

Biotechnology, GMO and Scientific Analysis: The Powers of Corporate Manipulation

Retracting Seralini's Study

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

The biotech sector often yells for “peer review” when the anti-GMO movement refers to analyses or research-based findings to state its case. Despite Professor Seralini publishing his research findings (rats fed on GMOs) that were critical of the health impacts of GMOs in an internationally renowned peer-reviewed journal in 2012, his methodology and findings were nevertheless subjected to sustained attacks by the sector. Personal smears came his way too (1). Now he finds that his paper has been retracted by the journal.

Peer review or no peer review, it seems to matter little to the biotech sector when research findings have the potential to damage its interests. In any case, peer review is only for the sector's critics. It doesn't seem to apply much to it. For instance, in the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) scientists had continually warned regulators that GM crops could create unpredictable and hard to detect side effects, including allergies, toxin production, nutritional problems, and new diseases. They recommended that long-term studies were needed to fully assess the effect of GM foods on other crops, the ecosystem, and animal and human health, but these warnings were ignored (2).

Commercial interest, political strategy and lobbying, not science, is what really counts for this industry. Much of the research it uses to back up its claims is after all carried out by itself and is not fully open to outside scrutiny. Certain negative findings that would be detrimental to its interests are suppressed. According to Open Earth Source in a 2011 article in Huffington Post, this is certainly the case where glyphosate (Round Up) has been concerned (3). It is therefore disconcerting that policy makers willingly accept the industry's claims and facilitate its aims, not least in the UK.

GeneWatch UK has revealed how Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer, and BASF (all biotech companies) under the guise of the 'Agricultural Biotechnology Council' held a meeting in June 2012 with government ministers and academics to formulate a 'strategy' to promote GMO in schools, to 'educate' the public and to 'improve' the regulatory framework favouring GMOs, while encouraging farmers to change their farming methods to fully accommodate the GMO products the companies produce.

Dr Helen Wallace, Director of GeneWatch UK said that this shows breath-taking arrogance by these companies which seem to think that British farming must be destroyed to suit their own commercial interest and British children should be brainwashed to support their business strategies. She argues that ministers should not be pushing the GM sector's propaganda in British schools at taxpayers' expense (4). It begs the question: where is the role for independent science (not corporate/industry-backed science) in all of this? The sector seems able to secure political patronage or co-opt key players to its cause as and

when necessary.

And the reason for this is clear. Writer Rich Murray highlights on Rense.com how top people from the GM sector have moved with ease to take up many top positions with various US government bodies, such as the FDA (5). William F Engdahl has described a similar effect in Europe (6). In both cases, the revolving door between government and biotech sector ensures the latter's interests are served.

Seralini's research team based its experiment on the same protocol as a previous Monsanto study but, importantly, were testing more parameters more frequently. And the GMO-fed rats were studied for much longer. The long time span proved critical. The first tumours only appeared four to seven months into the study. In the industry's earlier 90-day study on the same GMO maize Monsanto NK603, signs of toxicity were seen but were dismissed as "not biologically meaningful" by industry and the European Food Safety Agency. It seems they were indeed very biologically meaningful.

In his recent piece in *The Ecologist*, William F Engdahl argues Seralini's research is valid and that biotech pressure has led to the journal's decision to retract Seralini's paper (7). Engdahl notes that the *Journal of Food and Chemical Toxicology*, where Seralini's paper appeared, has itself violated scientific standards by deciding to retract the paper.

It begs the questions: when does science become 'non-science' and when can a journal decide to reinvent criteria for publication and retraction? On the *Independent Science News* website (8), Claire Robinson and Jonathan Latham note that in the run-up to the retraction, the journal's publisher, Elsevier, announced that it had created a new position, that of 'Associate Editor for Biotechnology'. The person they hired to fill it was Richard E Goodman, a former Monsanto employee. Six months after Goodman took control of GMO issues at the journal, Dr A Wallace Hayes, the editor of the *Journal of Food and Chemical Toxicology*, retracted the study by the team of Professor Séralini, citing the 'inconclusiveness' of the research findings as the reason.

However, Claire Robinson on the *GM Watch* site (9) notes that inconclusiveness of findings is not a valid ground for retraction because numerous published scientific papers contain inconclusive findings, which are often mixed in with findings that can be presented with more certainty. She rightly states that it is for future researchers to build on the findings and refine scientific understanding of any uncertainties.

There is something highly suspicious about all of this.

The public is having GMO food pushed on it with no say in the matter thanks to deceit and various forms of institutionalised corruption. Unfortunately, argument stemming from independent scientific findings is too often sidelined in favour of other means of influence. Recall how Dr Arpad Pusztai in the UK was effectively silenced over his research and a campaign was set in motion to destroy his reputation some years ago because his research findings were unpalatable to the biotech sector. Then there is the infamous WikiLeaks cable highlighting how GMOs were being forced into European nations by the US ambassador to France who plotted with other US officials to create a 'retaliatory target list' of anyone who tried to regulate GMOs.

In the meantime, evidence questioning the health impacts and efficacy or lack of agricultural benefits derived from GMOs mounts (10,11,12,13). But this is of little concern to

the industry and its pressure tactics and global PR machine, which receives full and active support from the US State Department (14).

Is science to fall victim to outside pressures? Claire Robinson and Jonathan Latham argue that unless radical reform is achieved, peer-reviewed publication, which many hold to be the defining characteristic of science, will have undergone a remarkable inversion. From its origin as a safeguard of quality and independence, it will have become a tool through which one vision, that of corporate science, came to assert ultimate control. They argue that Richard Goodman now has the opportunity to throw down the stairs only those papers marked "industry approved."

It's a valid point. As Don Huber, Professor of Plant Pathology at Purdue University, has indicated, getting research findings published that do not coincide with the aims of key commercial interests can be difficult and comes with certain risks (15). With some hugely powerful players involved, many of whom have influence over journal content and have successfully infiltrated important government and official bodies, much of the science and the debate is being manipulated and hijacked by vested interests for commercial gain.

Notes

- 1) <http://www.countercurrents.org/todhunter301212.htm>
- 2) <http://www.nongmoreport.com/articles/october2011/FDAignoredscientistwarningsGMfoods.php>
- 3) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/24/roundup-scientists-birth-defects_n_883578.html
- 4) <http://orderoftruth.wordpress.com/2013/06/20/uk-government-patterson-calls-gm-food-concerns-complete-nonsense-and-humbug-we-take-a-closer-look-at-his-lies-monsanto-gm/>
- 5) <http://renewse.com/general33/fd.htm>
- 6) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/stench-of-eu-corruption-in-monsanto-gmo-whitewash>
- 7) http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_analysis/2185442/scientific_journal_retracts_study_exposing_gm_cancer_risk.html
- 8) <http://www.independentsciencenews.org/science-media/the-goodman-affair-monsanto-targets-the-heart-of-science/>
- 9) <http://www.gmwatch.org/index.php/news/archive/2013/15184-journal-retraction-of-seralini-study-is-illicit-unscientific-and-unethical>
- 10) <http://www.greenmedinfo.com/blog/it-time-acknowledge-roundup-herbicide-contraceptive>
- 11) <http://www.responsibletechnology.org/gmo-dangers>
- 12) <http://vidarbhatimes.blogspot.co.uk/2012/11/maharashtra-reports-btcotton-failure-in.html?m=1>
- 13) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/india-genetically-modified-seeds-agricultural-productivity-and-political-fraud/5328227>

14) http://documents.foodandwaterwatch.org/doc/Biotech_Report_US.pdf

15) <http://farmandranchfreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/don-huber-may2011-acres.pdf>

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