

“Altered Genes, Twisted Truth”: The Silence of Britain’s Royal Society is Deafening

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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In his recent book ‘[Altered Genes, Twisted Truths](#)’, US public interest attorney Steven Druker exposes the fraudulent practices and deceptions that led to the commercialisation of GM food and crops in the US. Not long after the book’s release, he wrote an [open letter](#) to the Royal Society in Britain calling on it to acknowledge and correct the misleading and exaggerated statements that it has used to actively promote GMOs and in effect convey false impressions.

Druker cited specific instances where members of The Royal Society have at various times made false statements and the Society’s actions were not objective or based on scientific reasoning but seemingly were little more than biased and stridently pro-GMO. He argued that The Royal Society has misrepresented the case for GMOs and has effectively engaged in a campaign of disinformation.

The Royal Society acts as a scientific advisor to the British government. It is a self-governing fellowship of many of the world’s most distinguished scientists drawn from all areas of science, engineering, and medicine. The Society disseminates scientific advances through its journals. It also promotes science information and communication with the public. The Royal Society is a prestigious institution that feeds into policy formulation processes at national level in the UK. The Royal Society counts. It is a very big deal.

By the mid-1990’s, Druker notes that The Royal Society had become a partisan defender of GM foods and embraced a proactive policy on their behalf. In pursuing this proactive policy, he argues that several individuals holding prominent positions within the Society – and even the Society itself – have issued misleading statements in regard to GM foods that have created significant confusion and illegitimately downplayed their risks. He then goes on to document specific instances of occasions when this occurred.

Certain claims made in favour of GMOs were not supported by solid scientific evidence, neither did they clearly represent a consensus within the scientific community. However, Druker notes that the Society’s most deplorable actions in defence of GM foods were directed at the research on GM potatoes conducted at the Rowett Institute under the direction of Dr. Arpad Pusztai. That research study is still one of the most rigorous yet performed on a GM food. It continues to be highly relevant because it controlled for the effects of the new foreign protein – which entails that the adverse results it registered were attributable to a broader feature of the genetic engineering process itself.

Druker then goes on to present seven specific instances of the Society’s offenses against that particular piece of research, including what could be described as a PR campaign

mounted against Pusztai and his study. Even the editor of the respected journal *The Lancet* published an editorial rebuking the Society for a “gesture of breath-taking impertinence to the Rowett Institute scientists...”

Druker states that having unfairly attacked the research, the Society then strove to prevent it from being published. Even after the research was published (in *The Lancet* in October 1999), the Society continued to unjustly malign it.

He called on the Society to clear up the confusion caused by the misleading statements it has made to promote GM food and issue a formal statement acknowledging the following.

A. That there is not now nor never has been a consensus within the scientific community that GM foods are safe, that many well-credentialed experts do not regard their safety as having been established, and that a substantial number think that the research as a whole casts the safety of many of them in doubt.

B. That neither you nor any other scientific body has directly confronted and refuted the cautionary reasoning in the 2001 report issued by the Royal Society of Canada (which it has never retracted or revised) – and that this report stands as one of the compelling testaments that there is not a scientific consensus that GM foods are safe.

C. That the process of creating new varieties of food crops via genetic engineering is not more precise and predictable than conventional breeding in regard to food safety and instead entails a greater likelihood of unintended effects that could directly impact consumer health.

D. That although there are known instances in which genetic engineering has induced the production of a novel toxin or allergen, there are none in which conventional breeding has done so.

E. That Dr. Pusztai’s research was properly peer-reviewed and gained publication in *The Lancet* based on its merits, with five out of six referees voting in favor – and that, contrary to claims that the Society and other proponents of GM foods have advanced, the research has never been refuted or in any way discredited by subsequent studies – which entails that it is still relevant today.

F. Your statement should also contain a formal apology to Dr. Pusztai and his colleagues for the irresponsible manner in which the Society and several of its members have besmirched their reputations and derided the integrity of their research.

Druker continued by stating:

“Unless you promptly take these steps, it will demonstrate that your commitment to promoting GM foods is stronger than your commitment to honoring the truth and upholding the integrity of science.”

According to Druker, it is time *The Royal Society* confronted the facts about GM foods and set the record straight. He also challenged it to find factual or logical inaccuracies in his book. He finished his letter by stating:

“If you have not done so by 20 April 2015, the world will have a right to assume that it [his book] is as sound as the experts who reviewed it have affirmed – and that GM foods are therefore unacceptably risky and must be banned.”

It is now eight weeks since Steven Druker addressed The Royal Society in his open letter and 12 days since 20 April. There appears to have been no (public) response from The Royal Society.

The Royal Society is the preeminent scientific body within the UK that advises the government. It therefore has an obligation to the British public to provide a public response and “put the record straight” on GMOs, not least because the current staunchly pro-GMO Cameron-led administration will [likely sanction the planting of GM crops](#) in England within the next couple of years and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) deal could [open the floodgates to GM](#) foods appearing on the shelves of UK supermarkets.

The purpose of The Royal Society is according to its website to “recognise, promote, and support excellence in science and to encourage the development and use of science for the benefit of humanity.”

The Royal Society’s record on GMOs has been shameful (as a prominent public body in the UK, [it is certainly not alone in this respect](#)). Given what is at stake, its silence towards the issues raised by Steven Druker is little better.

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Articles by: [Colin Todhunter](#)

About the author:

Colin Todhunter is an extensively published independent writer and former social policy researcher. Originally from the UK, he has spent many years in India. His website is www.colintodhunter.com
https://twitter.com/colin_todhunter

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