UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

CRE

CENTRE FOR RURAL ECONOMY

GOVERNMENT DECISION MAKING UNDER CRISIS:

A COMPARISON OF THE GERMAN AND BRITISH

RESPONSES TO BSE AND FMD

Philip Lowe
Christianne Ratschow
Johanne Allinson
Lutz Laschewski

Research Report

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

Department of Agricultural Economics and Food Marketing

Centre for Rural Economy

Research Report

GOVERNMENT DECISION MAKING UNDER CRISIS: A COMPARISON OF THE GERMAN AND BRITISH RESPONSES TO BSE AND FMD

Philip Lowe

Christianne Ratschow

Johanne Allinson

Lutz Laschewski

May 2003

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Recent farming and food crises have severely shaken public trust in modern agrifood systems and the institutions that regulate them. Fundamental changes have been demanded in agricultural policy and practice. As a result, central policy institutions which, in this field, are renown for their inertia, have been given new political direction and objectives; and potentially momentous changes have been initiated to reorient farming practices and food production systems. Thus, 2001 found both Britain and Germany with new Ministries and Ministers setting new directions for agricultural policy.

In Germany, Renate Künast was appointed as the first female agricultural minister (and the first in that position to be a non-farmer and a Green) to head a revamped Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture. In Britain, Margaret Beckett was likewise appointed as the first female agricultural minister to head a new Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which replaced the old Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF). As well as these striking parallels in the symbols of a new beginning, there has also been a considerable degree of similarity in the new policy directions each has pursued. Consumer interests and consumer protection are to be at the heart of agricultural policy; more localised food chains are to be encouraged; and forms of farming that respect the environment, animal welfare and organic principles are to be promoted. Indeed, with a common interest in altering the framework for agricultural policy, the two governments have joined forces to seek reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy, to accommodate the changes they are both pursuing.

Our interest in these matters partly arises from wishing to understand where this is taking us. These are policy systems that are changing direction but are doing so in the midst of crises. It is important therefore to understand the dynamics and the rationality of decision making under crisis. Events in German and British agriculture in 2001 certainly illustrate systems under crisis and, by comparing and contrasting their reactions, we hope to tease out what is structuring the new directions being taken.

Whilst there are striking similarities between the two cases, there are major differences. The immediate cause for the crisis in Germany was Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE); in Britain it was Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD). German policy in the aftermath is more regulatory with organic farming having a central ideological function, whereas British policy is pursuing a more market oriented agriculture that also promotes stewardship of wildlife and the countryside. These emphases have been present for some time in the respective policy systems, but at the margins. Through the exigencies of crisis, they were thrust to the fore, to become dominant motifs of the new policy. Yet, they do not offer obvious solutions to the actual and immediate problems that precipitated the crises. On the one hand, it is not self-evident that promoting organic farming will, on its own, significantly curb BSE and the risks it poses to animal and human health in Germany. On the other hand, a more market and conservation oriented agriculture will not make Britain immune to future incursions of FMD.

Thus while different animal diseases ushered in quite similar and contemporaneous institutional changes in Britain and Germany, they also precipitated policy reform outcomes not specifically addressed to the

disease-problem that had caused the crisis. So it seems that the crises were the occasion to bring forward reforms that had been prepared in advance in the two countries. The policy reform outcomes can thus be characterised as 'garbage can solutions', and below we want to explore how the Garbage Can Model (Cohen, March, Olsen 1972) might illuminate the decision processes involved. This approach argues that, during a crisis, decision makers do not look for the most appropriate solution to the problem they face but take those actions that are most readily available, acceptable and feasible. It seems that that is what happened in Britain and Germany in 2001. The immediate effect was not a search for the right solution, but was to catalyse policy reforms in food and agriculture, by shifting the balance of pro- and anti- forces in the society and the economy.

Taking this as the main hypothesis, that the solutions adopted were the ones available, it is still important to analyse what contingencies obliged governments to pursue these particular courses of reform rather than other potential ones. Policy decision making is not only influenced by the actors taking part in it. It is also shaped by the economic and institutional structures and public opinion. This paper will try to reveal the crucial influences on the two sets of policy reforms being pursued in Germany and England[1] respectively.

[1] FMD affected all the countries in the UK, but England was most heavily impacted. The policy and institutional response has been somewhat different between the countries of the UK and in this paper we concentrate on what happened in England.

2 THE CONCEPTUAL APPROACH: SOLUTIONS SEEKING PROBLEMS?

In their celebrated article 'A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice', Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) sought to explain decision making in organisations. What they particularly addressed was how, in a systematic way, solutions adopted by organisations are not specifically devised for the problems they purport to solve. This argumentation was widely discussed in the social sciences for its challenge to prevailing notions of the rationality of organisational behaviour, and was the start of the development of other theoretical frameworks taking irrational decision making into account (e.g. Kingdon 1995, Zahariadis 1999).

Cohen and colleagues argue that an organization "is a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and decision makers looking for work." (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972: p.2). That means that, in an organisation, problems and solutions are not necessarily related to each other in a simple linear or deductive relationship. This arises from the specialisation of tasks within organisations. Various individuals within an organisation have the role to develop solutions. Normally these solutions are not needed and are therefore shelved (i.e. disposed of in the garbage can). At any particular point in time an organisation also faces or pursues an array of problems which it must characterise or prioritise, or alternatively, avoid or neglect (i.e. dispose in the garbage can). The garbage can, therefore, typically contains various potential solutions and various potential problems for the organisation. In the model, the garbage can is seen to act as a reservoir from which organisational decision making can

draw. The outcome therefore depends on the mix in the can. Solutions and problems have an equal status as separate streams in the organisation. Which solutions are ready for airing and which problems are on people's mind are critical. When a given solution is proposed it may be regarded by the participants as irrelevant to the problem. Or, even more likely, the participants have fixed on a course of action and cast about for a problem to which it is the solution. So, a given solution is looking for a problem.

Although the Garbage Can Model was initially developed to explain decision making within organisations, several articles and books have subsequently applied the model to the analysis of the national political system (e.g. Kingdon 1995, Zahariadis 1999). So it seems feasible, at least, to use it to analyse national policy making. That being the case, to pursue the questions raised in this paper, a framework is needed that incorporates the hypothesis of regarding the policy outcomes after BSE and FMD as 'garbage can solutions'; but that also encompasses other aspects. The crisis situation raised a severe problem of legitimacy for each government. A policy change decided by government alone would not have convinced the public. Consequently, in an attempt to solve this problem of legitimacy, governmental policy had to integrate solutions proposed by non-governmental groups during the crisis. These solutions had to be connected to certain public demands and ideologies in order to restore public trust in governmental policy. Indeed, Renate Künast remarked "I am campaigning for a new agriculture. An agriculture which is once again backed by the people" (Künast 2001). That means that focussing on the government as the only important actor in the crisis (as the garbage can model proposes) is not appropriate. The circumstances that influenced decision making during the crises have to be highlighted

because they constrained the range of feasible solutions available for the governments.

In policy analysis different frameworks have been developed to identify the basic influences on policy making (e.g. Sabatier 1999, Héritier 1993). Most of them identify three important elements: the structural conditions (i.e. the stable environment of the policy field); the situative context (i.e. the contingent circumstances); and the actors with their beliefs and their strategies (e.g. Sabatier 1999, Jänicke and Weidner 1997, Scharpf 2000). These are the elements that frame our analysis of policy decision making during the BSE and FMD crises.

Turning to the first element - the structural conditions - the paper highlights the respective structure of the agricultural sectors and the fundamental sociocultural values and ideologies surrounding agriculture and the countryside in Germany and Britain. These stable parameters explain the degree of consensus for, or against, certain policy directions in the respective countries. Second, the situative context has to be described which means looking at the effect the BSE and FMD crises had on consumer reactions and public demands concerning food, the environment and the countryside. This establishes the pressure on government for policy change and also the sort of direction that would fit consumer demands. Thirdly, the actors have to be explained which means mainly the policy network surrounding agricultural policy, including the beliefs and ideologies of the different actors. We do not describe all the relevant actors in the policy field, rather we focus on the groups newly integrated into policy making, who offered the solutions available during the crises. Such groups came to play a crucial role because the evaporation of public confidence in the crises meant that established

actors in the policy network - such as Ministers, government officials, the farming unions and the mainstream political parties - were unable to present publicly credible solutions at the time.

After analysing these three elements in policy decision making, it will be possible to identify in a fourth sub-section which solution was taken during the respective crises and what influences obliged each government to take this solution. We consider Germany and Britain in turn before comparing these two cases to derive some general conclusions about decision making in agricultural policy under crisis.

3 THE GERMAN CASE

3.1 Structural Conditions

German agriculture and agricultural policy in the run-up to the BSE crisis gave a reassuring appearance of stability and stasis which actually glossed over a situation of substantial change and upheaval. It is an irony that the country whose agriculture has long had a deeply conservative image of small family farms now contains, as a consequence of German unification, the largest agricultural enterprises in the current European Union. The integration and transformation of the East German agricultural sector has been (and still is) the most significant challenge to the agricultural policy system.

Between 1990 and 1992 the number of employees in East German agriculture declined from about 850,000 to about 150,000. More than ten years later the legacy of rural unemployment, depression and depopulation is still among the most significant problems the Eastern Länder have to deal with (Siebert and Laschewski 2001). However, East German agriculture itself has experienced a phenomenal turnaround. Whereas in the early 1990s there were doubts over whether its large farms, in particular the co-operatives, could survive, the European Commission more recently proposed a ceiling for direct CAP payments for such large farms in the context of the Agenda 2000 negotiations. Whilst partly a strategic step, this proposal also reflected the impressive productivity growth within East German agriculture. Equally remarkable was the forthright rejection of the Commission's proposal by the German Government and the Farmers' Union.

During the 1990s the German Farmers' Union showed itself to be more pragmatic than one could have assumed considering the importance that the ideology of family farming played and, to an extent, continues to play for the legitimisation of public support for agricultural subsidies.[2] The term 'family farm' refers to a small, non-specialised farm that is owned and managed by a farming family. Especially during the 1970s and 1980s, this model of the family farm was an important objective of agricultural policy in West Germany, around which the government had deliberately sought to temper structural change in agriculture. Family farms were seen as providers of public goods such as an assured supply and good quality of food, and environmental protection, but also as guarantors of social peace and stability and a certain morality (Hagedorn and Schmitt 1985; Lorenzl and Brandt 1995). On unification, the West German family farm seemed to present the appropriate model to fulfil the expectations of German society.

Despite this legacy, in 1991 the German Farmers' Union absorbed as regional members newly founded farmers' unions in the Eastern Länder that were the successors of former socialist organisations. This followed the failure of attempts to build a new joint organisation, which would have included landowner associations mainly representing the interests of the old dispossessed peasantry and committed to re-establishing family farming in the Eastern Länder (Laschewski 1998). In its pragmatic decision to integrate the larger group of farms, the German Farmers' Union thereby gave long-term priority to the unity of farmers' representation even at the expense of a coherent ideology (Heinze and

[2] 84% of the German public agree that 'The EU should use the CAP to protect medium or small farms' (Eurobarometer 2002).

Voelzkow 1993). Implicit in this shift was greater acceptance amongst decision-makers inside both the German Farmers' Union and the Federal Government of the inevitability of structural change, although this was not necessarily accepted in wider public opinion. Nevertheless, a new focus on competitiveness found expression in the shift of the official rhetoric from peasant farming ("bäuerliche Landwirtschaft") to farm entrepreneurs ("Landwirtschaftliche Unternehmer"). Not unrelatedly, the transformation of agriculture in the East has been accompanied by an accelerated restructuring process in the West, the rate of decline in the number of farms increasing from about 2% per annum in the 1980s to about 3% per annum in the 1990s.

Unification is one of the reasons that this process took place almost without public and even academic recognition. Whereas environmental problems had encouraged public debate about the direction of farming during the 1980s, German society became preoccupied with other issues during the following decade, including unemployment, the increasing state deficit and the new role of a unified Germany in a changing global context. One effect of the BSE-crisis was to reignite public debate about agriculture and food.

Before the crisis, agricultural policy making took place in a small circle of specialists. Even so, the growing diversity of farm structures and the accelerating restructuring process were making it difficult for the Farmers' Union to maintain its claim for exclusive and unified representation. As already mentioned, there was opposition from those Eastern farmers and landowners that felt discriminated against during the restitution process, and who, through an organisational platform called the Bauernbond, expressed a conservative small farming ideology closer

to some of West Germany's regional farmers' associations. Already in the West the environmental movement had connected with the concerns of those marginalised by modernisation - notably the small farms, especially in less favoured agricultural areas. By associating intensive farming with larger farms (despite the lack of a clear causal relationship between the two), the environmental movement implicitly reinforced the social commitment to, and faith in, the family farming model.

The wider platform for expressing opposition to intensive farming is the Federation of the German Agrarian Opposition (Dachverband der Deutschen Agraropposition DDA, today AgrarBündnis). This was founded in 1988 and brought together several environmental and consumer organisations, organisations for the prevention of cruelty to animals and organisations of organic farmers. The aim was to develop and promote an alternative concept of farming to intensive farming which would include nature and consumer protection and would promote a sustainable way of farming. Organic farming was identified as the farming concept which embraced all these issues. It encompasses not only a method of production but also the social ideals of localised systems of production on small family farms. It is interesting to note how much the work of the German Agrarian Opposition focused on organic farming as the main instrument of achieving their aims. With the Green Party and the environmental movement promoting organic farming as the way for sustainable farming the concept has had significant political attention focused on it. This platform successfully developed and professionalised its activities during the 1990s. Among its most prominent activities has been an annual 'critical agricultural report', in response to the official report published by the government.

In Germany the main focus for the politicians and the environmental groups concerned with the countryside is on agriculture and farming and not, as in some other countries, on a concept of rural development which includes, in addition, other activities that take place in rural areas. Of course, in Germany too there is no shortage of ideas, discussions and proposals for rural development but they are overshadowed by agrarian concerns. A second factor is an institutional one. In the very complex federal system political and administrative competencies are sharply delineated and observed. The actions of the Federal agricultural ministry are strongly guided by a clear sense of what is its domain. Even the idea of farm diversification raises conflicts not only between ministries but also between the Federal and the Länder governments.

Beside the political and public influences on agriculture, the specific characteristics of the food sector structures consumer demands in certain directions. As with other Western countries, there is a trend towards increasing concentration in food retailing. A distinctive feature is the prominent position of the discounters who have a rising share of the grocery market, currently standing at 29%. Food retailing is thus very competitive and oriented towards low-priced consumer demand. Nevertheless, there is some demand for speciality and high quality foods which command higher prices. Germany is currently the largest EU market for organic foods and this has been explained in terms of food safety and environmental concerns (Michelsen 2001) and the better taste of some vegetables. Even so, organic farming still remains a niche product. Most consumers are price-oriented, forcing the farmers and retailers to offer food as cheaply as possible.

3.2 Situative Context

The BSE crisis in Germany was so cataclysmic for the agricultural sector because of the severe public reaction it induced - a reaction that was reflected and stimulated by a mass media not normally interested in agricultural issues.

The general public reaction was, first of all, acute concern about food safety, especially about beef, which for a short period led to a complete collapse of beef sales (ZMP 2001). Nobody wanted to eat beef without further information about the risks from BSE. The Government was quite unprepared for this deep public reaction.

Amidst deep public concern about food safety, organic farming was hailed as BSE-free by the environmental movement, several politicians and the mass media (e.g. Künast 2001). This led to a steep rise in demand for organic meat which rose sharply in price. In this period, many German consumers temporarily abandoned either their normal meat-eating habits or their normal cost-sensitivity, turning instead to expensive organic food or even exotic meat such as ostrich steak.

Driven by the public demand for more information about food safety, the mass media started to scrutinise the agricultural sector more closely. Until BSE the German public had shown little interest in, or awareness of, the way the sector worked and how it was supported (Eurobarometer 2000). The more people learned about the production system, the involvement of the food and feed industry and the limited controls, the more anxious they became about the way in which food is produced, processed and distributed. There was the shock of recognition that the silent revolution

of technological change had created a type of agriculture that had little to do with the images of the 1950s and 1960s that still dominated children's books and the popular imagination.

The BSE crisis was characterised as the "Chernobyl" of the agricultural sector (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2001[3]) i.e. an event that shattered faith in the established system. The political support for intensive farming and the very close links between farming leaders, politicians and the food industry - that previously had occasioned little comment - became matters of deep contention. Wholesale change and transparency in the production system was what was now demanded (WWF 2001).

The BSE crisis thus induced, at least temporarily, an increased demand for organic and health foods, a collapse in the legitimacy for the politicians and interest representatives involved in the established policy network for agriculture and a demand for a new agricultural policy with environmental and food safety issues at its core. Even though these reactions had force for only a few months, they were very powerful during the crisis and forced the government to react.

3.3 The actors

As mentioned earlier, until the BSE-crisis agricultural policy making took place in a kind of 'closed shop' that involved politicians with strong linkages to the sector itself, or related businesses and associations, and the Farmers' Union. Other groups struggled to influence decision making from the outside (Mehl 1997, Ratschow 2003). However, the BSE crisis overwhelmed these arrangements. As the established policy network was

[3] 11th March 2001.

held responsible for the course of developments which had led to the BSE crisis, the participants in the network had to deal with an immense problem of legitimacy during the crisis.

Until this point agriculture had not been central to the politics of the government coalition. Within the coalition agricultural policy was the responsibility of the senior partner, the Social Democrats (SPD). The Minister Karl-Heinz Funke and the Chancellor had pursued an approach, that had not been popular with the farmers, of promoting the case for structural change in agriculture to improve its international competitiveness.

One week after the first confirmed BSE case in Germany, Chancellor Schröder made a remarkable volte-face and thus regained the initiative. In a speech to the German Parliament on December 1st 2000 he blamed the BSE problem on "industrial agriculture" ("agrarindustrie), a phrase connoting large, specialised and intensive farms and the supply and processing firms connected to them. Schröder thus directed his criticism on to the type of agriculture that policy so far had seemed to favour. Minister Funke, who only a few weeks before the crisis had reassured the public that they could trust German food, was obliged to resign.

To underline his intention of a dramatic shift in policy, Schröder transferred the agricultural portfolio to his junior coalition partner, the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), who were renowned for their critical view of established agricultural policy and its problems. Putting agricultural policy in the hands of the Green Party was necessary to convince an anxious public of the government's willingness to confront the problem of BSE and to redirect agricultural policy.

The new Minister, Renate Künast, was in many respects a surprising choice.[4] She had lived her whole life in cities without any expressed interest in agriculture or rural development issues, but as the speaker of the Federal Green Party she was very close to the inner circle of national Green policy making.

In public, the decision not to draw on a Green agricultural specialist had strong symbolic implications. Künast could be presented as not being compromised by connections to farmers at all. At the same time she also represented the shift that was foreseen by renaming the former Ministry for Food, Agriculture, and Forestry as the Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture. Until then, Consumer Protection had not been institutionalised as a policy arena in one particular ministry. This additional competence was a concession from Mr. Schröder, to encourage the Green Party to give up the much larger and more important Health Department. From the point of view of the Green Party the incorporation of this area opened up strategic options with a long term perspective going well beyond agriculture and food in a policy area were the party had its strongest standing in public opinion.

In keeping with this new structure, Renate Künast announced that the focus of agricultural and food policy was to shift from the farmer to the consumer (Künast speech 8 February 2001). A key phrase in the new strategy was "preventive consumer protection". The lack of a coherent policy for consumer protection regarding food safety meant a need, but

[4] Her appointment was the outcome of internal Green Party power struggles and the need to balance the representation of different groups in the Government. From the Green Party rationale the Minister had to be a woman (the other two Green Ministers in the Government are men).

also an opportunity for political regulation and institutional design, including a series of measures to regulate livestock feed (for an overview see BMVEL 2002).

There was a more general need to restore public faith in agricultural policy. As a member of the Green Party, Künast was very critical of established policy, and she called for a radical turnaround in agriculture ("Agrarwende"). This opened up the agenda to the environmental/alternative movement, even though they were not part of the established policy network for agriculture. They were able to use their own networks, including the German Agrarian Opposition, to co-ordinate their lobbying and campaigning. The environmental/alternative groups still enjoyed public trust because they were the ones who had most prominently criticised established agricultural policy over recent years. More particularly, over the years it was they who had established in public discourse a critique of industrial agriculture - its causes and consequences - which politicians and the mass media had seized upon in an effort to understand the crisis.

Now, WWF Germany, the NABU (the German bird protection organisation) and the BUND (the umbrella organisation for local environmental action groups) together issued a series of articles and surveys about agriculture and the environment, supporting the case for environmental measures and organic farming (e.g. WWF/ NABU 2001). The organic farming movement itself (Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft AbL, Bioland) also published articles but formulated much stronger demands for agricultural policy than did WWF and NABU. These various statements and reports did not greatly impinge directly on public opinion, where the mass media had much more

influence than the green groups. But the publications were sent to the Ministry to inform the new policy direction. Implementing modulation in Germany and strengthening organic farming are two issues where the green groups achieved their aim. Previously, reflecting the objections of the Farmers' Union, the German government had been opposed to modulation (i.e. the switching of some of farmers' production subsidies to provide incentives for sustainable agriculture and rural development, i.e. from the CAP's First Pillar to the Second Pillar). Now this was accepted as a means to reorient agricultural policy through promoting organic and welfare-friendly farming and other agri-environmental programmes.

Thus, during the crisis the German agricultural policy subsystem changed. Forced by the problem of legitimacy, the established policy network, which was closely connected to farmers' interests, was unable to present acceptable solutions. With the appointment of Renate Künast the beliefs and the solutions of the Agrarian Opposition and the environmental movement gained access to agricultural policy making.

3.4 The adopted solutions

As outlined above, a number of political initiatives by the new Minister sought to broaden the action arena of agricultural policy towards related industries, such as food processing and feeding stuff industries, and to define a new political arena - consumer protection - going far beyond agriculture. Renate Künast, with her background in Green politics, was comfortable with a rhetoric that blamed intensive farming for causing health and environmental risks. The policy changes that addressed farming directly were centred on organic farming which was promoted "as a role model for farming in general" (Künast 2001). Already in

spring 2001 the Ministry announced an increase in the share of land used for organic farming from 3% to 20% as a political goal.

However, the core problem for the Federal government for the implementation of the new agricultural policy was that rural development and agri-environmental policy (under which organic farming is publicly funded) is a competence of the Länder. It is also organised in a five-year plan that could not easily be amended during the crisis (such amendment necessitating joint Federal-Länder negotiations). Finally, modulation also requires co-funding, and Künast was faced with the task of convincing a sceptical Minister of Finance to allocate additional money to an already highly subsidised sector. In consequence, a substantial increase of subsidies to organic farming was not possible in the short term. The Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture made a virtue of necessity by setting up a Federal Programme for Organic Farming, designed by a small group of experts, to support a wide range of initiatives to inform consumers, producers and the food industry, and finance extension services and research. The other approach has been the implementation of the EU organic farming directive, including the Law on Organic Farming that sets up a control system and enforcement rules and a uniform certificate (“BioSiegel”) to increase transparency for the consumers.

With a new rural development plan that started with the year 2003 subsidies to organic farmers have now substantially increased. The possibilities to finance investments for processing and marketing have also been improved. The latter is not only limited to organic farming. In an action programme "Bäuerlicher Landwirtschaft" (peasant farming) - a remarkable return to earlier years - the government recently outlined a

broader approach of a multifunctional agriculture that is primarily directed to family farming (BMVEL 2003) that sees diversification as a major strategy. The rationale is that small farms are not well served by direct payments and that further subsidies are justified in recognition of the public goods they provide. A shift towards the CAP's Second Pillar is therefore promoted in favour of small, diversified farms and subsidies linked to environmental criteria**.**

In summary, at the height of the BSE crisis, the German public's acute anxieties over food safety led to irresistible demands for a change in the direction of agricultural policy. However, for a short period of just a few months the old agricultural policy network was not able to present acceptable solutions because it had lost legitimacy. The resultant change in the policy network allowed new actors, particularly Renate Künast and her connections in the environmental/alternative movement, to put forward their solution to the crisis, namely "preventive consumer protection" based on a concept of sustainable agriculture that sees a vital role for small farms and has organic farming as its core philosophy. In keeping with this outlook, the state is also seen to have a proactive role in protecting and supporting farmers and in fostering a rural economy based on agriculture and the food sector.

4.0 THE BRITISH CASE

4.1 The structural conditions

In certain crucial respects the structural conditions in England contrast sharply with those in Germany. England is a long urbanised society where few people have personal or family connections to farming. It has the most concentrated farm structure in Europe and one in which capitalist relations of production have been a dominant aspect for several centuries. It is not a country therefore in which agrarian ideologies are strong. Family farming is certainly not revered, and politicians and policy remain indifferent to particular models or systems of agriculture. Through its Imperial past, England became used to relying on food imports, and an urban public and government look to the food industry, including distributors, processors and retailers, to ensure food supply. While agrarian ideologies are comparatively weak, countryside ideologies are strong and deeply rooted. A long urbanised society has idealised the countryside and has looked to it as a place of retreat from cosmopolitan and industrialising forces (Lowe, Murdoch and Cox 1995).

In this context, agricultural policy does not have the unquestioned importance it enjoys in other Western European countries. Other policy fields, such as conservation and rural policy, express priorities for the countryside that compete, and sometimes conflict, with food production. Thus, unlike in Germany, financial support for farmers has long attracted public criticism (Grant 1997). The view has prevailed that the Common Agricultural Policy was never in Britain's interest but had to be accepted for Britain to be allowed to join the Common Market. Over the years of Britain's membership of the European Community, public and press

attitudes have failed to become reconciled to the CAP as the appropriate framework for British agriculture. Criticism of it reached a frenzy in the 1980s in a political climate strongly infected by both Euro-scepticism and neo-liberalism. The panoply of market interventions under the CAP became the butt of endless press and political derision. Lacking public legitimacy and with a political establishment that regarded the CAP as an alien policy, the policy regime has tended to externalise its problems, seemingly lurching from one crisis to another (Drummond et al 2000).

The crises of the 1980s and early 1990s were those of overproduction, overspending, trade wars, environmental destruction and occasional food scares. Politicians, interest groups and the media were inclined to blame all of these on what were seen as the CAP's excessive subsidies and regulations. The prevalent view in Britain then was that the CAP should be dismantled and agriculture exposed to the free market. The unwillingness of other Member States and the Commission to countenance such a course of action meant that British political leaders could conveniently blame the ills of agriculture and the CAP on European vested interests. Thus, although agriculture passed through a succession of crises, this was not seen to threaten the legitimacy of British governmental and political processes. Instead it was a factor that fuelled popular and political disaffection with the European Community. Since the mid-1990s, though, perspectives have changed somewhat. The Labour Government first elected in 1997 has been more pro-EU than its predecessors and has sought to take a constructive approach to CAP

reform. More momentously, BSE - which was by far the worst of the crises to afflict agriculture - originated in Britain[5].

The successive food scares experienced since the mid-1980s have posed a dilemma to governments whose instincts have been deregulatory, of how to respond to periodic consumer clamour for tougher regulations. A significant response has been to look to the corporate sector to help safeguard the consumer[6]. In particular, end-retailers, with their need to maintain consumer confidence, have been thrust into a prominent position as key arbiters of health, safety and environmental standards. Both consumers and government have vested a great deal of trust in the major supermarkets. The number of outlets they own and their share of the market have grown steadily over the years which has helped to embed one-stop shopping and its habitualness into English culture. The top six multiple grocery retailers currently have over 90% of the total grocery market (Nielsen 2002). This gives them considerable power to orchestrate and monitor food supply chains. They do so through elaborate vertical supply linkages with food processors and producers. Their increasingly commanding role has not gone unchallenged, however, especially by those who feel squeezed by it, including the smaller farmers, processors and retailers. Nevertheless, by projecting themselves

[5] BSE was first recognised as a new disease in cattle in 1985 and, over the following years, to counter an adverse consumer response, the British government sought to reassure the public that eating beef was safe. The announcement in 1996 of a new variant in humans of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, most likely caused by BSE, seriously undermined public trust in Britain's own domestic structures and procedures to protect consumers, and created a widespread belief that food safety was subordinate to production imperatives within the old MAFF.

[6] There have been limits to the extent to which government could cede responsibility for food safety. In particular, the BSE/CJD crisis demanded a demonstrative response from government, and one of the commitments of the incoming Labour Government of 1997 was to establish an independent Food Standards Agency that would remove from MAFF its responsibilities for overseeing food safety.

as the consumers' champion, they have been remarkably effective in legitimating their concentrated market power. This has required of them an acute sensitivity and responsiveness to consumers' concerns.[7]

Public criticism of farm subsidies and successive crises in agricultural policy have led to incessant demands to open up agricultural decision making beyond the farming unions and agricultural officials. One grouping that has taken advantage of this opening up of the established policy network has been the environmental lobby which has always had a strong orientation towards protection of the countryside. In the UK, major elements of the rural environmental lobby, such as the National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, are over a hundred years old. These are typically large and centralised organisations which have passive, mass memberships and employ teams of expert lobbyists and conservationists. The political style of these organisations is that of accommodation and persuasive expertise, rather than confrontation and radicalism (Lowe and Goyder 1983). They have long been accepted as partners in public policy although they only established a toehold in agricultural policy in the early 1980s when their criticism of contemporary farming practices for the damage done to rural landscapes and habitats helped initiate agri-environmental policy (Lowe et al 1986). The objectives they pursue - of biodiversity and landscape conservation - tend to be associated with traditional and less intensive farming, but they pursue these objectives across the countryside and the

[7] A report by the Competition Commission (2000) into whether the supermarkets were abusing their power concluded that they were broadly competitive, did not have excessive profits or prices, but were seen as providing the variety and range of foods at different prices which the British public generally demanded.

critical factor for them is often to do with specific farming practices (e.g. hedgerow and field margin management). These organisations have studiously refrained from giving a general endorsement to organic farming or from expressing a position on the desirable scale of farming. This is because they remain pragmatic and empirical about what types of farming favour conservation.

A long urbanised society has not only idealised the countryside but has also established other roles for rural areas besides food production. Conservation is one such role. But the countryside is very important for recreation and tourism too: some 70 million domestic tourism visits and 1.3 billion leisure day visits are made annually to the English countryside. It is also a place of residence and commercial activity: approximately 14 million (or 28%) of England's population live in rural areas and 5 million people work in rural locations. Agricultural employment, which is now below 350,000, is a small component of the rural economy.

4.2 Situative Context

The FMD epidemic of 2001 proved to be the most serious animal epidemic in the UK in modern times and the worst Foot and Mouth outbreak to be tackled that the world has seen. The disease was first detected on 20th February. Unfortunately, by then, (yet still unbeknown) it was already widespread across the country (Defra 2002).

With the exception of some panic buying of food in the first week triggered by concerns that the animal movement ban might lead to a shortage of supplies of meat in the shops, the outbreak of FMD did not precipitate the widespread panic amongst consumers and the public that

the outbreak of BSE did in Germany. This is not just because FMD is an old disease, familiar to science and known not normally to affect humans. It is also because UK food suppliers and retailers were used to dealing with 'farming-and-food' crises (see below), and because British politicians and the public had become somewhat inured to the trials and tribulations of the agricultural sector. The Guardian of 22nd February summed up the sentiment in its headline: "Farms: yet another crisis". The initial response, outside the farming community, was thus a certain weariness rather than any great loss of public confidence.

From the outset and to the end of the epidemic the Government pursued a policy of slaughter on infected farms and of stock judged to be at risk of spreading the disease. An alternative policy option of vaccination remained under active consideration but was not used. A complete ban on the movement of livestock was introduced on February 23rd. One week into the crisis, on February 27th, local authorities were given additional powers to close public footpaths to minimise the risk of spreading the disease. Public access to the countryside was effectively terminated while the disease was brought under control. National Park Authorities asked people to stay away, and major visitor attractions shut down.

During March, however, the number of confirmed cases of infected farms soared. The scale of the outbreak had overwhelmed the government's contingency planning and for several weeks the disease was out of control. In the press, weariness turned to alarm and criticism of the government mounted questioning the adequacy and effectiveness of its response.

The blanket closure of the countryside, however, soon came to be seen as too draconian, not only in relation to the low risk that walkers and members of the public posed of spreading the disease, but also because of the devastating impact on tourism and other rural businesses. Their interests, it seemed, were being sacrificed in order to ensure livestock exports. Many rural shops, pubs, restaurants, hotels, guesthouses and visitor attractions suffered financial losses. The fact that farmers were compensated for the slaughter of their animals and that the livestock sector received other temporary aids raised questions about the rationale and the justice of public financial support for agriculture compared to other sectors. In some areas, hoteliers organised protests to draw attention to their plight.

Many people also found the culling policy deeply disturbing, especially so from mid-March onwards when the Government stepped up the extent and the rate of the killing in a desperate effort to get on top of the disease. The scale of the slaughter was unprecedented. The backlog of animals to be disposed of meant that carcasses were left in open fields. Hurried arrangements for mass burial pits caused environmental concerns. Strong visual images of cows and sheep being shot, pyres of bloated carcasses, and white-coated officials saturated the media, and contributed to the impression that the countryside was not a safe or pleasant place to visit. The destruction of so many animals - the vast majority of them healthy - seemed senseless to many people. The wholesome image of the pastoral countryside was tarnished. Conservationists became alarmed at the prospect that the culling policy would denude vast areas of the countryside of the livestock that conserve the landscape and threatened the very existence of certain rare and traditional breeds of sheep.

By the end of April, the number of new FMD cases was declining sharply. However, the last case of an infected farm was not until the end of September, and movement and access restrictions remained in place in parts of the country until well into 2002. In total, some 6.5 million livestock were destroyed to stamp out the disease and to deal with consequent animal welfare and marketing problems. The costs to the Exchequer of the epidemic were about £3 billion and to the private sector £5 billion (National Audit Office 2002: 1).

4.3 The Actors

MAFF was the lead Government Ministry for the disease. It and the State Veterinary Service were responsible for the processes of disease control and eradication, and various emergency procedures and measures were swung into action at the start.

By mid-March, it was becoming apparent that MAFF was not getting on top of the disease, and press and public criticism mounted. As officials struggled to cope, many mistakes and blunders were made, leading to widespread charges of heavyhandedness and much public resentment in affected rural areas. At the same time, it also became apparent that businesses dependent on tourism and visitors to the countryside were beginning to suffer badly from the movement and access restrictions in place. Indeed, their financial losses proved greater than those incurred by the farming sector. What had started as an animal disease problem was fast becoming a rural economy crisis.

There was great political sensitivity towards the welter of press and public criticism. A general election was pending, and the previous

(Conservative) government had left office beset by questioning of its competence in managing BSE. In office, the Labour Government had made much of its own managerial competence and just three months before the FMD outbreak had issued a rural White Paper expressing one of its primary objectives for farming as being "to get away from the cycle of short-term crises" (DETR/MAFF 2000). There was clearly a strong political need to reassert the government's authority. In late March the Prime Minister took personal charge of the disease control campaign. At the same time the animal cull was extended and intensified and the army was brought in to speed up the slaughter and disposal of animals.

This more concerted response by government could not quell the rising public disgust and anger at the consequences of the ruthless measures that were being taken. There was little that the Government could do to respond directly to these wider concerns in the midst of the eradication campaign. Instead, it was locked into a course of action which demanded that efforts to stamp out the disease should be pursued with the utmost vigour, whatever the short-term damage to tourism interests, the rural economy, the image of the countryside and public credulity. What sustained Ministers in this stance was the promise that radical change would follow the ending of the epidemic.

Indeed, at the end of the first week of the outbreak and before the build up of criticism of the government, the Minister of Agriculture had announced a radical review of agriculture once the outbreak was over (The Times, 1st March 2001) and the Prime Minister had promised "a new deal for farming" (The Times, 2nd March 2001). In the meantime, the Government had to keep various potential critics on board and it did so by setting up a Rural Task Force in mid-March, which incorporated

representatives from a wide range of central government departments and agencies, local and regional government, and business, tourism, conservation and other rural interests. Despite its title, the Task Force was not allowed to interfere with the conduct of the FMD campaign, but it was given the remit: "to consider the implications of the outbreak of FMD for the rural economy, both immediately and in the longer term and to report to the Prime Minister on appropriate measures". It was chaired by the Environment Minister.

The political management of the FMD crisis at the national level thus involved two parallel but largely separate policy networks. The first one managed the disease eradication campaign. The chief organisations involved - MAFF, the State Veterinary Service and the National Farmers' Union (but not the Army) - were subject to ever more intense vilification as the number of livestock slaughtered rose relentlessly. The second network oversaw short-term relief measures and longer-term recovery programmes for affected rural areas. It included the members of the Rural Task Force and other rural organisations at the local and regional levels who played a crucial 'delivery' role in helping to re-open the countryside, promote the return of visitors, implement remedial measures, and bring forward programmes for rural recovery. Previously they had played no more than a minor or peripheral role in agricultural policy. Now, with the legitimacy of what had been the core of the traditional agricultural policy network hollowed out, they came to constitute a new network for a policy field that had previously lacked coherence - rural policy.

It is abundantly clear where Ministers wanted to stand in this changing political landscape. With the number of FMD cases falling sharply in

May, the Prime Minister called an election. The Labour Manifesto declared:

> "Labour is committed to support our countryside and the people who live and work in it. We are committed to create a new department to lead renewal in rural areas - a Department for Rural Affairs".

Straight after the election in June, which Labour won, the Prime Minister announced the creation of a new Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the abolition of MAFF. Margaret Beckett was to be the new Secretary of State.

One other major grouping of policy actors in the FMD crisis should be mentioned even though they kept a low profile throughout the crisis - that is the supermarkets. They helped to ensure that a farming crisis did not become a food crisis. In the first week of the crisis there was panic buying following the ban on livestock movement. The supermarkets, though, urged shoppers not to panic buy and reassured them about future supplies. Quickly they began placing orders for meat overseas. A spokeswoman for Asda said they were breaking their normal guarantee of solely selling British meat and were buying meat from abroad to combat any possible shortages (BBC 2001).

4.4 The adopted solutions

The outbreak of FMD and, with it, Ministers' suggestions that they wanted a fundamental review of agriculture once it was over unleashed a crescendo of critical comments and prescriptions. These reiterated or drew upon standard critiques of agricultural policy. Media commentators were quick to assume that FMD was another consequence of modern

'intensive farming' even though the outbreak occurred in the most extensive livestock production systems and FMD had been recognised as an animal disease for at least four centuries. There was much debate, though, about what drove 'intensive farming' which concentrated on most of the usual suspects: the CAP, the pursuit of cheap food and the drive for profits in the food chain.

During the early weeks of the outbreak there was considerable investigative journalism into the arcane practices of the livestock supply chain. Such reporting revealed that a particular factor behind the extensive spread of the disease was the large-scale movement of live animals. A Cabinet Office document on the outbreak estimated that two million sheep had moved about the country in the three weeks before the outbreak was discovered. This issue touched upon concerns amongst various activist groups, for example over animal welfare and local sustainability, and many politicians and members of the public questioned why animals had to be moved around so much.

Possible culprits for causing such apparently excessive movements included unscrupulous farmers and animal dealers, the complex and manipulable rules for CAP livestock payments, and the loss of local abattoirs brought about by a combination of EU hygiene standards and supermarket rationalisation of supply chains. In fact, the fundamental practices involved - the movement of hill-born lambs to lowland pastures for fattening and farmer-to-farmer trading in livestock auction markets - are historic ones. Nevertheless, the sense that such large-scale movement of stock was not right framed the debate about alternatives - captured in the Environment Minister's remark very early in the crisis that he

favoured "more farmers' markets, more local abattoirs and more local food production" (The Times, 1 March 2001).

After the election, the government appointed a Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food charged with responsibility for charting a new strategy for agriculture. It also appointed two other inquiries: one into the lessons to be learned from the FMD outbreak and its handling; and the other, under the Royal Society, into scientific questions on the prevention and control of infectious diseases in livestock. With these three separate national inquiries, the government sought to draw a line and put the FMD crisis behind it.

The Policy Commission reported in January 2002 and the two other inquiries in July of that year. The central recommendation of the Lessons to be Learned Inquiry was that the Government should develop a national strategy for animal health and disease control (Anderson Inquiry 2002). The Royal Society's report called for improvements to contingency planning and for consideration of emergency vaccination in any future epidemic (Royal Society 2002). These two later reports occasioned little public debate other than a flurry of press coverage on the day of their publication. In contrast, the Government spent most of 2002 consulting on the detailed recommendations of the Policy Commission.

The Policy Commission was chaired by Sir Don Curry (Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food 2002), a livestock farmer with strong cooperative agribusiness interests, and included prominent members of the conservation and consumer lobbies as well as the Chief Executive of one of the largest supermarket chains. The Commission was clearly intended to give direction to the new Department of the

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. In some respects, its membership represented DEFRA's new political establishment.

The overriding message of the Policy Commission's report is the reconnection of farmers with their markets and the food supply chain, and of consumers with the countryside and how their food is produced. The central recommendation of the report is for the UK to press for fundamental reform of the CAP, to bring about a market and consumer-oriented agriculture whilst ensuring the conservation of the countryside. That would entail the complete removal of commodity price supports and production subsidies over the long term and their replacement by agri-environment and rural development measures. This process should commence straightaway with an increase in the rate of modulation: firstly to fund the rationalisation and expansion of agri-environment programmes, to cover the whole countryside; and secondly to encourage farmers to produce and market higher quality and locally distinctive 'value added' products, including the creation of shorter and more regionally embedded supply chains.

The proposals to shift public support from production subsidies to countryside management incentives were fully in line with what conservation organisations had been pressing for, for some years. Indeed, already such incentives, as part of agri-environmental programmes, were an established if minor strand of agricultural policy but were now set to become a major strand, a policy direction the Government had flagged pre-FMD in its decision taken in 1999 to pursue modulation (Lowe, Buller and Ward 2002). Likewise, while conservation organisations already enjoyed an insider status with respect to agri-environmental programmes, they now became central players in the new framing of

agriculture-cum-countryside policy that followed from the setting up of DEFRA.

The consumer and market-oriented approach to agri-food policy also pre-dated FMD. The promotion of local and regional food economies and speciality produce was meant to encourage farmers and processors to be more sensitive to consumer concerns and demands about food safety and quality which had been a major preoccupation of policy since BSE. As well as seeking to stimulate this approach through product development and marketing grants to farmers and producer groups, the Government looked to the major retailers to play a key role, by ensuring quality assurance and market access, in the expansion of speciality and regional food supply chains. The big supermarkets can play this role because they are trusted by consumers. Survey research post-FMD has shown that, while many consumers are interested in the relationship between their food choices and sustainable farming, they expect nevertheless to exercise this choice through their normal sources for food purchase - few are willing to forsake the convenience of supermarket shopping (Weatherell et al 2003, forthcoming).

The effect of the FMD crisis was thus to consolidate the position of a set of policy actors - particularly conservation organisations, consumer groups and the major food retailers - at the centre of policy. Previously they had operated with a low profile within, or at the margins of, the agricultural policy system. Crucially, their reputations had not been tarnished by the failings of agricultural policy. What they offered to policy-making post-FMD was not only practicable policy alternatives but also new sources of legitimacy.

The Policy Commission's proposals have thus been put at the heart of the government's strategy for food and farming post-FMD. What is striking about the Policy Commission's report and those of the other two inquiries, though, is the neglect of the problems facing the wider rural economy in the aftermath of FMD. Yet, the distinctive feature of the FMD crisis was that it was not a farming-and-food crisis (unlike, say, BSE) but a farming-and-rural crisis. The (mis)management of an animal disease had brought havoc to the economy of rural areas, but these wider ramifications of the FMD crisis, and what they revealed about the rural economy and its interconnectedness to farming, received scant attention. Instead, the new policy direction after FMD drew on policy critiques and alternatives formulated well before the FMD outbreak occurred.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The German and British agricultural political systems passed through major crises in 2001. The immediate cause of the crisis in each case was an animal disease. The history, epidemiology and possible consequences for animal and human health of the two diseases were extremely different. Even so, the crises ran remarkably parallel courses and had strikingly similar features. These parallels and similarities relate to common characteristics and constraints in the complex management of contemporary agri-food systems. What both crises revealed is the critical importance of public trust to the smooth running of agri-food systems. Public trust was severely shaken, with possibly profound long-term consequences, but what heightened the crises in the short-term was the immediate consumer reaction, as people either stopped buying beef or visiting the countryside. The crises thus had short-term and long-term components which had to be addressed concurrently.

Measures had to be to put in place to manage and control disease risks. In a sense this was the straightforward aspect of the task involving as it did the regulatory apparatus for the protection of animal and public health. With impressive (at least, to British eyes) alacrity, the German government put in place preventative and monitoring measures to exclude BSE-contaminated material from the food chain.[8] In contrast, the British government struggled to get on top of the FMD outbreak which had overwhelmed its own rather perfunctory contingency planning.

[8] There had been earlier cases of BSE in Germany, associated with the British outbreak (and blamed on British exports). In taking measures against BSE, the German Government could also draw on the British experience.

The steps taken to curb the disease risk, however, did not placate public anxieties, but heightened them further. What was particularly problematic was risk communication. German consumers doubted the safety of their food, and the British government unwittingly conveyed the impression that the countryside was an unsafe, or at least unsavoury, place to go. At the heart of the risk communication problems was a loss of trust in government and official sources of information. The public and consumers seeking additional or alternative information looked elsewhere. The mass media came to play a key role in providing information, and thus also in heightening public awareness and in framing the problem.

The loss of legitimacy affected the main actors in the agricultural political system - the government and the farming unions. To rebuild legitimacy other actors had to be brought in who commanded public trust and were beyond media reproach. New directions for agricultural policy were then constructed around the alternative solutions advanced by these actors. In Germany this meant engaging with the Agrarian Opposition and its advocacy of organic, sustainable and welfare-friendly farming. In Britain it meant even deeper engagement with the conservation lobby and the major food retailers, and the reorientation of policy towards conserving the countryside and making the agri-food system more market-responsive.

These distinct policy directions reflect Anglo-German differences in the structure and priorities of the environmental movement, in consumer concerns and in the structure of the agri-food system. An additional factor is attitudes towards state regulatory authority. Until BSE, Germany had not been so beset by farming-and-food crises as Britain

had. Arguably, therefore, the BSE crisis was much more of a shock in Germany than the FMD crisis was in Britain. While this provided a political opportunity for the Green Party, there was not the same sense of yet further haemorrhaging of governmental authority in relation to farming and food as there was in Britain. Thus, German efforts to set the political management of the agri-food system back on track are firmly rooted in the view that this is a regulatory task of the state in which agricultural policy plays a key role. What is new is an overriding commitment to a food safety approach and a refurbished agrarian ideology based on organic production and the family farming model. In contrast, after the FMD crisis, Britain sought to bury its Ministry of Agriculture and went yet further towards the governance of the agri-food system, including strong elements of 'private-interest' government orchestrated from the retail end of the food chain.

As well as organic, more informal and marketing-oriented modes of regulation of the agri-food system are being pursued in Britain, using motifs like 'local' and 'quality assured', that are apparently more responsive to consumer demand. A central role is being played in this regard by the UK supermarkets. A key outcome from the Policy Commission on the Future of Food and Farming was the setting up of a National Food Chain Centre to improve internal practices and communications within whole food chains. Significantly the Government passed on responsibility for setting up the Centre to the Institute of Grocery Distributors, a food sector body in which the major supermarkets play a prominent role. Thus, in the aftermath of FMD, there was yet another significant extension of private interest government of the agri-food system. As Marsden et al have commented, referring to the general

decline (pre-FMD) in public trust in the regulation of the agri-food system:

> "The ability of … retailers to manage the quality of foods through their supply chains has been enhanced … as the growing crisis in food consumption has taken hold. As a result, new relations have been forged between public and private regulation" (Marsden et al 2000, p.102).

In contrast, in Germany, there is no comparable relationship between the Federal State and food retailers. It appears that there remains a much stronger faith in the state as the guarantor of the public interest. Moreover, the structure of food retailing (more fragmented, and more competitive) would preclude German retailers from adopting a comparable role to the British supermarkets in the political management of the agri-food system.[9]

It remains to be seen which is the more effective approach in the long-term to the political management of the agri-food system. It is noteworthy that the FMD crisis in the UK did not become a food crisis. Arguably it had the potential to do so. That it did not, is testimony to a certain robustness in consumer trust towards the emerging system of agri-food system governance in the UK (Food Standards Agency 2003). What FMD demonstrated however was that there was no equivalent system of alternative governance to cover for a steadily retreating state in relation to the territorial management of the countryside.

The longer term strategies for the agri-food system being pursued in Germany and the UK make fundamental and largely hypothetical

[9] This may be the reason why the German legislature has not yet imposed the strong product warranty rules on retailers that are in place in Britain.

assumptions about consumer behaviour which may prove to be unfounded. In part because of the concatenation within the crises of short-term and long-term components, the strategies are based on an implicit assumption that the consumer and public concerns and sensitivities revealed through the crisis are guides to long-term tendencies in consumer behaviour. Thus, at the height of the BSE crisis, consumers altered their food purchasing patterns and showed less price sensitivity but more sensitivity to the origins and production methods of the food they bought. Organic sales in particular rose sharply. However, after the crisis there was a return largely to normal consumption behaviour, including a drop in organic sales. Consumer demand for organics would seem to be modest. Yet it is seen as the foundation on which to reconstruct the agri-food system. There is a risk that the new strategies have been built on over optimistic assumptions about the scale of demand and the willingness of consumers to pay.

The events surrounding the discovery of BSE in Germany and the outbreak of FMD in Britain illustrate policy systems that are changing direction in the midst of a crisis. Change in policy systems under such circumstances is not completely surprising. Crises discredit accepted norms and procedures which both leads to demands for fundamental change while it weakens some of the established structures and interests that would normally be obstacles to fundamental change. Thus several researchers have shown how the new political situation created by an externally induced crisis can lead to fresh opportunities or possibilities: whether for actors, to play a new or different role in the policy field; for policy reforms, to gain acceptance because of altered priorities; or for novel issues, to attract attention because of changed perspectives (e.g. Kingdon 1995, Zahariadis 1999). Thus crises may come to be seen as

'windows of opportunity', opening up the possibility to depart from the normal path in a policy field or to initiate reforms (Kingdon 1995, Sabatier 1999). This may be of particular significance either in policy fields (such as consumer protection or rural affairs) that lack an institutional framework, or in an entrenched policy field such as agriculture in which, it is often judged, necessary reforms do not get enough support under normal conditions (Daugbjerg 1999). Margaret Beckett saw the FMD outbreak in these terms, commenting "the farming industry … faced difficult challenges before that outbreak. The epidemic accelerated the need for change … I am determined to make the most of the opportunity we now have to look again at the future of farming" (Beckett 2001).

There was thus political impetus behind the respective responses of the British and German governments. After all, crises do not necessarily precipitate reform. A comparison of the responses of Western European governments to the BSE crisis shows that they, in fact, did not follow the German example of a sharp change of direction in agricultural policy (Oosterveer 2002). If we see the potential role of a crisis in catalysing policy reforms as that of shifting pro- and anti- forces in the society and economy, then much may depend on how 'ripe' for change a particular policy system is nationally. In this regard, what is striking in both the German BSE case and the British FMD case is that, within a few days of the start of the crisis, the respective leaders of the government (Schröder and Blair) had publicly signalled the need for a major rethink of agricultural policy. In the era of complex government and policy systems locked into statis or incremental change, there is evidently scope for political leaders to use crises selectively, to remove what they see as

logjams to change.[10] Both the Schröder and Blair governments regarded agriculture as a policy field in need of reform. They had previously pursued an agenda of modernisation and international competitiveness which had alienated established agricultural interests. The crisis, and its attendant media attention, offered an opportunity to try a different tack to reform, that would appeal beyond these established interests, to urban consumers and the environmental movement. In a sense, then, the crisis exposed the dilemma of modern Social Democratic parties towards agriculture, of whether or not to pursue globalising or communitarian approaches.

Our interest has been to understand what structured the new policy directions taken and we sought to illuminate the decision process during the crises by using the Garbage Can Model. However, the original Garbage Can Model was developed to explain decision making in an organisation, not on a national level. The need for future research to anchor the framework within specific institutional contexts had already been identified (Zahariadis 1999). So we enlarged the model with structuring terms from policy analysis, to understand what influenced policy decision making during the crises. This enlargement was very helpful in comparing and isolating which forces played a crucial role, and also in revealing how deeply economic factors, institutional structures and public opinion influenced the actors and the policy process. Further research along these lines could fruitfully draw even more on approaches such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier 1999), or actor-oriented institutionalism (Scharpf 2000) which focus on the crucial forces

[10] Crises may also allow political leaders to demonstrate to the electorate their leadership skills - both Schröder and Blair faced impending elections.

at work rather than on problems and solutions. Indeed, integrating the key aspects of the Garbage Can Model - that solutions do not necessarily have to be related to specific problems and that decision making can be irrational - into theories dealing with policy incrementalism and policy change would seem to offer a fuller understanding of what forces have an impact on political decisions, especially in fields such as agriculture where periods of policy stasis are occasionally punctuated by crises.

References

Anderson Inquiry (2002) *Foot and Mouth Disease 2001: Lessons to be Learned Inquiry*, HC Paper 888, London: The Stationary Office.

BBC News (2001) *Shoppers urged not to panic buy.* Retrieved 23 February 2001 from http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/

BMVEL (2003) *Aktionsprogramm "Bäuerliche Landwirtschaft" - Die Landwirtschaft in Europa: mittelständische Betriebe mit multifunktionaler Ausrichtung* http://www.verbraucherministerium.de/landwirtschaft/laendl-raum/baeuerliche-landwirtschaft/aktionsprogramm.htm, 22.01.2003.

BMVEL (2002) *Ein Jahr Bundesministerium für Verbraucherschutz, Ernährung und Landwirtschaft – was ist geschehen? Eine Zwischenbilanz der neuen Verbraucher-, Ernährungs- und Agrarpolitik* http://www.verbraucherministerium.de/aktuelles/bilanz-ein-jahr-bmvel.pdf, 10.12. 2002.

Beckett, Margaret (2001) 'Meeting the challenges - a vision of the future'. Speech to the conference 'Where next for European agriculture?' Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London, 17 July 2001.

Cohen, M., March, J. & Olsen, J. (1972) A garbage can model of organisational choice, *Administrative Science Quarterly* (17) 1-25.

Competition Commission (2000), *The Supply of Groceries from Multiple Stores: Monopoly Inquiry issue statement, 31 January 2000*, London: Competition Commission.

Daugbjerg, C. (1999) Reforming the CAP: Policy Networks and Broader Institutional Structures. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 37, 3, 407 – 428.

DEFRA (2002) *Origin of the UK Foot and Mouth Disease Epidemic in 2001*, June 2002, London: DEFRA.

DETR/MAFF (2000) *Our Countryside – The Future*, London: DETR & MAFF.

Drummond, I., Campbell, H., Lawrence, G. and Symes, D. (2000) 'Contingent or structural crisis in British agriculture?' *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40, pp.111-127.

Eurobarometer (2000) *The Public's Attitudes Towards the CAP* Brussels: EU Directorate General for Agriculture.

Food Standards Agency (2003). Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards. prepared by Taylor Nelson Sofres Consumer, London. http://www.food.gov.uk/. Accessed February 2003.

Grant, W. (1997) *The Common Agricultural Policy* London: Macmillan

Hagedorn, K. and Schmitt, G. (1985) Die politischen Gründe für eine wirtschaftspolitische Vorzugsbehandlung der Landwirtschaft. In:

Boettcher E. et al. *Jahrbuch für Neue Politische Ökonomie*, **Band 4, Tübingen**, 250 – 295.

Heinze, R.G. and Voelzkow, H. (1993) Organizational Problems for the German Farmers' Association and Alternative Policy Options *Sociologia Ruralis* 23(1) 25-41.

Héritier, A. (1993) *Policy Analyse. Kritik und Neuorientierung*. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift,* Sonderhaft 23, **Opladen.**

Jänicke, M. and Weidner, H. (1997*) National Environmental Policies: A Comparative Study of Capacity-Building*, Berlin.

Kingdon, J.W. (1995) *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policy*, New York: HarperCollins.

Künast, Renate (2001) 'Germany's ideas about a new European Agricultural Policy' Speech to the conference 'Where next for European agriculture?' Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London, 17 July 2001.

Laschewski, L. (1998) *Von der LPG zur Agrargenossenschaft - Untersuchungen zur Transformation genossenschaftlichen organisierter Agrarunternehmen in Ostdeutschland.* Berlin: edition sigma.

Lorenzl, G. and Brandt, H. (1995) Landbau und Metropolis: Ein Beitrag zur agrikulturellen Sinnfindung. *Berliner Beiträge zur Agrarentwicklung* 16, Berlin.

Lowe, P., Buller, H. and Ward, N. (2002) "Setting the next agenda? British and French approaches to the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy" *Journal of Rural Studies* 18, 1-17.

Lowe, P. D., Cox, G., MacEwen, M., O'Riordan, T. and Winter, P. (1986) *Countryside Conflicts: the Politics of Farming, Forestry and Conservation* Aldershot, UK: Gower

Lowe, P. and Goyder, J. (1983) *Environmental Groups in Politics* London: George Allen & Unwin

Lowe, P., Murdoch, J. and Cox, G. (1995) "A Civilised Retreat? Anti-Urbanism, Rurality and the Making of an Anglo-centric Culture" in Healey, P., Cameron, S., Davoudi, S., Graham, S. and Madani-Pour, A. (eds) *The New Urban Context* Chichester:John Wiley and Sons

Marsden, T., Flynn, A. and Harrison, M. (2000) *Consuming Interests: The Social Provision of Foods* London: UCL Press.

Mehl, P. (1997) *Reformansätze und Reformwiderstände in der Agrarsozialpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, **Berlin.**

Michelsen, J. (2001) Recent development and political acceptance of organic farming in Europe *Sociologia Ruralis* 41, 1, pp. 3-20.

National Audit Office 2002, *The 2001 Outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease*, HC 939, Session 2001-2002, The Stationary Office, London.

Nielsen 2002, The Retail Pocket Book, Biddles Ltd., Guildford.

Oosterveer, P. 2002, 'Reinventing risk politics: reflexive modernity and the European BSE crisis', *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning,* vol. 4 (3): 215 - 230.

Policy Commission on the Future of Food and Farming (2002) *Farming and Food: A Sustainable Future*, London: Cabinet Office.

Ratschow, C. (2003) *Agrarumweltpolitik*, **Frankfurt a.M.**

Royal Society (2002) *Infectious Diseases in Livestock*, Policy Document 15/02, London: The Royal Society.

Sabatier; P. A. (1999) *Theories of the Policy Process*, Oxford: Westview.

Scharpf, F. W. (2000) *Interaktionsformen. Akteurzentrierter Institutionalismus in der Politikforschung*, **Opladen.**

Siebert, R. and Laschewski, L. (2001): Becoming a part of the union - Changing Rurality in East Germany. In: Tovey, H. and Blanc, M. (eds): *Food, Nature, and Society - Rural Life in Late modernity* . Aldershot: Ashgate, 235 – 252.

Weatherell, C., Tregear, A. and Allinson, J. (2003) 'In search of the concerned consumer: UK public perceptions of food, farming and buying local' *Journal of Rural Studies,* 19, pp.233-244.

WWF (2001) *Wirtschaften mit der Natur*. http://www.wwf.de/imperia/md/content/pdf/landwirtschaft/landwirtschaft_bsc_agrarwende.pdf , 13.6.2001

WWF, NABU (2001) *Schritte zur Agrarwende – Reform der Gemeinschaftsaufgabe zur Verbesserung der Agrarstruktur und des Küstenschutzes*. http://www.wwf.de/imperia/md/content/pdf/landwirtschaft/landwirtschaft_bsc_agrarwende.pdf , 13.6.2001

Zahariadis, N. (1999) Ambiguity, Time and Multiple Streams. In: Sabatier, P. *Theories of the Policy Process.* Oxford: Westview 73 - 93.

ZMP (2001) *Wochenbericht über die Agrarmarkt- und Preisentwicklung*, Bonn.