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## **Experts, agrochemicals and risk management: views on regulatory science in Denmark**

### Abstract:

From the 1990s onwards, European regulatory authorities in charge of environmental and health risk management are increasingly facing a number of problems concerning their legitimacy in the public view. Following spectacular 'food safety scares' such as BSE and foot-and-mouth disease, together with day-to-day issues of food additives, pesticides residues and industrial chemicals, public trust in experts and their institutions seem more fragile than ever. As such, the ability of science and technology to unambiguously guarantee progress and safety has been seriously questioned in the 'risk society'. In this presentation, drawing on insights from an on-going research project, focus is directed to one contentious environmental and health risk domain: science and regulations pertaining to the agricultural use of pesticides. While the agrochemical market is international in character and regulation is increasingly europeanised, the traditionally agrarian society of Denmark is singled out as case. Drawing on qualitative interviews with Danish experts and citizens concerning risk perceptions of pesticides, the presentation deals with issues of science, risk and regulation as viewed by these actors. In particular, issues of uncertainty, public legitimacy and a 'lay-expert discrepancy' in risk perceptions will be highlighted, by contrasting experts' preoccupations with views from ordinary citizens.

Theoretically, the discussion is situated within the emerging tradition of sociological studies into practices of 'regulatory science'. Developed by ST&S authors such as Sheila Jasanoff and Alan Irwin, this concept highlights the changing context, practices and political centrality of scientific research in environmental and health politics. Regulatory science refers to forms of knowledge developed in response to the requirements of government and industry in the context of risk regulation. In particular, the concept points to the highly technical character of current environmental and health policy. As socially restricted expert systems, regulatory networks tend to exclude wider public groups from policy discussions and standard setting. By analysing the political economy of pesticides regulation in Denmark and Europe, the presentation attempts to singly out certain categories of actors 'at risk' of exclusion from policy discussions. These include: politicians, academic researchers, NGOs, and the general public. Following this analysis, concerns about, and tentative suggestions for improving, the democratic legitimacy of pesticides risk decisions at national and European levels are sketched out.