)turn to a discourse of knowledge production, innovation, and research resembled the ‘OVO’ approach of research, information, and teaching that, by that time, had strongly shaped agricultural and food (safety) policy. Through this (re-)turn to a technical-modernist language, the definition of underlying policy

¹²⁴ An explanation of the concept of technocratic policymaking can be found in chapter two, section 2.4.

issues remained delimited, led from a producer-perspective (Martens and Spaargaren 2005: 30), and a potential discursive opening for environmentalist agency remained limited.

To sum up, between the mid-19th century and WWII, the Netherlands saw varying phases of state intervention and re-liberalization in the domain of food (safety). The meaning of food (safety) remained fragile and informed by often conflicting discourses that related to trade concerns, consumer health protection health protection, and the goal of maximizing production. As was the case in other countries, swindling and food adulteration formed the primary concerns as demands grew for, for instance, meat products. In spite of agricultural and economic crises, the two World Wars, and the critical movements of the 1970s and 1980s, Dutch agricultural food production was predominantly understood as an economic matter (cf. van Waarden 2006: 40-41), given its reliance on export, whereby marginal voices such as those within an environmental discourse did not come to change policy discourse substantially on the long term. Moreover, the key notions of ‘research’, ‘expertise’, and ‘control’ structured the development of food (safety) policy in the Dutch context.

Keeping these dominant discursive elements in mind, below, the chapter moves on to recount the series of food scares that occurred in the Dutch context over the past decade and subsequently addresses the institutional rearrangements that they have brought about.

6.3 The changing governance of food (safety)

In this section, I recount the events around the discovery of BSE, swine fever, the dioxins-affair, and the outbreak of FMD. These crisis instances are not discussed in strictly chronologically order, for a more integrated narrative can better trace out the discursive continuities and changes in this particular case. As regards the key moments of institutional transformation, subsection 6.3.2 focuses on the 1999 Berenschot Report and the report of the Wijffels Commission, as they constitute moments when changing meanings of food (safety) were introduced and the dislocatory impact of the food scares became visible.

6.3.1 BSE and other domestic food scares

In 1990, as one of the first governments to do so, the Dutch government unilaterally banned British MBM as livestock feed. Fattening calves imported from the UK were specifically marked (with a red ear tag) as British, kept separately from other animals during transport, and were fattened in isolation. More stringent measures followed in 1993, in regard to the production of animal feed. After controls had indicated the likelihood of cross-contamination between feedstuffs for ruminants, on the one hand, and for poultry and pigs, on the other, the

production procedures in the compounding industry were to be kept strictly separated (Loeber and Paul 2005).

When the BSE crisis broke out in March of 1996, the Dutch authorities as well as the media reacted by defining the situation as a *British* problem (cf. Oosterveer 2002), and measures to deal with the disease were based primarily on a containment logic. In March 1997, however, the first infected cow was detected in the Netherlands. Following the British example, the cow was destroyed, along with the farm's entire herd. The suspicion of BSE in the cow concerned ('Anja 3') was diagnosed by a veterinarian, and was later confirmed in the laboratories of a governmental research center for animal health (*Instituut voor Dierhouderij en Diergezondheid*), which had been testing for BSE since 1990 on a small scale and on a voluntary basis. In 1997, the removal of so-called 'specified risk material' (SRM) of slaughtered cattle was ordered. With this rule, the Dutch, along with the British, followed the advice of the EU Scientific Steering Committee.

While the percentage of households buying fresh beef fell from 22.5% to 16% during the first week of March 1997 in the Netherlands, consumption rates returned to previous levels in the course of the subsequent months (Oosterveer 2002: 220). Soon after, the EU banned MBM, and as of January 2001, the 'over-thirty-month-rule' was set in place, which implied that all cattle above that age had to be tested before approval for human consumption. In response to pressure from the Dutch Parliament, the new measures introduced in the Netherlands were stricter and were implemented earlier than later EU-regulation foresaw. While there was no 'period of denial' as observed in the German case, BSE continued to be understood as an external (British) problem.

In consideration of the potential linkage between an increased rate of identification of BSE cases and the related economic damage, an extensive campaign was launched in early 2001 in order to restore public confidence and to communicate to the Dutch public that even though more cases of BSE were likely to be detected as a result of the new policy, beef would be 'safer than ever before' (Oosterveer 2002: 220). Rather than a manifestation of increased risk, the increasing prevalence of BSE should be viewed *rationally* and as an indication of good risk management and disease control. Yet, the campaign did not prevent prices of cattle and fattening calves from dropping by some 25% (*NRC Handelsblad* 2001).

The new testing policy implied a sharp increase in BSE-related expenditure and, during the first three months, all costs associated with the new testing policy were borne by the central government. In late 2000, it became painfully clear that the costs involved had produced yet another set of problems that brought about a linkage between BSE and environmental concerns.

The Court of Audit (*Algemene Rekenkamer*) concluded that the costly policy measures taken by the Government induced farmers to illegally dump cattle suspected of carrying BSE, or to even have them sold and slaughtered in the regular processing trajectory. As, traditionally, environmental policy in the Netherlands was based on the 'polluter pays' principle, farmers were held responsible for the expenses involved in having animals removed as 'high risk material' (Loeber and Hajer 2006). Yet while BSE was being dealt with, another animal health-related epidemic came to plague the Netherlands. Let us return to the year of 1997.

In February 1997, classical swine fever was detected on premises in Venhorst, and by 22 March of that year, a total export ban on pigs was installed and newly discovered potential infection premises, such as those for artificial insemination, had to be cleared, as well as around 1,200 farms. In total, the 1997-8 epidemic led to the preventive slaughter of nearly 10 million pigs in the Netherlands, and around 1,200 pig farmers were affected by the outbreak (LNV 1998).

The interpretation of the 1997 outbreak of swine fever in the Netherlands was shaped by the discursive shadow of the BSE crisis in the UK, it entailed high costs for farmers and the authorities, and - not unlike the UK during the FMD outbreak in 2001 - the Dutch authorities were largely unprepared for an epidemic of this kind, as decades had gone by without an outbreak and the so-called 'crisis scenario books' (i.e. simulations and contingency plans) were not up-to-date (LNV 1998). It was the discursive shadow of BSE and the fact that the virtually uncontrollable disease could not be understood within the previously hegemonic policy discourse which made for its disruptive effect: (Animal) disease control, in the formerly hegemonic policy discourse, could be managed by focusing on efficient controls and coordination, and the strong Dutch agricultural sector's only threat was foreign competition. The swine fever virus, it appeared, however, had been underestimated in the agricultural sector and by policymakers, as the miscalculations regarding the expected incubation time of the virus along with the relatively late installment of an export ban indicate (LNV 1998: 10-13, 19; *Algemene Rekenkamer* 1999: 11; cf. *Algemene Rekenkamer* 2005).

An additional problem that policymakers and the agricultural industry faced was the question around preventive vaccination against the virus. Although an effective vaccine existed at the time, EU trade-related regulation had installed a prohibition of the export of vaccinated pigs, as the vaccination would make it impossible to trace whether the animal has ever carried the virus. Since neither vaccinating nor preventive culling were 'popular' measures to fight the virus (see, for example, Tweede Kamer 2002), the authorities focused on merely containing the virus during the first few months of the outbreak. The density of the pig population, however,

rendered this strategy ineffective and inefficient, as a result of which the authorities initiated a systematic ‘preventive culling’ policy (see van der Weijden and Hin 2004). At the same time, however, this new policy revealed the contingency of the crisis: The disease was not merely a veterinary issue, but also an administrative and economic crisis, which added a taste of disaster to the formerly ‘safe’ practice of exporting animals; in addition, images of burning pigs that were featured in the media on a daily basis triggered public concern about animal welfare.

In order to rehabilitate itself in the face of acute institutional ambiguity and public unrest, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Fisheries (*Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur, en Visserij*, hereafter Ministry LNV) initiated a ‘self-evaluation’ of its performance during the swine fever outbreak (Algemene Rekenkamer 1999). The Court of Audit, however, responded critically to the report, pointing to its methodological flaws (ibid.). Criticisms from another discursive premise came from the Council for Rural Affairs (*Raad voor Landelijke Gebied*), which initiated a research program on food production in the 21st century, where, for the first time in post-war history, a reform-oriented discussion of agricultural production came to be at the core of the Council’s work program (RLG 1998; cf. RLG 2001). The 1998 report of the Council for Rural Affairs targeted criticism at the expert-centered post-WWII agricultural system and argued for more consideration for animal welfare and the natural environment (van der Ploeg, the abovementioned Wageningen-critic, participated in the research project). The authors further called for taking ‘consumer concerns’ seriously and holding producers more responsible for food safety and food quality. In sum, the swine fever epidemic of 1997-1998 seems to have generated more concern about the modes of agricultural meat production than BSE in the Netherlands, even though food (safety) strictly speaking was not at stake. The welfare of animals as well as farmers came to be a public concern, more so than food safety strictly speaking.

In fact, as Chantal Laurent (2006) illustrates, ‘food safety’ was not taken up as a serious policy issue in the Netherlands until the 1999 dioxin scare, which arguably produced Europe’s worst panic over food safety since 1996. On 29th April 1999, the Department of Veterinary Affairs, Nutrition, and Environmental Affairs at the Ministry LNV received a confidential phone call from a researcher at the public food safety research institute (*Rijks- en Kwaliteitsinstituut voor Land- en Tuinbouwproducten - Dienst Landbouwkundig Onderzoek*), who reported on a number of samples of Belgian chicken and eggs in which an elevated level of dioxins had been identified (Berenschot 1999: appendix 9: 1-2).¹²⁵ A few weeks, phone calls, and faxes later, 150 feed distributors across Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands were traced that could have been

¹²⁵ The Institute of Food Safety is an officially independent scientific organization in the Netherlands.

involved in the (cross-)contamination of Dutch and Belgian animal feed (in particular fat products), and consequently food. Soon, poultry meat and eggs were taken off the shelves, an information hotline was installed by the Ministry LNV and the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare, and Sports (*Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport*, hereafter Ministry VWS), the EU permanent veterinary committee secured support for the handling of the crisis, and letters were sent out to General Practitioners and environmental health specialists, informing them of the standard operating procedures to be taken in case of suspected dioxin poisoning (Berenschot 1999: appendix 9: 1-2).

In light of the remarkably swift reaction to the dioxins incident, it is interesting to note that a respondent involved with the Ministry LNV at the time states that the dioxins scandal constituted ‘the greatest problem [that led to] change [*omslag*] [...] and the beginning of a new food safety policy’ (NL9-G). The dioxins affair in the Netherlands was ‘the last straw that broke the camel’s back [*de druppel die de emmer deed overlopen*], and we realized that we had to develop a much more fundamental hygiene approach, and that perhaps one shouldn’t make use of *all* residual products [to increase productivity]’ (NL9-G). These concerns, as the respondent also suggests, did not necessarily arise suddenly: Three years earlier, the Court of Audit had concluded that the General Inspection Service (*Algemene Inspectie Dienst*) was working inefficiently, and only two years earlier, the auditors had warned that the Ministry LNV could not guarantee effective surveillance regarding the food chain. While the awareness of the instability and fragility of the policy infrastructure had been latent, it was these seemingly domestic, but in fact transnational food scares that rendered this fragility visible.

Food and agricultural policy again came to be tested again on 20 February 2001; an outbreak of FMD was identified in England. This time, the Dutch authorities immediately initiated preventive measures and began preventive culling on farming premises in the Netherlands. These measures, however, could not avert a domestic epidemic. On 21 March 2001, FMD was diagnosed in cattle on a farm in Olst (Overijssel), followed by a number of outbreaks across the country, ending in Oene on 22 April of that year.

As with swine fever, the EU had imposed a ban on vaccinating against FMD in 1991, as important trade partners such as the United States of America (USA) and Japan would not import vaccinated animals. The non-vaccination policy complicated the control of the disease and eventually led to the preventive culling of over 250,000 animals, next to over 4,300 infected animals (*de Volkskrant* 2001). The wave of ‘preventive culling’ in response to the FMD epidemic in 2001 served as a reminder of the swine fever epidemic of 1997-1998 and further fuelled public discomfort regarding the (non-)treatment of the disease, whereas the decision taken by the

agricultural ministers of the EU in 1991 had not caused much upheaval among the public (*ibid.*), most likely because it was constructed as a trade-related decision that would be in the interest of all.

The discussion around the ‘ethical’ aspects to vaccinations reached a peak when images of burning cadavers once again featured regularly in the media. Opposition against the preventive culling measures was staged in protests where citizens attempted to resist the culling policy, such as the inhabitants of the small village Kootwijkerbroek, whose protests and actions provoked a number of police interventions. Swine fever, along with FMD, produced not only another administrative and veterinary crisis – but also a disruption of the dominant policy discourse at the time, which focused on economic aspects of disease and was based on the notions of control and efficiency, rather than considering the public perception of these ‘efficient controls’, that is, the culling measures. As Rob Jan Tazelaar, the chairman of the product board of livestock and meat at the time (*Productschap Vee en Vlees*), stated: ‘We terribly misjudged the social acceptability of our [culling] approach to this epidemic. We did not anticipate that people would find it so difficult to have seemingly healthy animals killed preventively’ (*Volkskrant* 2001; see also B&A Group 2002: 3). A columnist compares this predominantly technical understanding of the measures to the German situation:

German farmers resist the general culling policy. There is no such talk among the Dutch farmers. We hardly hear anybody talk about cows here [and if so] then always as a thing, and not as a [being] with its own fate and interests (*NRC Handelsblad* 2001).

This is not to say that this technical understanding of cows was shared by the general public, as the protests, the formation of alliances between citizens and farmers, as well as the public resistance against the vaccination policy and the later Wijffels Commission, to be discussed below, indicate. Nevertheless, it appears that those intra-Dutch tensions were in part controlled, if not obscured by the dominant definitions in the policy discourse at that time. This interpretation of the events echoed the reactions to the swine fever epidemic of 1997-1998; however, it appears that animals were now constructed as victims more than farmers were.

To sum up, three aspects are particularly pertinent with respect to the series of diseases recounted above. First, the dioxin incident revealed the inherent connection between animal feed and food, whereas the dominant image of industrialized agriculture until then had entailed ‘clean’ production processes and a separation between animal and human health, as well as between feed and food. Second, the tracking and tracing of feed and food that lasted over a few weeks revealed the inherently transnational nature of food production and the inadequacy of

existing control mechanisms. Put differently, the series of diseases presented a transgression of the animal/human and national/transnational boundary that had characterized the post-WWII food (safety) policy discourse. Finally, the crisis produced another wave of criticism regarding the operation of the authorities and the alleged lack of transparency therein, when the failure to effectively control the swine fever epidemic had hardly been dealt with. These disruptive features of the discovery of dioxin residues, in combination with the discursive shadow of BSE and the swine fever epidemic, finally led the Dutch authorities to rethink institutional structures concerning food (safety) policy. The process of this institutional transformation will be discussed in the next subsection, highlighting, in particular, the pronounced call for a transnational policy approach on the part of the Dutch authorities.

6.3.2 Institutional rearrangements and (non-)interventions

Until the late 1990s, the responsibilities for the safety of meat and meat products were divided between the Ministry VWS, which was in charge of an agency tasked with the control of consumer products, the Inspectorate for Health Protection and Veterinary Public Health (*Keuringsdienst van Waren*), and the Ministry LNV, responsible for the National Inspection Service for Animals and Animal Products (*Rijksdienst voor de Keuring van Vee en Vlees*). In addition, the *Voedingscentrum* (Nutrition Centre), co-financed by the Ministry LNV and the Ministry VWS, was charged with ‘translating’ scientific advice and informing the public with respect to food (safety) and nutrition.

Following the discovery of the dioxin contamination in the summer of 1999, the Ministers of LNV and VWS together assured the Parliament (*Tweede Kamer*, lower house) that they would implement short-term measures ‘to improve coordination and communication around the safety in the food chain’ (Berenschot 1999: 1) The well-established consultancy firm *Berenschot* was commissioned to undertake research and provide advice to both ministries on that basis (Berenschot 1999). Regarding the question of shared responsibilities, Berenschot advised that the Ministry LNV should be responsible for the production phase of the food chain, while the Ministry VWS should be in charge of the processing and handling phase. At the same time, however, Berenschot emphasized that responsibility for food safety could not be explicitly limited to any of the two (*Algemene Rekenkamer* 2006). Berenschot focused on the ‘optimalization of the coordination and communication activities of the two ministries’ (Berenschot 1999: 1), whereby the dioxins-affair served as a point of reference rather than a case study (*ibid.*), which signals a more general sense of ambiguity triggered by the dioxin incident.

Despite an initial resistance to ‘drastic institutional changes’ (VWS 2000), the Dutch authorities played a particular role in the mobilization of a transnational food (safety) approach (NL9-G). Contrary to usual practice, they approached the EU Commission with a memorandum in hand, rather than a conventional written response to the Commission’s consultations. Unlike the German authorities, the Dutch government immediately articulated the need for a transnational approach, which can in part be explained by the particular features of Dutch food and agricultural policy discourse (in terms of trade and transport). In line with this trade-orientation, Dutch retailers swiftly decided to adopt a common standard for retailer own-branded food in 2001, the British Retail Consortium standard, instead of establishing their own, as German producers, suppliers, and retailers did (see chapter five). This transnational discourse among both policymakers and members of the industry stands in contrast to the regionalism pronounced in Germany, which found its expression, first, in the ‘pre-BSE’ notion that German sterilization techniques would keep beef safe and BSE outside the country and, second, in the later announcement of a need for a return to traditional agriculture, implying the notion that regionally produced and organic food would be safer (see chapter five, section 5.4).

Rather than propagating the alleged qualities of regional products (in terms of safety, health, and also trust-building), as was done in Germany by policymakers, citizen groups, and the food industry alike, the Dutch authorities understood safety to rely on the opposite: A transnational approach, yet with more efficient coordination and controls was to be put into place. Perhaps the only instance where recourse to a ‘regional approach’ became apparent was the fall of 2000, when Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, then Dutch Minister of Agriculture, ordered French meat to be temporarily banned from the consumer market in order to meet public unease. But set in relation to the other cases studied here, one can hardly speak of true ‘regionalism’ here: Brinkhorst dismissed the Italian response (that is, a total boycott) to the French and German BSE discoveries as ‘populist’ and as undesirable in light of the process of European integration, saying, [we do not wish to] reinstall national borders within the European market’ (*NRC Handelsblad* 2001). Similarly, the Minister criticized the simultaneous announcement of the *Agrarwende* (‘Agricultural Turn’) in Germany, asserting that organic farming ‘would not be a solution to the problem’ and that large-scale farming should be sustained (*ibid.*).

In another effort for discursive closure, yet also in recognition of the ambiguity and anxiety that the FMD epidemic and swine fever had caused, the Ministry LNV installed a commission in order to deliberate on the future course of the animal farming sector in May 2001. Chaired by economist and politician Herman Wijffels, the Commission included scientific experts, policymakers, and members of the industry. Wijffels laid out a scenario of animal production in

2010, which would be characterized by product differentiation and variety, and the existence of organic farming *alongside* conventional production. In Wijffels' vision, animal rearing would require the respectful handling of animals, less animal transport, transparency in production chains, and competition on quality instead of price. The report signaled an opening of the hegemonic policy discourse at the time in the sense that notions relating to environmental sustainability, including animal welfare, were asserted in the report. For example, Wijffels called for a new policy regarding animal transportation, through which live animals should be transported in no more than eight hours (whereas German Minister Renate Künast, notably, called for a maximum of four hours). Despite this apparent opening, the government did not accept the recommendations uncritically. Indeed, Minister of Agriculture at the time, Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, referred to the potential consequences of the policy changes envisaged in the Wijffels report with regard to the competitiveness of Dutch farmers, only a day after the report was published (Van der Weijden 2001). The rivalry between these two discourses – touching upon environmental sustainability and the efficiency of the market - will be the subject of section 4 of this chapter. First, however, the subsection below presents an account of the institutional rearrangements that the food scares of the past decade have brought about.

6.3.3 Continuing institutional rearrangements

In January of 2002, the Ministers of LNV and VWS wrote to the speaker of the Parliament, pushing for further institutional integration by way of subsuming all existing public control agencies under one independent agency (van Buuren et al. 2004: 58). Shortly thereafter, the Central Retailers' Association (*Centraal Bureau Levensmiddelen*, hereafter CBL), other members of the food industry, and the *Consumentenbond* (Consumer Association) called for the establishment of a central food safety agency. Partly as a result of this search to find a 'common denominator', early in the discussions, the agency was envisaged as a modest, coordinating organization. Soon, however, a debate was launched in the parliament and the aforementioned interest groups led to a new organizational design, the Preliminary Food Authority (*Voorlopige Nederlandse Voedselautoriteit*) as an organization with a more fully developed set of responsibilities and tasks. At that point, a possible fusion of two formerly separate control agencies was proposed, the National Inspection Service for Livestock and Meat (*Rijksdienst voor de Keuring van Vee en Vlees*), an organization for veterinarian inspections and control of safety stipulations in the slaughtering and meat processing industry – subsumed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry LNV – and the Health Protection and Veterinary Public Health Service (*Keuringsdienst van Waren*), which operated under the auspices of the Ministry VWS. The agency would not merely be responsible for food

safety issues; it would additionally consider ‘consumer aspects’ and product safety in general, and it was to have a coordinating role in both policymaking and research activities, as well as law enforcement tasks (VWS 2002).

In July of the same year, the Food and Consumer Products Authority (*Voedsel en Waren Autoriteit*, hereafter VWA) was set up as a permanent agency in charge of food safety in terms of production, processing and consumption, as well as the safety of other consumer goods, and as an independent agency under the Ministry LNV. The specific responsibilities of the VWA came to be tripartite: inspection and surveillance; scientific risk assessment; and risk communication. In resemblance to the German institutional setup, the separation of tasks between the Ministry LNV and the VWA – risk management and risk assessment, respectively – imply a differentiation between ‘policy’ and ‘science’. As in England and Germany, this institutional rearrangement invoked a language of ‘independent risk assessment’ and ‘science-based advice’ (VWA 2008). These principles became institutionally fortified in the 2006 the Law on Independent Risk Assessment (*Wet onafhankelijke risicobeoordeling*), and the establishment of the Advisory Council (*Raad van Advies*), which was to secure the independent formation of assessments and advice. In this context, the earlier renaming of the Ministry LNV in 2003 additionally signalled the beginning of a ‘new approach’: The ‘V’ came to stand for *voedselkwaliteit* (food quality), rather than fisheries (*visserij*). By renaming the ministry, the Dutch authorities invoked not only a particular definition of the problem but also a new image of their roles and responsibilities on this new institutional stage. At the same time, the technical language employed in the establishment of the VWA stood in contrast to the more critical language produced in the Wijffels Commission, whereby the latter, rather critical, call for change remained marginal.

Following this account of the most significant food scares over the past decade in the Netherlands as well as the institutional rearrangements they brought about, the next section of this chapter moves on to the analysis of the five empirically derived discourses and the overall shifts they have generated in Dutch food (safety) policy discourse.

6.4 Change and continuity in Dutch food (safety) policy discourse

This subchapter presents the discourses that have structured the different meanings of food (safety) in order to assess their respective relevance in contemporary policy discourse in the Netherlands: the ‘good governance’ discourse; the environmental sustainability discourse; the market efficiency discourse; the consumer protection discourse; and the public health discourse. As was done in the foregoing country-based chapters, the notions of which the respective discourses are composed, as well as the actor constellations that they produce are summarized in

table 6.1. The presentation of these discourses helps explain the specific shape of the current food (safety) policy discourse as a collection of conflicting, and often overlapping, discourses. By disentangling them and assessing their relative strength and interaction, we can arrive at an understanding of why certain meanings – and with them, those who are informed by and push for them – remain marginal, and others become more dominant. I will discuss the discourses individually; likewise, the key notions (as presented in the table cells) are principally discussed one after another for every discourse, whilst the very nature of discourses will often require a more integrated presentation in order to expose the overall effects of particular notions in tying discourses together and producing changing discursive clusters of practices.

6.4.1 Good governance

The ‘good governance’ discourse in the Dutch context bears some similarities with those discussed in the foregoing chapters, yet in the Dutch context, its function in delimiting the meaning of food (safety) is even more pronounced, as this section will show.

The composition of this discourse will be discussed as follows in this subsection: I cover the notion of a need for a rational debate about food (safety); the notion that food scares can best be dealt with by efficient coordination, management, and control; the notion of a need for a ‘new’, more ‘professional’ policy style; and the notion that the provision of information and working in an open and transparent manner serve to secure citizens’ trust, a basis for good governance. Beyond these notions, good governance also means enhancing administrative efficiency and ‘cutting red tape’ in favor of private regulation whereby ‘stakeholders’ need to be consulted regularly. Next to the discussion of this collection of notions in consecutive order, I also seek to highlight the interlinkages between those notions as well as their function in creating a coherent policy discourse by connecting the seemingly separate discourses and actor-categories across them.

To begin with, it is worth recalling that, in Germany and England, the discursive opening caused by the food scares generated notions of the need to remove the agricultural lobby from food (safety) policy, as we saw exemplified in the English Curry Commission report and the German announcement of the *Agrarwende*. In contrast, the Dutch authorities reacted to the discovery of BSE by calling for a ‘rational debate’ in their reform of the policy infrastructure. Through the series of post-crisis reports, starting with those commissioned after the swine fever epidemic, a vocabulary of ‘good crisis management’ and rational ‘risk analysis’ entered the policy discourse (for instance, Berenschot 1999; B&A Group 2002; Wijffels 2001). This notion of a need for reflecting ‘rationally’ about the consequences and lessons to be drawn from the food-

and agricultural crises over the past decade also explains why the institutional rearrangements introduced in section 3 of this chapter were set in place without much public debate (compared to cases such as Germany and the UK), apart from the parliamentary discussions mentioned above (Loeber and Hajer 2006; Oosterveer 2002).

Consistent with the notion of implementing rational measures, the reforms focused primarily on improving the efficiency of controls, such as on farms, in slaughterhouses and in restaurants¹²⁶, and commissioning further research in order to contain public unrest and potential economic losses, particularly in the export sector. As Oosterveer observes, ‘the government handled the BSE crisis mainly as a technical issue [...] [and] the Ministry of Agriculture depoliticized the problem and formulated technical answers to technically defined problems’ (Oosterveer 2002: 221). The recurrence of the notions of a need for improved coordination, communication, and efficiency, as indicated by the study of newsletters, speeches, and post-crisis evaluation reports, also speak to this finding (see appendix C for a list of newsletters).

Again in stark contrast to the German *Agrarwende* policy discourse of an ‘end to agriculture as we know it’ (Künast 2001a), an extensive information campaign was launched in early 2001, which conveyed the message that the increasing incidence rate of BSE should be viewed ‘rationally’ as a result of efficient controls and improved testing techniques (see section 6.3.1). Policymakers anticipated that, by providing citizens with information, the campaign would help restore and sustain citizens’ trust in food (safety) and those who are charged with ensuring it. Similarly, the *Voedingscentrum* campaign ‘From commotion to communication’ (*Van commotie naar communicatie*) reflects the aim to transform public unrest about food (safety) risks into a ‘rational debate’. Confirming this impression, F.B.J. de Meere and C.E. Sepers (2000) suggest that, in the aftermath of the 2000 BSE crisis, the government and the media sent largely comparable messages to ease public apprehension (de Meere and Sepers 2000: 9). Concerning the official press releases, moreover, the authors detect a hesitancy to express ‘emotions’ (or ‘pathos’, as the authors put it).

By defining BSE and other food (safety) questions as technical problems, policymakers and scientists acted as vanguards of the previously hegemonic policy discourse, which had constructed food (safety) as a technical matter of efficiency and control, and intensive food production and export as beneficial for all. To be clear, the attempts to sustain this formerly hegemonic policy discourse were not necessarily an act of conscious preservation of authority. Instead, one must also understand these efforts as attempts to make sense of unexpected and

¹²⁶ In the catering industry, the system of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) is a common practice.

disruptive events, the dislocations experienced in the course of the series of scares to animal and human health. This attempt at (self-)preservation also manifested itself in the initial resistance to the institutional rearrangements proposed in the abovementioned Berenschot report. In response to the delivery of the report, the government (and the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport) issued a press release:

The cabinet does not see a reason for drastic change in the political and administrative responsibilities regarding food policy as far as the Ministry VWS and the Ministry LNV are concerned. We do want to draw attention to the *improvement* of work *processes*, better *coordination*, and better *communication* within and between ministries (VWS 2000, emphasis added).

These attempts at institutional preservation reflect the endeavor to make sense of the institutional ambiguity within the previously hegemonic policy discourse. The meaning of ‘food safety’ was not immediately linked to a discourse of environmental sustainability, as it was in Germany, but it was framed as a set of issues that would require a ‘technical fix’ in the form of improved coordination, communication, and efficiency.

A related cluster of notions in the good governance discourse consists of the frequent emphasis on the value of crisis management, foresight, and ‘planning for the future’. These notions, in turn, materialize in the pervasive setting up of ‘taskforces’ as well as ‘think tanks’ and ‘expertise centers’ in discursive clusters among policymakers (the Ministry LNV), scientists (at Wageningen University and the Agricultural Economics Research Institute [*Landbouw Economisch Instituut*], LEI), members of the industry (such as in retailers’ associations and agricultural professional associations), as well as citizen groups (such as those who participate in ‘working groups’ and ‘stakeholder platforms’). Moreover, these notions find expression in the practice of drawing up post-crisis evaluation reports (e.g. Tweede Kamer 2002).

In discursive relation to these notions of crisis management, one can observe the emphasis on an ‘oversight’ and ‘control’ in the good governance discourse. In its 2005 report *Zicht op Toezicht* (‘Looking into oversight’), the VWA declares its central institutional motifs to be as follows: ‘Thinking ahead of what you want to have achieved later’ [*Vooraf nadenken over wat je achteraf bereikt wil hebben*]; ‘compliance’; and implementation (VWA 2005c). Even though this technical vocabulary is often presented as a ‘new approach’, these notions do not necessarily signal discontinuity in policy discourse, but they echo the previously sedimented technocratic discourse. Although this approach no longer ‘made sense’ when one food scare after another hit the Netherlands, it appears that due to its technical, seemingly neutral character (what one could call ‘discursively safe’), it survived the crises.

Moving beyond a mere focus on the ‘life course’ of vocabulary, newly created institutions are useful objects of analysis for they allow us to explore the role of discourses in informing organizational culture in times of institutional ambiguity, in line with the ‘discourse-as-practice’ approach introduced in chapter three. When the VWA was established in 2002, following the parliamentary debate discussed above in section 3, new roles, rules, and responsibilities were invoked. The discourse of good governance informed this ‘new approach’ with notions of institutional entrepreneurship and the need for a more modern approach, including openness and transparency vis-à-vis the public (cf. VWA 2005a).

While these institutional reforms – such as the implementation of the transparency policy with regard to publishing the details of product withdrawals, including the identification of the producer and the retailer – took longer (VWA 2007), notions of ‘dynamism’ and a new kind of ‘professionalism’ marked the VWA. In their 2004 Annual Report, for instance,

We did not wish to await the completion of the reorganization and agency formation process before pressing on with the *creation of a stable VWA*. [...] At a certain moment, *the organization started to move on its own momentum* [and] [...] people simply want[ed] to take the bull by the horns and press ahead as quickly as possible] (VWA 2004: 1, emphasis added).

The notion of a need for a visibly new, dynamic, and modern approach to food (safety) governance manifests itself in the organization of open events on institutional sites in the name of ‘transparency and openness’, as was also observed in the previous two country-based chapters. The VWA aims for a visible reduction of risks while, at the same time, strengthening consumer trust in the safety of foodstuffs. To that end, the VWA regularly commissions research in cooperation with Wageningen University (VWA 2006b). The VWA aims to work in a fashion ‘close to consumers’, while at the same time ensuring ‘effectiveness’ and ‘efficiency’, and establishing and sustaining a relationship of trust with the industry (VWA 2006b).

As a performative expression of the notions of a modern approach, transparency, openness, and working close to the consumer, in the spring of 2006, the VWA hosted an open day at their The Hague headquarters, a building with transparent glass walls between many of the offices, and, as the high-resolution paper booklet on display stated, with the ‘solid and transparent [...] characteristics of a modern authority’ (VWA 2006a: page number unknown). Both figuratively and physically, the notions of conducting policy in a transparent and open manner have come to form a key characteristic of the ‘good governance’ discourse. With its building, its self-declared ‘values’, and the recent Law on Independent Risk Assessment mentioned above, the VWA exists as a policy laboratory, a stage where the formerly ‘passive’ audience – the citizens – are not only

monitored through consumer surveys (e.g. VWA 2005b), but also turn into virtual monitors themselves. The VWA open day exhibition also included a meat counter with a white-coated scientist behind it, thereby enacting those notions in public: the layperson becomes part of the laboratory, as we have also seen in the previous chapters on the English and German cases.¹²⁷

The notion of a need to rebuild and sustain citizens' trust is closely linked to these practices, for in times of institutional ambiguity, it becomes particularly important for authorities to develop measures to track their own performance vis-à-vis their audiences on a new institutional stage. The regular assessment of citizens' trust by way of the *Consumentenmonitor*, which measures trust in science, food (safety), as well as in the ability of the government to ensure safe food is exemplary for such a reaction (for instance, VWA 2005b; cf. Consumentenbond 2004c).

In light of the contingency of the notion of trust, as discussed in chapter two, it is useful to briefly introduce the 2001 food (safety) campaign, which drew on EU funding. The EU left implementation of the program entirely to the member states, with virtually no restrictions as to the precise content of campaigns and the tools to be used. In the Netherlands, the main objective was 'to make consumers aware of the role played by the *authorities* in general [...] in *guaranteeing safety* in the production of food' (COMM 2002b: 59, emphasis added). Such an approach is not necessarily specific to the Dutch context, given the pervasive experience of institutional ambiguity, and the apparent gap between 'actors' and 'audience' experienced at the time. The more telling, and indeed context-specific notion one finds in the formulation of the 'main message' to be communicated to consumers was to 'learn how to make *independent* and *rational choices* about food' (COMM 2002b: 59, emphasis added). In this way, I would argue, the definition of 'food safety' was relocated to the 'private sphere', whilst the German implementation of the same project included participation in the *Internationale Grüne Woche*, the annual International ('Green') Agricultural Fair.¹²⁸ In Germany, therefore, the meaning of trust in food (safety) was staged in relation to agriculture as well as the environment, whereas in the Dutch context, the meaning of trust in food (safety) became constructed as a matter of individual responsibility and 'rational choices'.

The good governance discourse further finds expression in the notion of a need to improve administrative efficiency and 'cutting red tape'. While this notion also connects to the market efficiency discourse, it is useful to introduce it here in order to give an understanding of the role

¹²⁷ For analysis of the science/policy nexus in England and Germany, respectively, see chapter four, section 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 and chapter five, section 5.4.1 and 5.4.4.

¹²⁸ The *Internationale Grüne Woche* is more than a conventional agricultural fair. Exhibitors include (primarily) the feed and food industry, but also diverse associations, including the Farmers' Association (*Bauernverband*), a number of associations of organic farmers; the public nutrition information centre *Aid*, the German Risk Assessment Institute (Bundesinstitut für Risikoforschung), environmental NGOs, and ministries.

of the good governance discourse in sustaining a producer-led tone in overall food (safety) policy discourse. The notion is not restricted to the policy domain considered in this study and finds its expression in more general policy initiatives, such as in the policy program 'For a Different Kind of Government' (*Programma Andere Overheid*) introduced by the Ministry for internal affairs (*Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties*) in January 2004 under Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende. The calls for large-scale overhaul of government administration, even though not necessarily successful, have reinforced the notions of (market) efficiency and coordination, *also* in food (safety) policy discourse (for instance, Tweede Kamer 2004; Veerman 2004b). By 'cutting red tape', the government wants to move from 'taking care of' to 'making sure that' with regard to food safety and quality as well.

We have to leave behind the [idea of a] *centre of regulation* that the *nation-state* has been, as the only way to *achieve order*. [...] We have to do justice to the *diversity* and *complexity* of *society* and the *production processes*. [...] We have to use the creative potential in society in order to search for the right boundaries and good arrangements (Veerman 2004b, emphasis added).

The quotation above expresses, first, the transnationalizing policy discourse, as national boundaries are associated with (excessive) regulation. Second, the metaphorical comparison between society and production processes produces a notion of consumption as a technical matter; and although this 'privatization' of responsibility is a growing phenomenon elsewhere, too, it seems particularly pertinent to Dutch food (safety) and agricultural policy discourse. In the enactment of this notion, responsibilities for food (safety) are relocated to the private sector, for

[t]oo many rules can hinder the competitive position [of Dutch food producers] within the European agri-food sector, particularly now that liberalization demands continual growth (Veerman 2004a; cf. LNV 2004a, 2005b).

Similarly, an internal review of the ministry's tasks concludes that

[t]he own responsibilities of the private sector and the consumer become more important, and the role of the government as the facilitator gets emphasized more next to its role in creating controls and checks (LNV 2005a: 9; cf. LNV 2005b).

Beyond a generic neoliberal trend of a withdrawal of government, which we have also seen in the case of England, these quotations also insinuate a relocation of food (safety) responsibilities to the sphere of the private home and the role of the industry. These

connotations, moreover, further expose the political nature of the policy field of food (safety), when governments seek to shed responsibilities in favor of leaving them to the private sector.

To sum up, ‘good governance’ of food (safety) in the Netherlands means that ‘food safety’ is a matter of (in)efficiency and (in)adequate management, rather than a fundamentally problematic policy issue that calls for an overhaul of agricultural food production and consumption. From the vantage point of this discourse, food (safety) policy should be conducted in a transparent and open manner, whilst private regulation should be encouraged. Beyond this notion, ‘food safety’ comes to mean a matter of consumer trust but also rational choices in the private sphere. Aided by the technocratic discursive legacy in food (safety) and agricultural policy that developed since the late 1890s, the good governance discourse contributes to the definition and indeed delimitation of ‘food safety’ and ‘food quality’. The next section will demonstrate the close relationship between the good governance discourse and that of market efficiency, at the level of both individual notions and the actor constellations they produce in policymaking.

6.4.2 Market efficiency

In this subchapter, I seek to demonstrate that the discourse of market efficiency has played a particularly significant role in shaping the relatively narrow debate around food (safety) policy in the Netherlands. I shall discuss the specific composition of the Dutch market efficiency discourse as it also appears summarized in table 6.1: the notion of a need to sustain international competitiveness; the notion that organic food constitutes a market niche that could be exploited ideally by lowering prices; the notion that too many rules could hinder the functioning of the market and, therefore, private regulation and ‘product innovation’ should be encouraged; the notion that the farmer can and should be an entrepreneur and an environmental steward simultaneously in order to effect a gradual ‘transition’ towards sustainability; and, finally, the specific notion of being an actor and a stakeholder in the food chain, which varies in its meaning from what was observed saw in the English and the German case. The presentation of these notions below will be significantly more integrated than in other cases, given the very nature of this discourse in wrapping around, but also drawing on, others, such as the discourse of environmental sustainability.

The notion of a need to sustain international competitiveness after the series of food scares finds its expression in several ways. To begin with, a number of respondents interviewed for this study – including civil servants, members of the industry, and an environmentalist - point to the ‘outward-looking character of the Dutch people’ in reference to the practice of exporting, a considerable part of which depends on intensive agriculture. Similarly, respondents allude to

their *handelsgeest*, denoting a mercantile, entrepreneurial spirit, and to more concrete symbols such as the Rotterdam port and Schiphol airport (NL12-FA; NL13-ENV). The frequent reference to these symbols across discursive premises suggests the relative weight of the market efficiency discourse and the internalized narrative of being a ‘nation of traders’ – a notion that is historically shaped yet continues to reappear, as much as romantic notions of farming reappear in the German case.

The prominence of the notion of competitiveness further appears exemplified in the fact that the Dutch food and farming system is frequently referred to as ‘agri-business’, ‘agri-food sector’ ‘agro-clusters’, or particular industry areas as ‘food/nutrition’ – employing the original English term in current policy discourse, even though these precise terms are hardly used elsewhere. The use of English-language terms indicates a degree of Europeanization (i.e. the effort to produce a language that prevents a ‘loss in translation’ effect), as the usage of the English term ‘stakeholder’ signals, too. Moreover, the internalization of these ‘internationally-oriented’ notions can also explain the relative eagerness with which Dutch authorities pushed for a transnational approach in this policy area.

The notion of competitiveness is institutionally embodied in support schemes for organic farming. While these support schemes certainly express an environmental sustainability discourse, the rivalry of the latter discourse with the discourse of market efficiency is more pronounced in the present case than in the other two country cases studied here: The support schemes are not (solely) arranged for the purpose of achieving environmental sustainability but because ‘we don’t want to fall behind European neighbors’ (see, for instance, Tweede Kamer 2002). Indeed, organic farming, as a sub-field of food (safety) policy, is a useful site on which to explore the weight of the market efficiency discourse: Here, the notion that organic prices are excessive and should be reduced in order to stimulate demand also sets the Dutch case apart from the other contexts studied (LNV 2004b). This collection of notions entails that the production and consumption of organically produced food are not so much constructed as ‘moral’ obligations – as the notion of *Öko* used to connote in the German context – but rather, as a market niche. In other words, the notion of a need to overhaul food production in order to move towards more sustainable consumption patterns continues to be wrapped into the discourse of market efficiency, as captured in, for instance, the policy paper on organic agriculture of 2004:

The price difference [between organic and conventional production] is caused by the current small-scale organic production chain and because the negative

externalities of conventional agriculture are insufficiently discounted in their prices.

This is an imperfection in the functioning of the market (LNV 2004b: 16).

The appeal to an imperfect market in the quotation above again bears important political implications. In the market efficiency discourse, ‘the market’ forms the obstacle to achieving sustainability, rather than what is constructed as ‘fundamental flaws’ in the agricultural food production system in some environmental discourses. At the same time, the notion of ‘entrepreneurship’ feeds into this discourse, and the confident ‘farmer-entrepreneur’, and her orientation towards the future - a ‘transition’ towards sustainability (see Hendriks and Grin 2007) - is constructed as the savior of the ‘agri-food sector’. Now that the worst crisis instances and their discursive definitions have been controlled and that some of the institutional authority of policymakers and scientists has been preserved, the priorities for the ‘agri-food cluster’ are to ‘enhance competitiveness, entrepreneurship, and innovation’, and for producers and policymakers to ‘share knowledge and experiences, to reward pioneers, and to encourage those lagging behind’ (Veerman 2004a).

The rivalry between the discourses of market efficiency and environmental sustainability, which shall be discussed further below, is also reflected in the calls for ‘product innovation’ – a policy notion that was also observable in the late 19th century Dutch food (safety) policy discourse and then again after WWII, when the ‘OVO’ paradigm of research, information, and teaching steered policy discourse in the field of agriculture. Currently, the producer-led tone and the specific call for ‘innovation’ as a remedy against the failure to reach sustainability is embedded in the call for a ‘transition approach’ as introduced in the fourth National Environmental Policy Plan (*Nationaal Milieubeleidsplan*) (cf. Hendriks and Grin 2007). The Ministry LNV installed a ‘transition team’ (*transitieteam*) in 2002, and an analysis of two related series of newsletters (see appendix B), *Onderweg naar Duurzame Landbouw* (the newsletter of the transition team at LNV) and *Ondernemen in Innovatie* (‘Enterprise and innovation’, LNV’s general newsletter) suggests an interesting amalgamation of the market efficiency discourse (as expressed in the calls for ‘entrepreneurship’ and ‘product innovation’; see Transitieteam LNV 2004, 2005; appendix C), the good governance discourse (as articulated in the emphasis on ‘knowledge development’, ‘expertise’, and ‘cutting red tape’; see LNV Nieuwsbrief 2005a, 2005b), and an environmental discourse (expressed in the calls for transitions to ‘sustainability’). These amalgamations are exemplified in practices of corporate social responsibility, where the market efficiency discourse overlaps with (and often wraps around) more marginal environmental and socially critical discourses:

[Corporate social responsibility can] contribute to sustainability [...]; on the one hand it can serve *to strengthen the competitive position of the Dutch agri-food sector*. On the other hand, it helps us to achieve a number of *public aims*, such as a *sustainable society*, and a different distribution of responsibility between the Government and the private sector, delegating *more responsibility to the [private] sector* (LNV 2004a: 1, emphasis added; cf. Veerman 2004b).

Beyond corporate responsibility for food (safety) and sustainability, Dutch food (safety) policy discourse has also come to include the notion that agricultural production should be linked to environmental stewardship, as it is manifested, for instance, in the organic support schemes mentioned above.¹²⁹ In the two previous chapters, I pointed to the inclusion of this notion particularly in the environmental sustainability discourse, but in the Dutch context, a discourse analysis indicates that this notion, as it is appealed to, for instance, in the policy program launched in 2001, *Voedsel en Groen* ('Food and Green [Areas]'), is even more strongly informed by a market efficiency discourse. Whilst the policy paper recognizes that food production has touched upon societal, economic, and ecological boundaries, the key notions regarding the 'future developments of the "agro-food-complex"', the paper suggests, are corporate social responsibility, a high level of knowledge, and 'innovative strength' in order to 'reach the top of the world market' (LNV 2001). The following quotation demonstrates the discursive amalgamation of environmental sustainability, market efficiency, and good governance well. In a relatively producer-led tone, the government's policy aims for

a new equilibrium between nature, landscape, and production. This is especially important in a *country like ours* that is densely populated, has a shortage of space, a huge livestock population and a large, highly productive *agri-food sector*. By 'working together' we want to show that we are now *working towards alliances* between the various *stakeholders who all have to take their own responsibilities*. [...] This marks a *shift for the Government*, from taking responsibility for everything to becoming a 'delegator' or facilitator. For the Ministry this means working innovatively by not concentrating on what is not allowed, but on what can be achieved and what should be done (LNV 2004a: 1, original translation, emphasis added).

The quotation above gives expression to an amalgamation of seemingly divergent discourses, which rests on the notion of *stakeholderness*, as we have seen also in the previous chapters. The notion that the consultation of and cooperation with 'stakeholders' is beneficial and necessary

¹²⁹ For an extensive analysis of private schemes and their implications with regard to transparency in the pork production chain in the Netherlands, see Kalfagianni (2006).

for market efficiency (and indeed good governance, as observed in the previous subchapter) is embodied in a number of ‘platforms’, ‘think tanks’, ‘task forces’, and ‘stakeholder groups’. An exemplary cluster of practices in which the ‘equilibrium between nature, landscape, and production’, as it is called for in the quotation above, can be found is the 2001 ‘Organic Covenant’ (*Biologisch Covenant*). The platform was established based on the shared notion that organic agriculture embodies certain (even though diverse) values, and with the intention to bring together ‘stakeholders’ – industry, governmental bodies, certification bodies, retailers, and NGOs (LNV Task Force 2001). In contrast to the – admittedly rather ambitious – aim to reach a 20% market share for organic food by 2010 in Germany, the Covenant aspired to an organic food market (sales) share of five percent. This endeavor, however, failed to be reached (1,8% were reached instead), and the covenant was renewed and redesigned in 2004 and again in 2008 (LNV Task Force 2007).

Regarding the actor constellations that come together in this amalgamation of the discourses of market efficiency and environmental sustainability, among the signing parties were representatives of the Ministry LNV, *Platform Biologica* (the association for organic farming), the cooperative Rabo Bank, the retailers’ association CBL (see section 6.3.3), the Agricultural and Horticultural Association (*Land- en Tuinbouw Organisatie*, LTO),¹³⁰ but also a range of citizen groups (particularly environmental campaigners). Through the bridging function of the notion of *stakeholderness*, the policy objectives became defined in such a way that diverse actors could collectively push for a particular set of notions. This bridging function, moreover, was strengthened by the technocratic legacy of the previously hegemonic policy discourse, as some of the key policy instruments proposed in the covenant suggest: the promotion of ‘product innovation’; the ‘stimulation of knowledge exchange’ between and ‘mutual strengthening’ of conventional and organic farmers (LNV Task Force 2007: 3-7); and diverse research strategies (Task Force LNV 2001). This discursive cluster, to sum up, relies on the amalgamation of two seemingly diverse discourses, the apparently neutral ‘OVO’ approach based on research, information, and teaching, and the invocation of a sense of entitlement as well as responsibility as a ‘stakeholder’.

As it also appeared in the previous two country-based chapters - the notion of *stakeholderness* produces a sense of mutual dependency when actors are situated as equivalential members of the food chain. In order for the notion of *stakeholderness* not to produce a sense of competition, new

¹³⁰ The LTO is an association for entrepreneurs and employers in the agricultural sector. In total, 50,000 farmers and horticulturalists are represented through regional associations, a central office in The Hague, and a representational office in Brussels.

forms of cooperation in the governance of food (safety) involving ‘all relevant stakeholders along the food chain’ crucially depend on the construction of a particular rationality: By emphasizing that food safety and sustainability are ‘non-competitive issues’, a sense of neutrality is introduced (NL14-IA; see also Havinga 2006, Gezond Ondernemen 2008). An interview respondent at the major agricultural association (LTO) and as well as a retailer representative confirm that the bracketing out of the market efficiency discourse requires discursive negotiation between the different parties along the food chain that try to ‘find ways to link economic concerns to corporate social responsibility, whereas for a long time, it was assumed that the two could not go together’ (NL12-FA; NL14-IND). In particular clusters of practices, meanings of food safety – and, gradually, ‘food quality’ as well – have been reframed as ‘non-competitive’ issues and have therefore made possible new forms of cooperation (such as private certification schemes) among farmers, producers, retailers, and NGOs.¹³¹ From the vantage point of a critical discourse analysis, one could, however, consider the repetitive usage of the term ‘non-competitive’ to actually accentuate the market efficiency discourse, as its bracketing out evidently requires constant renegotiation.

Whilst in the German context, the notion of being an actor in the food chain has had an empowering effect for citizen groups, in the Dutch policy context, instead, the notion of cooperating as a chain is of a more technical and production-oriented nature: ‘Chain-cooperation’ forms one of the core principles in the 2005 policy program ‘Choosing for agriculture’ (*Kiezen voor landbouw*),¹³² where it is defined as follows:

The aim is to improve quality and reduce costs. [Chain cooperation] is about cooperation with other partners in the chain such as traders and processors. Regular deliberation [*overleg*] is also a feature. Certification is also an element in chain cooperation to gain benefits vis-à-vis other (imported) products (LNV 2005d: 7).

In the quotation above, the notions of ‘reducing costs’ and ‘encouraging competitiveness’ are set in relation to being a member of the food chain and the need for cooperation. In this way, the notion of the food chain, from the vantage point of the market efficiency discourse, acquires a technical connotation that brings together members of the feed and food industry, rather than

¹³¹ For instance, in 2006, the supermarket chain *Jumbo* launched a project jointly with the animal welfare campaigning organization *Dierenbescherming*, seeking to promote meat produced under more animal-friendly circumstances. Other conditions that organic methods emphasize (e.g. environmental standards) are not adhered to, however (see also LNV 2006 for a similar call by the retailer chain *Albert Heijn*).

¹³² The others are ‘unique products’, improving sales rates, cooperation, and extra income (through tourism, for instance).

citizen groups, as it did, for instance, in the German Food Chain Initiative (*Initiative Nahrungskette*) (see chapter five, subsection 5.4.2). In regard to certification practices introduced in the quotation above, animal welfare standards have been a frequent object of deliberation and discussion, whereby a tension has become visible between, on the one hand, the notion of the economic value of specific standards in terms of product marketing, and on the other hand, the potential competitive disadvantage caused by (more cost-intensive) elevated welfare standards. In the preparation of the *Nota Dierenwelzijn* (LNV 2002b), a policy proposal on animal welfare, some panel members understood the improvement of animal welfare conditions as a potential ‘selling point’ for Dutch meat products. Others argued that animal welfare improvements could actually hamper the competitiveness of the Dutch exports. In both arguments, the market efficiency discourse outweighs that of environmental sustainability, a dynamic that shall be further explored in the next subchapter.

To sum up, the market efficiency discourse in the Dutch context has shaped food (safety) policy in a more pronounced fashion than in the other countries studied here. From the vantage point of a market efficiency discourse, the notions of a need to sustain a competitive ‘agri-food business sector’, a need for administrative efficiency for the sake of ‘innovation’, and the notion that organic food is a potential market niche have tended to limit the debate around food (safety) in the aftermath of the series of food scares that occurred in the Netherlands. By virtue of the assertive enactment of these notions through the composition of ‘stakeholder platforms’ and the encouragement of industry self-regulation as well as the contextually contingent internalization of notions of trade competitiveness, the overall policy discourse in the Netherlands is marked by a producer-led tone. The weight that the notions of the market efficiency discourse carry in the overall policy discourse, as it is depicted in table 6.1, will become even more clear in the section below, which discusses the nature and composition of the discourse of environmental sustainability.

6.4.3 Environmental sustainability

This subsection discusses the specific content of the environmental sustainability discourse in the Dutch context in order to show how the same notions employed across contexts can take on divergent meanings when they appear in conjunction with others at the level of discourse. In the Dutch case, the environmental sustainability discourse is composed of the following notions: the notion that sustainability (including animal welfare) links ‘planet, people, and profit’; the need to promote ‘knowledge development’, research and ‘product innovation’; the economic value of nature and landscape; the notion that farmers can and should be entrepreneurs and

environmental stewards at the same time; and the notion of being a member of the ‘food chain’ in its specific connotation in the Dutch policy context, as the discussion of the market efficiency discourse suggested, too. While I generally discuss these notions in consecutive order, I shall also demonstrate the ways in which the discourse of market efficiency intervenes in their interlinkages.

Coinciding and overlapping with the Wijffels Report (2001) introduced in subsection 6.3.2, a number of environmental organizations, scientists, farmers, and political parties produced reports, the ideas of which resembled those of the Wijffels Commission (for example, Raad voor het Landelijk Gebied 2001; Stichting Natuur en Milieu 1999; Commissie Veerman 2001; Van der Schans and Backus 2001). The multiplicity of voices that found expression at this key moment of transformation speaks to the dislocatory impact of the foregoing food scares. The opportunity to renegotiate the meaning of food (safety) and to articulate it in terms of environmental sustainability found expression in the film *Pork Plaza*, which dealt with the concept developed by the think tank *InnovatieNetwerk* of keeping pigs in large storage buildings in closed-system pig husbandry.¹³³ These plans came to be referred to as the construction of ‘pig flats’ (*varkensflats*), and, although the concept was not necessarily a new idea (indeed, it had previously been discussed in the aftermath of swine fever), it caused wide-spread debate. Proponents claim more space, less waste, and less transport as benefits of this system, while others, such as the environmental NGO *Milieudefensie* (the Dutch partner of *Friends of the Earth International*) contend that the living conditions of pigs actually deteriorate.

The infamous *varkensflats* express a more general wave of questions that came to the fore at the time concerning how to improve animal welfare while maintaining intensive agriculture. The pervasive sense of dislocation produced by the series of food scares and the imagery around it is exemplified in the view of a representative of the agricultural association LTO, mentioned above in subsection 6.4.2; see also footnote 127), who states that it was ‘in the national interest to thoroughly rethink and change the practices in the livestock farming sector’ (NL12-FA). Particularly after what the respondent describes as an ‘identity crisis’ for Dutch farmers, ‘the visibility of the sector is very important, not only for citizens but also for the pig farmers themselves’ (ibid.). Similarly, the Minister of Agriculture later suggested that if cows were no longer to be seen grazing in the open fields ‘the Dutch would be affected in their sense of identity’ (Veerman 2005a).

¹³³ The *Innovatie Netwerk* (Innovation Network) was set up by the Ministry LNV in 2000 and seeks to ‘develop radical new concepts in agriculture, agribusiness, food and rural areas and [to ensure] these are put into practice by interested parties’ (Innovatie Netwerk 2008). The debate was organized by the quasi-governmental Rathenau Institute.

In response to this ‘identity crisis’, in 2003, Minister Cees Veerman announced a ‘debate on the future of intensive livestock farming’ (*Debat Intensieve Veehouderij*), inviting ‘everyone who is in one or another way involved in the future of the sector’ (LNV 2003a). The debate manifested itself in a series of events, such as roundtables in various parts of the country in the presence of the minister (*Het Portaal* 2003a; LNV 2003a). In November of that year, a national conference was to be held at a countryside estate, attended by around 170 participants.¹³⁴ The discussion setting was arranged in two seating circles: In the inner circle, 45 participants were able to address one another, mainly ‘decision-makers’ and ‘representatives of the sector’ (*Het Portaal* 2003b) – among them Minister Cees Veerman, who, unsure of what was expected of him in these ambiguous times, could develop and perform a particular role. The outer circle was intended for ‘guests’, who could take part in the discussion as desired. Two themes structured the debate: ‘social appreciation [of the agricultural sector]’ and ‘the market’ (LNV 2003b). While these themes could be seen to suggest a relative openness of the debate, the concrete setting of the conference as well as the position of authority in the inner circle vis-à-vis the outer circle, of course, demarcated what could be said, the topics that could be introduced, and the questions that could be asked: Whereas the environmental sustainability discourse found its expression in this initiative, it was simultaneously performed in a way that delimited its discursive function in empowering critical voices.

The notions in the environmental sustainability discourse, as it is captured in policy papers, mirror and overlap with the discourse articulated by members of the industry. For instance, the agricultural association LTO states that

Innovation is necessary and decisive for the future of agricultural businesses long-term. [...] This entails searching for new, knowledge-intensive markets and products with added value. [...] The management of collective goods, such as nature and landscape constitutes a special responsibility for agriculture. The international competition will increase, and with it the need to expand production [*schaalvergroting*] and further concentration of businesses (LTO 2006, cf. LTO 2007, 2008).

Two things can be inferred from this statement and this discussion more generally: The first remarkable aspect is the contrast in which this policy discourse stands to the kinds of policy discourses presented in chapters four and five in the English and German contexts, respectively, as here, notions of sustaining competitiveness are articulated in necessary conjunction with

¹³⁴ The conference event was repeated in 2005 at the Groeneveld castle and in 2006 in Apeldoorn at a conference centre.

environmental sustainability. This is not to say that these notions do not exist in the other contexts studied here, but the fact that they are presented in this integrated way, seemingly without recognition of the possible frictions between them, sets the Dutch case apart from the English and the German case.

A second specific feature that transpires here concerns the resilience of the discursive terms of reference within which the meaning of ‘good food production’ is understood. This continuity finds expression here in a discursive amalgamation of (i) technocratic notions that emphasize scientific expertise and innovation, (ii) the institutionalized environmental sustainability discourse of the 1970s and 1980s (the management of collective goods with an awareness of environmental impact), and (iii) the market efficiency discourse in which the purpose of agricultural food production is to expand and modernize production in the face of increasing competition (see also LTO 2008).

Returning now to the specific issue of animal welfare, in a performative appeal to a ‘new approach’ to food and farming, in 2002, Minister of Agriculture at the time, Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, issued a Policy Paper on Animal Welfare (*Nota Dierenwelzijn*, LNV 2002b) after consulting a number of civil society organizations and members of the industry. Among the major concerns expressed were the ‘consequences for the competitive market position of the Netherlands, the role of the consumer, the relation to food safety, and the use of financial incentives [to encourage more animal-friendly farming conditions]’ (LNV 2002b: 3). The emphasis on a European ‘level-playing field’ points to the function of the market efficiency discourse in wrapping around and in partially crowding out the discourse of environmental sustainability. Later, in 2004, the Minister rearticulated this notion: ‘We have to strive for a European level-playing field, whereby the animal welfare standards we set earlier which exceeded the legal requirement of the EU have to be brought back to the European level’ (Tweede Kamer 2002: 4, see also Tweede Kamer 2004). In other words, after a temporary dislocatory opening, the meanings of food safety and food quality were re-articulated here by drawing on both a discourse of environmental sustainability and one of market efficiency.

Noteworthy moments that indicate the growing strength of the environmental sustainability discourse, however, include the establishment (and electoral success) of the *Partij van de Dieren* (‘Party for Animals’), as well as the prominence of the animal rights campaign group *Wakker Dier* (‘The Alert Animal’), whose president is counted among the top five most influential people in Dutch agriculture, according to the agricultural professional magazine *De Boerderij* (the farm) (Dokter 2006). Unlike what respondents refer to as ‘more moderate’ organizations, *Wakker Dier* does not seek to engage in the official policymaking process. Their discourse introduces a

language of ‘animal rights’ and presents animals as the victims of intensive farming practices, the CAP, and the food scares over the past decade. This more radical discourse, however, is crowded out by the hegemonic notions that present *farmers* as victims and that present ‘(product) innovation’ as a remedy for poor environmental (including animal welfare) conditions, and the notion of ‘entrepreneurs’ being the primarily responsible party for the future of farming. Nevertheless, in 2006, the *Partij voor de Dieren* was the first political party with an exclusive animal welfare agenda to gain seats in the Parliament, and the government has since then decided to transform the poultry sector entirely into free-range farming (LNV 2005d: 23).

An anecdote helps demonstrate the negotiation between the discourses of market efficiency, good governance, and environmental sustainability, while at the same time showing the legacy of the previously hegemonic post-WWII policy discourse. When farmer Jan Veldhuis returned from his vacation in the summer of 2007, he learned that two entrepreneurs considered constructing two ‘mega-stables’ (*varkensflats*) on land that bordered his own in the Dutch province of Overijssel. One out of the four planned stables - which would each house 20,000 pigs on an area of two football fields and at a height of 15 meters - was to be built a stone’s throw away from his own farm. What followed was an extraordinarily successful citizens’ protest against the construction plans. In October of that year, an ‘information meeting’ was attended by scientists, farmers, and environmental organizations alike. Through interaction, and based on overlapping discourses, an alliance among these seemingly disparate actors was formed in opposition to the construction of the ‘mega-stables’. By articulating these joint demands, they reached a reversal of the plans and secured support across the political party spectrum. Veldhuis explained that the secret to their success was to not present themselves as an *activist group*, but rather an *interest group* (De Pers 2008).

Abstracting from this anecdote, what mechanisms in the overall Dutch food (safety) policy discourse made this possible? On the one hand, the particular style of the movement (that is, joint demands as well as the technocratic self-representation as an *interest group*) fit well into the Dutch style of technocratic policymaking. Yet the conditions of possibility for the very emergence of the alliance are grounded in the dislocatory and hence emancipatory effect of the food scares discussed above: They gave momentum to a previously more marginal discourse of animal welfare. Following the swine fever epidemic, a law regarding the restructuring of the affected sector was introduced (*Herstructureringswet*), which led to a significant reduction in livestock farming. Particularly the swine fever outbreak represented a kind of ‘eye-opening’ experience, as it produced the sudden visibility of how animals were being kept in intensive agriculture stood. It was not merely this physical visibility (in the sense of ‘becoming real’) but

the stark contrast in which it stood to the sedimented narratives around farming and food production as beneficial and economically necessary for all.¹³⁵ This experienced dislocation made new forms of identification possible, whereby the alliance of Overijssel could develop as an *interest group*. As a consequence of this discursive opening, in other words, new notions became available that came to shape definitions of food safety and food quality, whereby the latter term has also come to include animal welfare standards, next to environmentally sustainable production methods - which is not least reflected in the renaming of the Ministry LNV (from fisheries to ‘food quality’, see section 6.3.4).

The renewed alliance between environmentalism, farmers as entrepreneurship, and new meanings of food quality, not only safety, resonates in the frequent mentioning of the ‘triple-P’ concept - people, planet, and profit. The concept of sustainability here implies the notion that farmers can and should be entrepreneurs and environmental stewards at the same time, and that ‘people’ and ‘the planet’ have an equal stake in transition to a sustainable form of food production. The *Consumentenplatform* (Consumer Platform), which is integrated into the institutional infrastructure of food (safety) policy at the Ministry LNV (see *Consumentenplatform* 2004b, 2005), suggests an amalgamation of the different discourses, as the following quotation indicates:

If the [agri-food] sector wants to maintain [a globally leading] position, it will have to continue to work on the three dimensions of sustainability: socially embeddedness, ecological efficiency, and economic profit. [...] The sector will therefore have to innovate more strongly in the planet- and people aspect in order to maintain their license to produce (*Consumentenplatform* 2003: 5).

By virtue of the notion of ‘people, planet, and profit’, policymakers and members of the industry have come to merge in a range of practices, including private quality assurance schemes. This notion further finds expression in the kinds of research commissioned to the *Landbouw Economisch Instituut* (Agricultural Economics Research Institute, LEI) and Wageningen University, where advice is sought regarding economically and environmentally sustainable agriculture and animal welfare. Whereas these researchers were historically concerned with the advancement of agriculture – as well as sustainability ‘transitions’ more recently - consumer behavior has now also become an object of inquiry from a social science perspective (see, for instance, Baltussen et al. 2006).

¹³⁵ To some observers, the actual economic value of the Dutch agricultural sector is indeed debatable (Siebelink 2006).

This desire for organizational knowledge suggests the effort and need of policymakers, scientists, as well as the industry to ‘know their audience’ and, through research, to redefine their ‘audience’ and to internalize it. The notion of including a ‘consumer perspective’, also in agricultural research, is often referred to as a ‘chain perspective’, or a ‘chain reversal’ approach (*ketenomkering*) - implying the notion of stimulating consumer demand. As suggested in the previous subchapter, the notion of being a member of the food chain here appeals to technical cooperation, and less so to citizen groups as (environmentalist or consumer advocacy) stakeholders.

Despite the weight of the market efficiency discourse, the *Kiezen voor Landbouw* (‘Choosing for Agriculture’) policy paper (LNV 2005d, 2005e) and the subsequent paper issued in 2007 indicate a slight change of tone. The responsibility for animal welfare, it states, lies no longer solely with the cattle breeder, or with the trader and seller. Rather, ‘all parties of the chain’ have influence on the well-being of animals, and policy is consciously directed at all those parties. In other words, the environmental sustainability discourse has come to inform both policymakers and members of the industry, as a result of which one can observe a broadening of the debate. The invocation of the notion of a chain, for instance, signals an opening for a redefinition of the roles and responsibilities associated with food (safety) policy. Nonetheless, the environmental sustainability discourse remains in ‘rivalry’ with the market efficiency discourse when it comes to informing the meaning of food (safety), as a discourse analysis of the policy program suggests.

Another element of the environmental sustainability discourse that allows for comparative insight across the contexts studied for this thesis is the notion of (the value of) the ‘natural environment’ itself. Set in relation to the romanticist connotation of the ‘natural environment’ observed in the German case, and, to an extent, in the English case, the notion of nature in the Dutch food (safety) policy discourse informs the meanings of food safety and food quality in a remarkably different way. Two examples where the meaning of ‘nature’ in the Dutch context becomes apparent (i.e. where it is enacted) are helpful here.

First, the so-called *Comfort Class* project seeks to improve rearing conditions for livestock, particularly pigs, and is financed by private bodies (such as NGOs and agricultural associations). The ‘needs’ of pigs are researched by creating nature in a laboratory: Stables are set up in a large research centre; a skybox makes it possible for visitors to observe the ‘experiment’. On the one hand, this suggests a slight change in discourse and reflects the growing support for animal welfare campaigns (see, for instance, Voedingscentrum 2006). On the other hand, it still fits into the science-based, ‘OVO’ and ‘innovation-engineering’ approach introduced above, and ‘the

point of departure [remains] that pig farmers are entrepreneurs', as a representative of an agricultural association puts it (NL12-FA; see also LTO 2006, 2008).

A second concrete instance where the tensions and overlaps between the different discourses shape the outcome of a discussion concerns the LNV's Consumer Platform discussion titled: 'Nature: what value for policy?', held in June 2004 by the Ministry LNV (Consumentenplatform 2004a). Among the permanent members of the platform, which was installed in 2002, are a chef, a livestock farmer, a 'consumer (advocacy) expert', and a scientist. That way, we can understand the platform to constitute a 'stage' where meaning is produced from different discursive premises. In consideration of the performative dimension, it is interesting to note that the platform meeting was staged at an *haute cuisine* organic restaurant with *Michelin*-starred staff - a setting that makes it possible to express some sentiments, yet not others; a discussion at an organic farm restaurant, for example, may have produced a different kind of discussion culture, both in content and style.

Alongside other questions, the platform was concerned with the 'added value' of maintaining green areas. Society, it was argued here, expects two things of farmers: 'good food and a pretty landscape with added value'. For instance, it was suggested that farms could function as tourist attractions due to their aesthetic value, echoing the discourse in the *Choosing for Agriculture* policy paper mentioned above (cf. LNV 2005d, 2005e: 7, cf. LTO 2008). One of the key outcomes of the discussion was the call to avoid the term 'nature' in policy discourse because of its vagueness and the contention that 'nothing is natural'. In fact, platform members proposed to substitute the term 'nature' with 'sustainability': 'The government should be concerned about expanding sustainable agriculture instead of stimulating the organic food market niche' (Consumentenplatform 2004a: 6). Nature, it turned out, was understood in a rather broad way (e.g. including football fields), and it was therefore considered inappropriate to make use of these terms in policy discussion (ibid.). Instead, the platform called for the government to stimulate research on the 'economic value of nature in a broader sense' (Consumentenplatform 2004a; see also LTO 2008).

It appears that the environmental sustainability discourse is contained in that it is kept as neutral and technical as possible. In addition to the construction of the notion of 'nature' in this discourse, the notions of a need for 'innovation' and 'knowledge development' contribute to this technical tone. For instance, regarding 'knowledge development', the Ministry LNV recommends 'education' and 'research' (LNV 2004b: 8) and suggests that '[t]he challenges to improving the innovative strength of organic agriculture lie in the dissemination of knowledge to conventional agriculture' (ibid.; cf. LNV 2001, 2003, 2005a; Veerman 2005b). These suggestions

again echo the OVO-triptych of research, information, and teaching (LNV 2005d: 10), as it also appeared in the discussions of the discourses above. Beyond the technocratic nature of this discourse, it also insinuates a natural compatibility of organic and conventional agriculture, whereas some environmentalists would most likely dispute this view.

In sum, the development of the environmental sustainability discourse with respect to food (safety) has been limited, compared to the English and German cases. A key finding in this discussion concerns the continuous intervention of the market efficiency discourse as well as that of good governance, whereby the definitions of ‘food safety’ and ‘food quality’ remain relatively technical. Food (safety) issues are constructed as manageable and controllable, rather than, for instance, understanding them as systemic problems relating to industrial agriculture, as they are constructed in German food (safety) policy discourse.

To conclude, the relative strength of the market efficiency discourse helps to account for the comparatively narrow ‘food debate’ we have seen in the Dutch context. In light of the historical discussion of the ‘life course’ of the policy field of food (safety), we find a remarkable pattern of continuity, as we have also seen in the English and German cases, even as the specific contents of the environmental sustainability discourse vary considerably across these contexts.

6.4.4 Consumer protection

This subsection is devoted to a discussion of the specific notions included in the discourse of consumer protection in Dutch food (safety) policy discourse, as summarized in the pertinent column of table 6.1: the notion of citizen trust as a basis for effective policymaking (a notion we have also seen in the discourse on ‘good governance’); the notion of a difference between being a consumer and being a citizen, implying that consumers prioritize price at the expense of sustainable food production methods; and the notion that consumers have rights and that they need, want, and have a right to information in order to make (individual) choices, wherein the public authorities should take an advisory, rather than a moralizing stance. I draw particular attention to the latter notion in order to highlight the socio-political implications of this discourse with respect to a possibly more critical consumer movement.

A key moment when the discourse of consumer protection was introduced into the meaning of food safety formed the renaming of the Ministry in 2003, when the ‘v’ in the name of the Ministry LNV came to stand for food quality (*voedselkwaliteit*), rather than fisheries (*visserij*), as recounted in section 3 of the present chapter. Although policymakers performed an act of demarcation between a ‘new’ and the ‘old’ approach, this institutional rearrangement was not accompanied by an oppositional notion of the need to ‘remove the smell of stables’ (that is, the

agricultural lobby) from the Ministry, as it was in the German and English contexts. The press release announcing the change of name of the Dutch ministry read as follows: ‘The transfer of the VWA to LNV makes clear to both consumer and producer that the Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for the entire chain [...] also viewed from the perspective of consumer interests’ (Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst 2003). This performative rearticulation of what consumer protection means in relation to food (safety) policymaking further manifested itself in the renewed call for a specific ‘consumer platform’ within the Ministry in 2002, the *Consumentenplatform* mentioned earlier (Consumentenplatform 2004b).

The reinvention of this ‘consumer perspective’ also finds expression in the notion of a need to sustain the relatively high degree of consumer trust in the Netherlands (Oosterveer 2002), a notion also observed in the discourse of good governance discussed above in section 4.1 (see, for instance, VWA 2005b, 2006b). Regarding this notion of trust as the basis for ‘good consumer protection’ in relation to food (safety), it is interesting to note that the platform mentioned above did not come to conclude ‘lay consumers’, as the organizers of the platform assumed that the trend-watchers, scientists, and ‘consumer experts’ would act as representatives of consumers in an adequate way. In another contrast to the English case, the meetings are held confidentially.

Beyond the notions of consumer trust, it is useful to trace out the central differences between the Dutch consumer protection discourse and those in the other two country cases. The first difference concerns the increasing linkage between the environmental sustainability discourse and the consumer protection discourse - a connection that is observable across the countries studied here, but expresses itself in context-specific ways. In the calls for sustainability, the Dutch government has recently been trying to promote organic food consumption, or to ‘stimulate demand’, as organic agriculture is considered to be the ‘cradle of sustainability’ (LNV 2004b). On the one hand, policymakers, agricultural scientists, and members of the industry have articulated this need for a shift by refocusing on the consumer end of the food chain, the ‘chain reversal’ policy approach explained above in the discussion on the environmental sustainability discourse. This notion indicates a rethinking of agricultural food production on the whole, as has been witnessed elsewhere, including at the EU level. Yet the frequent emphasis on the need for ‘communication’, ‘research’, and ‘knowledge dissemination’ (the ‘OVO’ legacy of research, information, and teaching), while at the same time emphasizing the individual consumer’s right to choice, continues to shape the implementation of this policy objective (cf. LNV 2004b).

More specifically, the market efficiency discourse interferes in this connection through the notion that prices for organically produced food - as a potential market niche - are too high. As mentioned above, this stands in stark contrast to the findings in the English and the German case, where organic prices are generally understood to reflect the ‘real price of production’ by policymakers, scientists, members of the industry, and (most) citizen groups alike - even though in the English case, some consumer groups as well as policymakers express concern over the fact that not all consumers can afford organic food. In line with the Dutch understanding of the price difference, among the ‘points for action for policy’ in the ‘Policy Paper on Organic Agriculture’ (*Beleidsnota Biologisch Landbouw*), for instance, the Ministry LNV recommends that, in order to increase sales of organic products, reducing the price gap between organic and conventional products and promoting consumer awareness of the ‘added value’ of organic food are important points for action (LNV 2004b, see also LNV 2001). This amalgamation of a market efficiency discourse (‘price’), an environmental discourse (‘stimulating organic food consumption’), and a consumer discourse (‘awareness’) constitutes an exemplary case of discursive clustering, which in its institutional enactments tends to reify current consumption patterns.

The most central notion that structures the consumer protection discourse in the Netherlands lies in the construction of a difference between being a ‘consumer’ and a ‘citizen’, a distinction that has received remarkably little attention in the existing scholarship (but see Dagevos and Sterrenberg 2003). From the vantage point of the discourse of consumer protection, the act of (food) consumption denotes an activity driven by *economic* concerns rather than emotions or a particular sense of *experience*, for instance, related to environmental protection. An official at the Ministry LNV, who is charged with sustainability policy areas such as animal welfare, explains it as follows:

[T]he *consumer* makes his [sic] *choice* [...] *at the moment of buying* and the citizen is the one who uses issue movements in order to ventilate his opinion. There are many cases where people state their opinion when asked to but they don’t get involved in any issue movements. [...] The question is whether the citizen really acts accordingly at the shops. Because *then they are consumers*. So one can try to make the consumer and the citizen the same so that your actions as a consumer correspond to your opinions as a citizen. But then what’s difficult is that *there has to be a choice*. What we are looking to do is how to enhance the action perspective [*handelingsperspectief*] of the consumer [and] to make him aware of his behavior and his responsibility by giving him the *right information* (NL9-G, emphasis added; cf. LNV 2002a).

The distinction drawn in policy discourse invokes the notion that, as soon as one enters a supermarket, one turns into a ‘consumer’ and (potentially) disconnects from one’s perspective of action as a citizen. That way, the notion of being a consumer is reduced to satisfying one’s individual interests, these interests are clearly recognizable, and they are private, rather than related to wider societal (and indeed safety-related) concerns regarding environmental sustainability. This construction stands in contrast to the historically more paternalistic notion of being a consumer in German policy discourse, which persists in the assertion that ‘the right choice’ is indeed organic food (e.g. Bio-Kann-Jeder 2006).

Taking this thought further, one could understand the distinction between the ‘citizen’ and the ‘consumer’, as introduced above, as a public/private differentiation, implying that the government has no business to interfere in the latter sphere.¹³⁶ This observation becomes even more salient when one considers that the sphere of the consumer appears to be expanding at the expense of the sphere of the citizen, whilst the boundaries between those ‘spheres’, as they are asserted in policy discourse, are of course constructed. The former Minister for Agriculture, Cees Veerman, for instance, recognizes that

[t]he policy domain has grown broader for the Ministry [LNV]. An important part of those aspects [related to food quality] relate to *societal interests* [...] but it is difficult, for it is unimaginable that the *government would look into people’s cooking pans* to see what they are having for dinner. We find that *food quality*, in the first place, is *a matter of those affected: producers and consumers*. It is their [task] to determine the rules of the game (Veerman 2006, emphasis added).

The ‘cooking pan’ here symbolizes the private sphere – the sphere of the consumer, who may be advised, in line with the technocratic ‘OVO’ approach of research, information, and teaching, as the official quoted above insinuates, but not ‘moralized’. Evelien Tonkens (2006) stresses that ‘moralization’ (or ‘changing mentality’) has gained a particularly negative connotation over the past two decades. Since the peak of social movements in the 1980s, ideals of ‘autonomy’ and ‘choice’ have become predominant, and ‘a good life and good behavior’ came to be private matters (Tonkens 2006: 8). Such developments are reflected in food (safety) policy discourse, too: Questions related to the experience of food, such as regarding ‘taste’ and ‘identity’, are referred to as ‘new issues’ in policy discourse (NL4-Q; Voedingscentrum 2006), as if there was a risk of moving too far into the ‘private sphere’ of citizens. Recent articulations such as the notion that ‘consumption is a moral act’ (Veerman 2006) are for now difficult to

¹³⁶ In a similar way, good governance also means that the government should not interfere ‘excessively’ with the industry, either, as discussed in section 6.4.1.

assess in terms of their weight in the overall policy discourse, but they could be seen to signal growing tension within this discourse.

An exemplary case of such a ‘moralization’ problematic can be found in the current four-year-plan ‘Informed Choice’ (*Nederland Kiest Bewust*, Voedingscentrum 2006). Here, the Ministry LNV allocated a set of tasks to the officially independent *Voedingscentrum*, which is jointly funded by the Ministry LNV and the Ministry of Health (VWS), as mentioned above. Officials emphasized, however, that the latter organization would not take on a directive position. In the work of nutrition advisors with the *Voedingscentrum*, the tension between, on the one hand, a more technocratic, apolitical, information-based approach, and, on the other hand, a shift towards a more advisory role becomes evident.¹³⁷ The recent campaign material, which focuses on animal welfare issues, ‘shows an aspect of the work of the *Voedingscentrum* that we are not familiar with yet [...] [where] animals play the main characters, not people who show what is healthy food and what is not’ (Verburg 2007). At the time of writing, television spots and a campaign poster form the primary ‘communication channels’, advising citizens that ‘Chickens cannot *choose*. You can!’ (*Een kip kan niet kiezen. Jij wel!*). The tensions between the former technocratic form of communication and the current shift towards what is still framed as a ‘moralizing’ discourse become evident in the following excerpt from an interview conducted with a nutrition advisor involved with the implementation of the ‘Informed Choice’ campaign:

It is difficult for us to determine what to do with this project [...] because we are not an activist group, not an environmental group. It is much more difficult for us to tell people: ‘It is better to buy organic!’ Or: ‘Do not use pesticides!’ [We are] an independent but honest provider of information; our three central tenets are [to be] independent, objective, and honest. Now what is objective in this subject matter? That is what we are struggling with. [...] [We could not say] for instance, that organic food is better; the task is to inform people that there are different ways in which food is produced and that as a consumer, one has got a choice. That is the most important message in this campaign (NL3-G).

The consumer/citizen differentiation described above entails critical implications. First, the hegemonic economic framing - the assumption of ‘price’ as a number one priority and the idea of the ‘rational’, self-interested individual – naturalizes current practices and reproduces a notion of the ‘consumer’ as both calculating and conscious in her choice, provided she has sufficient information to take decisions regarding her consumption behavior. In this context, it is interesting to note that recent studies in the Netherlands indicate that, in fact, price

¹³⁷ This tension is also evident in other policy areas, such as health care and social (family) policy.

modifications may not necessarily encourage consumers to opt for organically produced food (Balthussen et al. 2006).

Second, by constructing consumption as a personal and individual matter, and thereby relocating food into the private sphere, consumption is depoliticized and the scope and nature of a debate about food production and consumption is demarcated. By reifying such a notion of being a consumer policymakers, in a sense, undermine their own policy objective:

The consumer will only switch to organic meat when/if that means something to him [sic]. Whether that is the guarantee that there are no pesticides used [...], or because it makes him feel comfortable [*lekker*], or because he thinks organic meat tastes better. *It can be different things* but ‘organic’ has to *mean something to the consumer*. If it does not, then he will follow his *natural tendency* to go for the bargain of the week [*kiloknaller*] (LNV 2005a: 16-8, emphasis added).

In sum, the analysis indicates that through the assertion of the notion of individual, private choice, alternative and possibly more critical discourses remain marginal. In this way, the definitions of ‘food safety’ and ‘food quality’ remain comparatively technical. A stronger integration of the discourse of consumer protection with that of environmental sustainability might, for instance, generate the notion that policymakers, scientists, members of the industry, and citizen groups alike are responsible for pushing for sustainable consumption as a form of consumer protection. Those discourses are indeed available, also in the Dutch context, but the clusters of actors, it seems, remain entrenched in the previously hegemonic policy discourse. I should emphasize that this does not necessarily entail a conscious (lack of) agency on behalf of those actors, but is also an effect of the institutional preservation of self-understandings. Nevertheless, this analysis was able to accentuate the political implications of discursive resilience. We shall see in the next subsection that the notion of choice and the implicit distinction between private and public also feature in the discourse on public health.

6.4.5 Public health

Below follows an exploration of the particular meanings that are allocated to food safety and food quality in the discourse of public health. The specific composition of this discourse, as also summarized in table 6.1, includes the following: the notion that poor nutrition and phenomena such as rising obesity rates are public health as well as individual issues; that, at the same time, nutrition advice should not interfere with the choices of ‘consumer-citizens’; and that private regulation often works more effectively and efficiently. By discussing the present discourse at this point in the chapter, one can highlight the ways in which notions appear *across* discourses

and thereby create a seemingly coherent, recognizable policy discourse while, at the same time, the contested nature of the object of inquiry – food (safety) – and its fluid boundaries become visible here.

Prior to the food scares of the late twentieth century food (safety) *strictu sensu* had not become established discursively (and thereby institutionally) as a public health issue in the Netherlands - contrary to the developments in Germany, where the fact that BSE was understood as a potential public health threat to begin with marked the institutional developments. Instead, the responsibilities for food safety were as fluid as they had been in the UK until the late 1990s, with two separate agencies in charge (see subsection 6.3.3). Even with the institutional rearrangements introduced above, the ‘new’ meaning of food (safety) as a public health issue only gradually evolved. While the VWA was made directly responsible for the enforcement of food and consumer product safety legislation, it only has a very limited role in relation to nutrition.¹³⁸

An initial policy link between health and food was produced in 1998, when the Ministry VWS first launched the policy program *Nederland: goed gevoed?* (“The Netherlands: Well Nourished?”) (VWS 1998). Despite a series of revisions, nutrition did not appear to become a priority until recently, nor was its implementation well-funded (cf. Webster 2006). As for the current policy discourse, obesity rates are constructed as one of the central priorities in public health policy discourse in relation to food (safety). In the Netherlands, the Ministry VWS is responsible for the coordination of the approach to nutrition. In the 2003 policy paper on ‘Living longer, healthier: also a question of healthy behavior’ [*Langer gezond leven; Ook een kwestie van gezond gedrag*], the Ministry VWS states:

Unhealthiness implies high costs for society. Only a direct approach to the most important kinds of unhealthy behavior [*ziekmakers*] can stop this development. This will only work *if everyone participates*: the *citizen*, but also the *government*, local authorities, health care providers, *businesses*, civil society, and *research* institutes (VWS 2003, emphasis added).

Around the notion of holding a stake in public health, these parties can formulate a joint discourse that transcends their apparent differences. This discursive clustering is enacted, for

¹³⁸ In this mission, the VWA is assisted by the National Institute for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (*Nationaal Instituut voor Gezondheidsbevordering en Ziektepreventie*) and the aforementioned *Voedingscentrum*. In addition, the Netherlands Institute for Public Health and Environment (*Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu*) undertakes regular consumption and dietary surveys. It is worth noting again that the *Voedingscentrum* also receives funding from the Ministry LNV, which could suggest a discursive linkage between the issues of nutrition, food quality, and food production.

instance, in the National Health Platform (*Nationaal Platform Gezondheid*) set up in 2003, and, more recently, events such as ‘lessons in taste’ (*smaaklessen*) have been introduced, where Minister Cees Veerman launched the program by attending cooking lessons in secondary schools in the fall of 2006. Through this performance, the Ministry asserted a stance of ‘bringing public health policy closer to the citizens’, but also a discourse of (children) consumer protection, as one can also observe in the other contexts studied for this thesis.

In close relation to the notion of food (safety) as a shared collective concern in relation to public health, the notion of *stakebolderness* recurs in this discourse, particularly due to its function in bridging across the seemingly diverse actor constellations in the policy process. Again embodied in the establishment of platforms and ‘taskforces’, such as the National Health Platform mentioned above, the notion of holding a stake in public health produces and reproduces a shared interpretation of a ‘problem’. In such a vein, the Ministry VWS is concerned that

[w]e have lost our leading [public health] position. And the difference is only growing [...] [b]ecause while in the Netherlands, life expectancy is stagnating, it is rising in other European countries (VWS 2003: 10).

As the quotation above demonstrates, the mobilization of such a shared problem definition in the public health discourse is aided by the additional mobilization of the market efficiency discourse, as is expressed in the reference to the financial costs caused by unhealthiness and rising obesity rates. Another discursive clustering that embodies the connections between notions of market efficiency and those of the public health discourse is observable in the ‘Obesity Covenant’ (*Covenant Overgewicht*), which was established in 2005 and in which more than ten partners seek to promote ‘healthy’ consumption behavior. In this discursive cluster, shared meanings regarding public health are negotiated between the seemingly disparate actors and their dynamic roles in the policy process. This is, for instance, indicated in the composition of the platform, which included members of the food industry, retailers, caterers, public health advocates, the national consumer association *Consumentenbond*, the Ministry VWS, the Ministry for Education, Culture, and Science (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap*), and the *Voedingscentrum*.

In view of my argument regarding the relative strength of the market efficiency discourse, it is worth noting that the growth of privately run labels extends to the public health discourse. These labels embody the notion that private regulation may work more effectively than government intervention. Among the most prominent labels is the *Ik Kies Bewust* (‘My conscious choice’) logo founded in 2006, which seeks to encourage ‘healthy’ nutrition but also ‘product

innovation and adaptation' (Straver and Hakkaart 2006), and to enable *choice*.¹³⁹ Here, the notions of the market efficiency discourse and that of consumer protection resonate again. The government, in fact, had asked the Dutch Food Industry Federation (*Federatie Nederlandse Levensmiddelen Industrie*) and the retailers' association CBL to develop a uniform system and logo, whereas the government would play a 'supportive and coordinating role' (ibid.).

As we saw in the composition of the discourse of good governance and that of market efficiency, the Dutch government generally favors self-regulation on the part of the food industry (including restrictions on food marketing) and would only resort to bans in cases where self-regulation should fail. The notion that private regulation works better, along with the notion that the government should not 'moralize' consumers, helps explain why the overall role of the VWA in regard to food (safety)-as-public-health and nutrition has been mostly marginal and hesitant. Conversely, in the UK, the FSA has been strongly involved in, for instance, salt reduction campaigns (which are virtually absent in the Netherlands), and calls for controlling food advertisements, particularly those to children, have been increasingly taken up by the public authorities (see chapter four, subsection 4.4.3). Put differently, scientists have not taken on the discourse of public health *in relation to food* in the Netherlands in a manner as pronounced as the FSA has done, and as scientists in Germany have historically done. The lack of an organized movement of consumer-health citizen groups may help explain this difference between the UK and the Netherlands, too, as in the former case, the 'new food movement' of the 1980s experienced the dislocatory food scares over the past decade as a source of re-empowerment.

The *Voedingscentrum*, however, holds a much stronger role in the field of nutrition than the VWA. With its slogan 'honest about food' (*eerlijk over eten*), it has launched a series of information campaigns, such as the *Schijf van Vijf* diet guidance scheme ('Healthy plate of five', or 'Five-a-day'). This concept of a 'food pyramid' is by no means a new idea. In fact, the *Schijf van Vijf* was first introduced in 1953 as part of the post-war nutrition campaign (see section 2 of this chapter) yet gradually decreased in popularity, until it was reinvented in 2005. Consistent with changing notions of health, the recommendations now include the need for variety as well as limits in food intake, less saturated fats, guidelines regarding vegetables and fruit, and, notably, an awareness of food safety (Voedingscentrum 2008).¹⁴⁰ The inclusion of food safety in health recommendations indicates a growing incorporation of food (safety) into the public health discourse.

¹³⁹ Over one-hundred members of the food industry are now taking part in the scheme. See <http://www.ikkiesbewust.nl/> [accessed 9 June 2008].

¹⁴⁰ Other instances of enactment of this clustering include the range of food-related debates held over the past few years. I do not specifically include them in this study due to their anecdotal and very recent nature.

Regarding the position of the environmental sustainability discourse vis-à-vis the public health discourse – a relation which is of relative importance in Germany, as chapter five argued – it is interesting to note that the *Voedingscentrum* does not necessarily propagate ‘natural’ food; in contrast, their recommendations include, for instance, dairy products with artificial sweeteners to combat obesity.¹⁴¹ In a similar rejection of the notion of naturalness, the VWA urged environmental organizations to ‘communicate in a scientifically correct manner and not to create unnecessary commotion’ regarding the potential health effects of pesticides (VWA 2005b: 28). ‘Eating vegetables and fruit is healthy’, the authorities asserted (ibid.), and the campaigns of some environmental NGOs (such as *Milieudefensie*) that articulated their concerns in terms of ‘poison on fruit and vegetables’ were dismissed as irrational and scientifically unfounded.

Two final quotations help demonstrate that, within the public health discourse, the relation between food (safety) and public health remains delimited, as current consumption behavior is ‘naturalized’ here. Moreover, the aim to stimulate what currently counts as ‘healthier’ consumption is in part undermined by those who push for it themselves; a nutrition advisor tells me, for instance, that ‘[as a] consumer - whether we are talking about finances or health, one always considers what your own benefit may be’ (NL3-Q). Resembling this stance, a nutrition advisor finds in a newspaper interview that

[t]here is no use in preaching. We could say: eat a real apple [rather than a vitamin-enriched dairy drink] [but] *people make their own choices. By nature*, people like convenience, sugar, fat, and large quantities (NRC *Handelsblad* 2007, emphasis added).

In conclusion, the public health discourse has gradually come to shape the meaning of food (safety) in the overall policy discourse, but there remain significant traces of an economic framing of nutrition-as-public health. Despite the fact that organizations such as the consumer association *Consumentenbond* and the Netherlands Heart Foundation (*Nederlandse Hartstichting*) have taken part in recent nutrition awareness initiatives, no coherent discursive network of non-governmental organizations has developed around the notion of health as of yet (see also Schilpzand 2004), whereas England saw such a movement already in the 1980s, and in Germany, food (safety) has virtually become a mainstream issue that is taken up across discursive premises. The analysis of the specific content of the public health discourse and the intervention of the market efficiency discourse here reveals the political implication that discursive shifts towards

¹⁴¹ This is not to say that this strategy is necessarily less effective or against medical-scientific insights. After all, sweeteners remain a debated issue in the scientific community, and besides, effectiveness is not a concern for this study.

health-conscious consumption patterns remain limited and undermined by those who push for them themselves, either in the consumer protection or the public health discourse. In conclusion, I would argue that the apparent ‘demoralization’ of public health, with its notion of a shared market (in)efficiency threat, as well as the ‘OVO’ policy devices (of research, information, and teaching) that structure the consumer protection and public health discourse, have hindered the development of a stronger consumer-health nexus in relation to food (safety) in Dutch policy discourse.

6.5 Concluding remarks

The present chapter has sought to describe the ways in which food scares were taken up as policy issues in the Netherlands. In light of the observation that, after a series of ‘politics in the stable’ in the form of food scares and agricultural crises, policy discourse remained relatively stable, this chapter sought to explain the ‘life course’ and the specific content of the discourses that inform Dutch food (safety) policy discourse.

The chapter proceeded as follows. After an introductory section, section 2 traced the key elements of food (safety) policy discourse in the Netherlands. Specifically, three elements were identified: an emphasis on the functioning of free trade; the formation of the ‘Green Front’; and the rise of scientific experts shaped the hegemonic policy discourse in the late 19th and early 20th century. Regarding the post-WWII policy discourse, I highlighted the paradigm of maximizing production, which also became evident in the study of England and Germany in chapter four and 5, respectively, the increasing intertwining of market efficiency values in consumption practices, and, again, the role of scientific experts in the overall technocratic policy approach, as expressed in the ‘OVO’ policy devices of research, information, and teaching. Section 3 distilled the most important food scares and agricultural crises over the past decade, whereby I found that the swine fever epidemic and the dioxins crisis were of particular significance, both for the re-emergence of an environmental discourse that emphasizes animal welfare and the push towards a transnational, EU-based policy approach, consistent with the historical, internalized notion of ‘being a nation of traders’ and holding a leading position in agricultural exports. Section 4 was devoted to the primary focus of this thesis, the discourse analysis of contemporary food (safety) policy discourse. The five discourses appear summarized in table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1 Dutch food (safety) policy discourse: key notions

Good governance	Market Efficiency	Environmental Sustainability	Consumer protection	Public health
PSCI	PSCI	PSCI	PCI	PI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Rationality should guide food (safety) policy * Citizens' trust is essential for policymaking, and a new policy approach is needed to secure trust * Policy and science should be conducted in a transparent and open way * Good food (safety) governance requires efficient and effective coordination and being prepared for the future * Too many rules can hinder innovation and efficiency * Good governance needs to be supported by the provision of information * Regular consultation of stakeholders is necessary for the sake of good governance * Industry self-regulation often works better than government intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Dutch food producers must not fall behind the international competition * Organic food is a market niche and lower prices may stimulate demand * Sustainability cannot be reached without focusing on planet, people, and profit * Industry self-regulation and product innovation often work better than government intervention * Food safety is a non-competitive issue, so stakeholders along the food chain should cooperate * Animal welfare could be improved but the disadvantageous implications for trade should be considered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sustainability cannot be reached without focusing on planet, people, and profit * Animal welfare could be improved but the disadvantageous implications for trade should be considered * Farmers can and should be entrepreneurs and environmental stewards simultaneously * The countryside and nature can be economic resources * Knowledge development and product innovation help promote sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Citizens' trust is essential for policymaking * Consumers focus on price, rather than 'quality' * There is a difference between being a 'citizen' and being a 'consumer' * Consumers need and want information regarding food (safety) in order to make choices * Advice regarding food (safety) and nutrition should not be too moralizing * Nutrition is (also) a matter of individual (consumer) choices * Consumers are stakeholders and have rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Obesity is a (costly) public health problem and everyone holds a stake in it * Obesity and poor public health can affect competitiveness * Advice should not be too moralizing * Nutrition is (also) a matter of individual (consumer) responsibility * Industry self-regulation often works better than government intervention

Categories:

P = Policymakers

S = Scientists

C = Citizens (e.g. consumer advocates, environmental groups)

I = Members of the food industry

In bold: recurring notions that connect discourses and actors

First, the ‘good governance’ discourse draws on notions of transparency, openness, and the need for improved coordination and efficiency as a basis for securing food safety and citizens’ trust. At the same time, and slightly differently from what we saw in the English and German case, good governance of food (safety) entails the need for a rational debate about what is at stake, and similarly, consumers are expected to make rational decisions, too. With regard to policymakers’ responsibilities vis-à-vis citizens and the food industry, there is no strong notion of a need to remove the agricultural lobby from the Ministry LNV in order to secure trust – rather, information, education, and preserving rationality inform the notion of trust in this context. Good governance further implies that private and voluntary regulation may be more efficient and effective than ‘too many rules’. Through the good governance discourse and its technocratic features, considerable discursive closure was achieved in the aftermath of the series of food and animal health scares.

Second, what I termed the ‘market efficiency discourse’ holds a relatively hegemonic position, such as in the pervasive notions of competitiveness, export-dependence, entrepreneurship, and the fear to ‘fall behind’ in the European market. The relative strength of these notions, when compared to the English and the German case, limits the debate on the implications of intensive agriculture, as export, trade, and (intensive and cost-efficient) agriculture are constructed as beneficial for all.

Third, we can similarly observe the relative strength of these notions in the environmental sustainability discourse. Despite the tradition of environmental protection in the Netherlands, and a growing emphasis on animal welfare, this discourse is often wrapped into a dominant market efficiency discourse - for instance, in the ways in which organic food production and consumption are encouraged and in the use of the sustainability concept, with its focus on ‘people, planet, and profit’. Moreover, a key notion within this discourse forms the industry-oriented use of the concept of the food chain, while in the German context, the notion has supported the (re-)empowerment of citizen groups concerned with environmental issues and

consumer rights, as well as coalitions between the two. The technocratic nature of the discourse in the Dutch case implies that notions of environmental sustainability are wrapped in technical terms: ‘communication’ is emphasized at the expense of ‘pathos’ and antagonistic conflict; ‘research’ and ‘information’ are valued over ‘moralizing’.

From the vantage point of the discourse of consumer protection, food (safety) policy entails some degree of governmental responsibilities and the integration of a ‘consumer perspective’ into policymaking, while there are no clear signs of a renewed ‘consumer movement’ in the Netherlands. The most central notion in this discourse is the distinction between ‘the consumer’ and ‘the citizen’, whereby the (individual) citizen is constructed as an individualist market agent who values price over (different understandings of) food quality. This finding bears important political consequences. The socially constructed distinction does not only reproduce a stereotypical image of ‘consumers’, but also forecloses a broader, more critical discussion and changes towards more environmentally and socially conscious consumption behavior.

Finally, in the discourse of public health, food (safety) refers to hygienic qualities, technical safety rules on behalf of the feed and food industry, and the need to combat obesity. With regard to the latter, we find the recurrent notion of a need to think rationally about food (safety) and to make decisions that are based on the ‘OVO’ policy devices of research, information, and teaching. The notion that declining public health (such as in rising obesity rates) bears economic costs produces a notion of *stakeholderness* in this discourse, and the beneficial nature of private regulation becomes emphasized and enacted in particular actor constellations. The notions we find in this discussion are moreover exemplary for the fluid boundaries of the object of inquiry here, when food (safety) and food (quality), consumer protection as well as market efficiency, are drawn into a discourse of public health.

In conclusion, while the food scares of the past decade have certainly triggered debate and public concern, there has only been a limited expansion of the meaning of ‘food safety’ and ‘food quality’ and the debate remains relatively narrow in the absence of romanticist notions one finds in England (‘reconnection’) and Germany (‘the intrinsic value of nature’). Institutional rearrangements and discursive actor constellations do indicate a dislocation of the previously hegemonic image of intensive agriculture and a re-empowerment and stabilization of other discourses such as environmental sustainability, in particular concerning animal welfare. Yet three factors have helped a relatively swift (though always partial) discursive closure – a return to stable politics - in reaction to the sense of dislocation and institutional ambiguity experienced over roughly the past decade. First, the discourse of market efficiency intervenes in the discourse of environmental sustainability, often wraps around it, and crowds out more marginal notions,

such as the construction of an intrinsic value of 'nature'. Second, the notion of a difference between being a 'consumer' and being a 'citizen' bears important implications. Its continuous presence in the policy discourse implies a reification of the status quo, prevents the individual from identifying with wider (safety-related) environmental concerns, and reproduces a stylized image of the 'consumer' as an individual who follows her own – easily identifiable, economic – interests. In such a way, food (safety) is relocated into the 'private' sphere, whereby producers and consumers are held responsible for keeping food safe.

Having discussed the different interpretations of and meanings allocated to food safety and food quality in the English, German, and Dutch contexts, the next chapter examines the policy discourse at the level of the EU and identifies the key notions that bind that discourse together.