

Reflections on Interdisciplinary research with examples from food research

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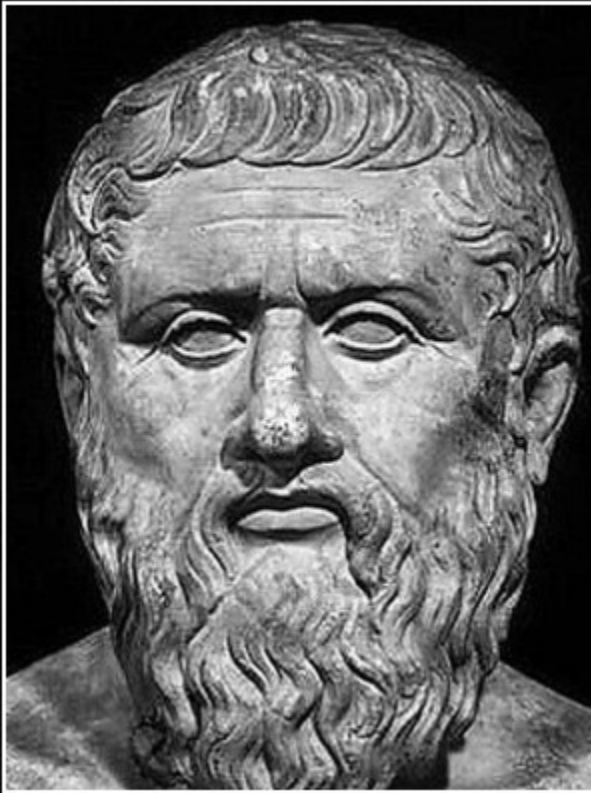
Why?

Why interdisciplinary food and agriculture research?

The defensive (and valid) arguments:

- Because food is interdisciplinary
- Because the food related challenges (e g health and sustainability demands it)
- But the real question is – who decides what a research discipline is?

If Plato have cooked, academia could have been organized in a more relevant way for food studies



Cooking is a form of flattery....a mischievous, deceitful, mean and ignoble activity, which cheats us by shapes and colors, by smoothing and draping....

— *Plato* —

AZ QUOTES

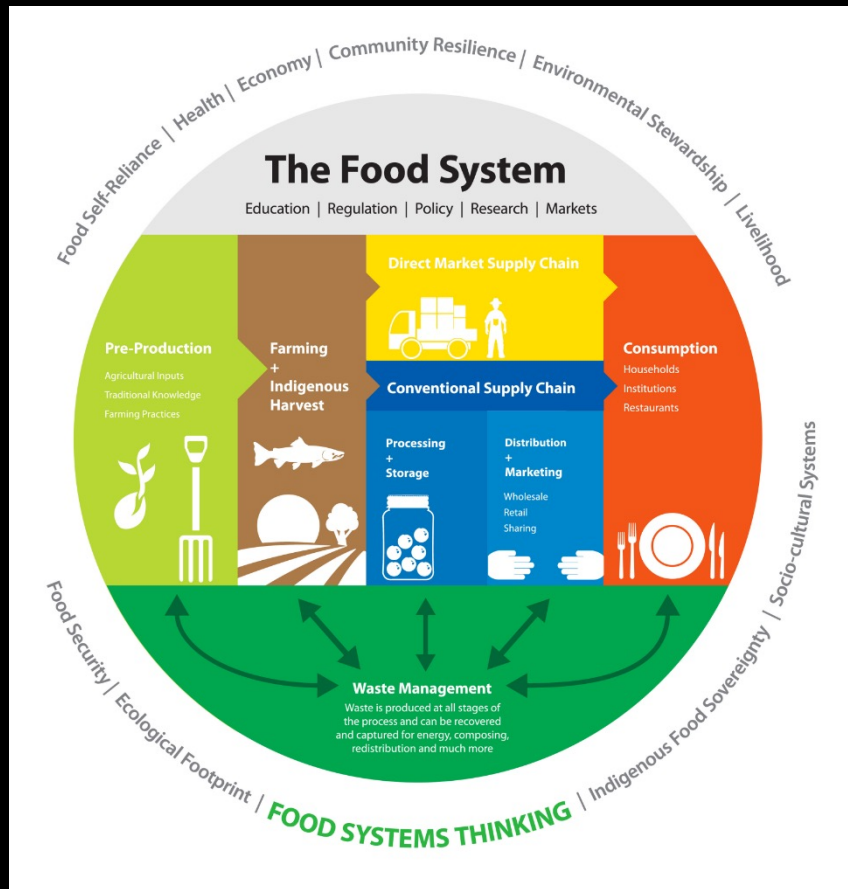
Food Studies still suffer from Plato's ignorance

- Food studies have had low status, despite the fact that food is present everywhere, influences groups and individuals, mind and body, countryside and urban life, animals and humans, climate, private and public spaces etc.

Considered as:

- Too trivial
 - Too physical
 - Too feminine
 - Too private
-
- But finally – Food studies is one of the fastest growing academic fields. The challenge is to redefine the study topics as well as the reward systems within academia.

Food system as joint starting point



- Calls for cross disciplinary action – more than the food chain or value chain concepts
- Allows focus without losing the big picture

Innovations must fit into the food system

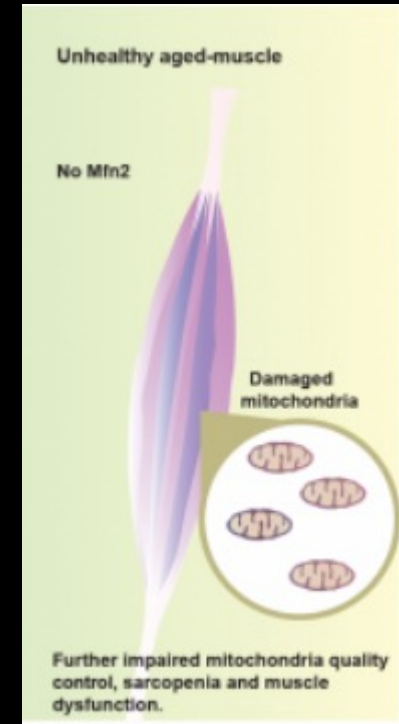
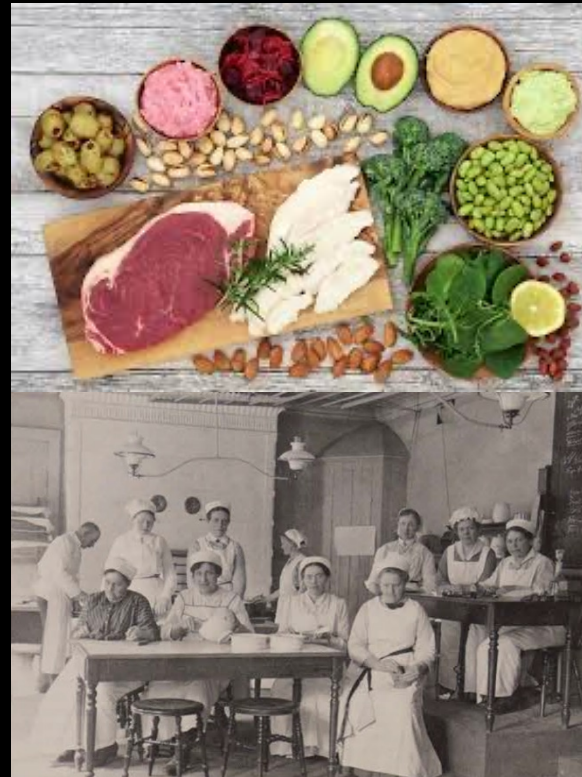
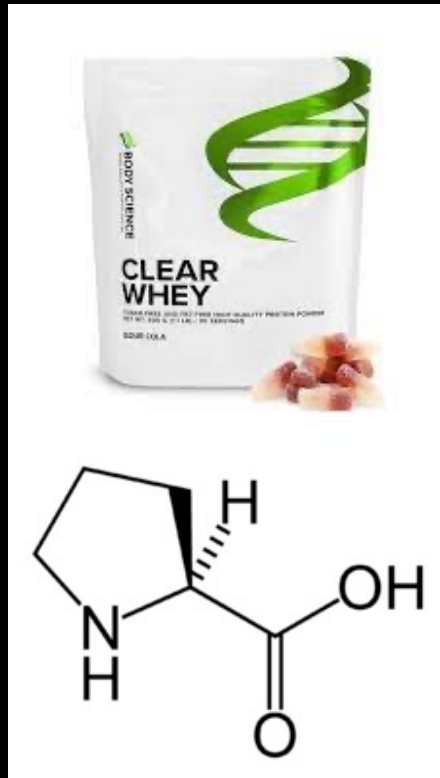
- No use to be innovative in e.g. product development of a healthy or sustainable food products if other parts of the food system can't deliver
- Innovation projects often fail due to a lack of understanding between different parts of the food system (also within companies)
- Offering transparency and trust is one of the most important business concepts in the future – you cannot offer transparency without knowledge of the food system

How?

Example 1

- CALM – (*Counteracting Age-Related Loss of Skeletal Muscle Mass*)
- Medicine - impact of physical activity on muscle mass and muscle strength
- Dietary protein – perceptions, consumption and product development (whey)
- Social and cultural perspectives on ageing, exercise and diet
- The applied starting point – *Counteracting* was crucial for making the project work
- Willingness to share and use similar data
- Interventions studied from a number of perspectives
- The understanding of how ageing and diet policies are developed from historical processes that may not longer exist in people's minds, but they are still part of the institutions

Participants were forced to define their angles on the topic



Jensen, T.; Bechshøft, RL.; Giacalone, D.; Otto, MH.; Castro-Mejía, J.; Ahmad HF.; Reitelseder, S.; Jespersen, A.P. (2016). "Whey protein stories – an experiment in writing a multidisciplinary biography", *Appetite*, 107: 285-294.

Example 2 Community building

- Food researchers' network – started in 1999
- Seminars with 2 food researchers from different disciplines presenting ongoing research
- Encouraged very different discussions compared with monodisciplinary seminars. "So what?" was repeatedly asked
- Created a research community that has been important for a generation of food researchers in Southern Sweden
- Multi disciplinary collaborations is often the first steps towards interdisciplinary research

MATFORSKARNÄTVERKET

Inbjuder till Seminarium på Temat: Går det att ändra matvanor?

9.30. Uppstart med fika.

10.00. Stephan Rössner *"35 års kroniskt misslyckande att lösa fetmans gåta."*

10.45. Arun Micheelsen *"The New Nordic Diet – how do Danish consumers respond"*

11.30-12.00 Avslutande gemensam diskussion om matvanor, forskning och förändringsprojekt

Example 3.

Curiosity as the starting point

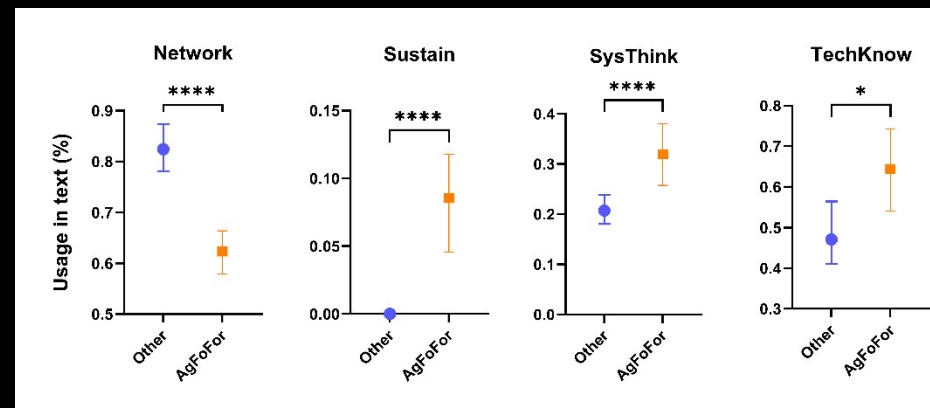
- Why does tomatoes taste like they do (nothing)?
- The question started a journey through horticulture, culture theory, EU-committees, consumer sensory tests, politics, economics, labelling and more...

See: Jönsson, H. Ekelund, E. 2011.
'How does Modernity Taste?
Tomatoes in the Societal Change
from Modernity to Late Modernity'
Culture unbound. Volume 3, Article
28, 2011 pp 439-454



Example 4. NextFood

- Building the education for the next generation of professionals in the agrifood sector
- Defining skills for the future
- Where are the gaps?
- A need for complementary methodologies – Qualitative (Interviews, focus groups, observations) and Quantitative (informatics, web scraping)



Interdisciplinary studies – some reflections and recommendations

- Clear aim calling for competences from different research traditions needed
- A defined problem and potential solutions must be clear early on in the process
- Whenever possible – share and use the same research material, but analyze and discuss from different angles
- Daily interactions – coffee break chats – helps a lot
- Make sure to visualize not only the common views, but also diverging views
- The end user perspective is often the best starting point since everyone can agree that there is no use make food or concepts which are never used
- Mutual respect and open mind – the question of which research methodology and tradition that may answer the questions is a topic for consideration, not a fixed ideological starting point

Avoid the Excellence trap



Thank You!

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