

From the Editor

Richard Haynes

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The current number has four articles and two book reviews. The first three articles discuss ethical issues in the use of genetic resources and suggest how these should be approached. In the first of these three articles (“Ethical Considerations in Agrobiodiversity Research, Collection, and Use”), authors Johannes M. M. Engels, Hannes Dempewolf, and Victoria Henson-Apollonio attempt to address a topic that is currently of great concern, the collecting, research, and use of agricultural biodiversity, because, for example, “easy access to genetic resources for breeding purposes is important, but international agreements and legal frameworks are necessary to ensure adequate recognition of the contributions of local communities and traditional farmers in creating and nurturing these resources.” To address this concern, the authors “assess ethical principles in the context of existing codes of conduct that are relevant for agro-biodiversity researchers” and consider the following key ethical principles: “the importance of obtaining prior informed consent, equity, and the inalienability of rights of local communities and farmers.”

In the second of these three articles (“What is fair and equitable benefit-sharing?”), Bram De Jonge examines how the “Fair and equitable benefit-sharing” objective of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture can be realized, since neither “fair” nor “equitable” is defined in this context. This paper looks at six different approaches to benefit-sharing that can be extracted from the current debates on “Access and Benefit-Sharing.” These approaches form the basis of a philosophical reflection in which the different connotations of “fair and equitable” are considered, by analyzing the main principles of justice involved. The author then brings the various principles together “in order to draw some conclusions as to how a fair and equitable benefit-sharing mechanism might best be realized.” The author then makes several recommendations for policymakers.

R. Haynes (✉)
Gainesville, FL, USA
e-mail: rphaynes@ufl.edu

The third article also addresses an issue about the use of genetic resources, namely how and whether consumer autonomy should be respected in regard to the purchase of genetically modified food. In “Consumer Autonomy and Availability of Genetically Modified Food,” Helena Siipi and Susanne Uusitalo ask whether the European Union’s policies respecting consumers’ autonomy in regard to genetically modified food implies that both GMF and non-GMF products should be available in the market. The authors look at two lines of thought on this question and conclude that the requirement to respect consumers’ autonomy of choice “does not imply that there should be both GMF and non-GMF products available in markets.”

The fourth article (“Natural Food and the Pastoral: A Sentimental Notion?”) is by Donald B. Thompson. Thompson analyses the various meanings of *natural* and *nature* in Western culture to try to remove some of the ambiguities in a term that appears to be an effective marketing device for a wide variety of foods. Thompson uses Leo Marx’s distinction between a sentimental and a complex pastoral to develop the notion of a second nature and uses this to consider the importance of local and organic foods in an industrialized food system. Thompson concedes that the marketing of natural foods might be said to consume nature, but he argues that what is consumed is more appropriately called second nature. So in order to maintain “a critical perspective about one’s relationship to the natural world, everyone should make an attempt to experience the complex pastoral with respect to at least something that is consumed as food. When nature is understood as second nature in the context of a complex pastoral, the question of whether a food or ingredient is to be considered natural is replaced by deliberative thought based on our best knowledge and judgment, and the result will be less constrained by ideology.