

Tillamook Co-operative, Monsanto, and rBGH: Discourse Struggle and Common Sense

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Historically, agricultural co-operatives have been formed — in-part — to oppose local, regional, and national monopoly/monopsony, and oligopoly/oligopsony power. With the advent of such organisational innovations as joint ventures, strategic alliances, outsourcing, mergers, and consolidations, some have questioned the continued relevancy, and ability of agricultural co-operatives to serve as countervailing agents in the market place. However when examining the rBGH controversy, re: Monsanto versus Tillamook Dairy Co-operative, Tillamook prevailed in being able to withdraw rBGH use from among its members. This action triggered similar decisions by other dairy firms. These actions were done in spite of Monsanto's attempts to derail its removal. By detailing the rBGH history from its initial introduction to its removal from Tillamook, the paper addresses questions related to: 1) specifying the various discursive logics used to justify and oppose (countervail) the use of recombinant bovine growth hormone, in the spheres of production and consumption, 2) highlight how various classic oppositions between cooperatives and investment firms (eg organised for use versus organised for return on investment) were penetrated with this discourse, and 3) how the Tillamook/Monsanto controversy can serve as an example of the continuing relevance of agricultural co-operative organisation to countervail the power of larger organisations, while simultaneously achieving the voiced interests of independent farmers.

Introduction

For Gramsci, popular common sense ... [becomes] a ground of struggle because it is not univocal and coherent, but an amalgam of historically effective ideologies, scientific doctrines and social mythologies. This historical 'sedimentation of popular common sense "is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinion which have entered ordinary life. It is the folklore of philosophy ... (Rupert 1997).

Following Gramsci (1971) and Rupert's (1997, 2003) extension of Gramsci's work on the "reconstruction of common sense in the US", discourse analyses allow us a window upon various struggles for predominance in common sense thinking as it influences everyday decision making in civil society.

Gramsci (1971) suggested common sense exists as a combination of different belief systems, with different discourse languages — part ideology, part scientific doctrine, and part myth. This mixture is dynamic, historically changing through time, different parts being predominant at some points, but muted at others, and constantly being influenced by developments in the different realms of formal idea making (eg advertising, academia functions) and formal science. Due to the multiplicity, dynamism, (and influential capacity) of common sense, it can become easily

embedded with struggles of particular interests. Gramsci's project involved tracking aspects of common-sense patterns of thinking (and decision making) concerning particular issues, detailing their constitutive tensions and contradictions, and the various cross-discourse conflicts that occur, with the ultimate goal pointed toward gaining greater, collective self-clarity, and ultimately transformative political practice (Rupert 1997).

This paper provides a brief discourse analysis of the conflict between various dairy processors (with primary focus given to Tillamook Co-operative Creamery Association) and the multi-national investment-oriented firm, Monsanto, concerning its use of recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH). Co-operative discourse is articulated around its central 'use' values, and co-operatives as a self-intentioned distinct form of organisation separate from investment firm organisation. Rupert's work on reconstruction of US common-sense is relied upon in its characterisations of the 'key' elements of a popular common-sense in the US, as related to liberal capitalism (eg civil rights, rights of private property, self-government, universal liberty and democracy, equality) and as part of the historical context of operational firms. Lauck (2000) suggests similar public socio-emotional loadings (and decision-making predispositions) around Lockean liberalism (economic individualism and consumer sovereignty, civil liberties, property rights, and competition) but also populist republicanism (civic virtue and voluntarist participation,

