

The Glaring Hypocrisy and Embedded Deceptions of the Global Food Giants

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Global Research, December 29, 2024

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

Bryce Martinez (18) from Pennsylvania is mounting a legal challenge against major food companies, alleging that their ultra-processed foods (UPFs) led to his development of Type 2 diabetes and fatty liver disease at the age of 16.

The 11 firms listed in the lawsuit are Kraft Heinz, Mondelez, Coca-Cola, Post Holdings, PepsiCo, General Mills, Nestle's (US), WK Kellogg, Mars, Kellanova and Conagra.

UPFs have undergone multiple processing steps and often contain additives, preservatives and artificial ingredients. These UPFs have become staples in many households. Examples of UPFs are prepackaged soups, many breakfast cereals, sauces, frozen pizza, ready-to-eat meals, hot dogs, sausages, sodas, ice cream and store-bought cookies, cakes, candies and doughnuts.

Martinez's legal team contends that the big food corporations have deliberately engineered their products to trigger addictive responses. His lawyers at Morgan & Morgan, a major US law firm, says the case is unprecedented and includes claims for conspiracy, negligence, fraudulent misrepresentation and unfair business practices.

Martinez had regularly consumed popular UPFs throughout his childhood. The lawsuit challenges the food industry's argument that consumers have free choice in their dietary decisions. It argues that the notion of free choice is compromised by aggressive marketing tactics, especially aimed at children, and the addictive nature of these products.

UPFs are highly profitable for corporations. The same companies that dominate the UPF market are intertwined with investment firms like BlackRock and Vanguard, which also hold stakes in the pharmaceutical industry. This dual investment creates a cycle where investment firms profit from both the sale of harmful foods and the treatment of diseases associated with these products.

Furthermore, the prevailing economic system creates a paradoxical situation where workers, whose pension funds are often managed by these same investment giants, find themselves financially tethered to a cycle that undermines their own health and well-being.

There is a famous quote often attributed to farmer, poet and campaigner Wendell Berry:

"People are fed by the food industry, which pays no attention to health, and are treated by the health industry, which pays no attention to food."

For a long time, that has served both industry's interests very well.

Corporate Science and ILSI

The influence that giant corporations have on the food system is encapsulated by the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI). Presenting itself as an independent scientific organisation, across the world, from China to India, the ILSI plays a crucial role in promoting narratives that benefit its corporate funders.

According to the report [Partnership for an Unhealthy Planet](#) (Corporate Accountability, 2020), political interference by food and beverage transnationals like Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Nestlé and PepsiCo is pervasive. The report shows how these corporations have leveraged the ILSI to cripple progress on nutrition policy across the globe.

After documenting that the ILSI has spun a complex web of revolving doors or partnering with leading research institutions in India (including "controlling" the Niti Aayog, the Government of India's policy think tank) to denigrate traditional diets, the report states:

"ILSI India is emblematic of how ILSI at large ensures that the food and beverage industry are able to deepen their capture of public policy and discourse thereabouts across the globe. One such example of this is an ILSI-sponsored study on sugar consumption by two of India's most respected research entities, the Indian Council of Medical Research and the National Institute of Nutrition."

It adds:

"... the study's intent seems to be the absolution of food products marketed by ILSI's corporate backers and/or redirection of public dietary concerns toward the traditional foods ILSI's funders would hope to supplant."

The ILSI generates scientific data and provides it to state agencies, working to harmonise food regulations and facilitate international trade, not least by shaping Codex standards and guidelines. It has a notable influence on Codex through its collaborations with regulatory bodies involved in setting food safety standards.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission is an international organisation jointly run by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Its published goals are to develop and adopt uniform food standards for its member countries and to promote the free and unhindered international flow of food goods, thereby eliminating trade barriers to food and (supposedly) providing food safety.

Biotechnology, pesticides, food additives and contaminants are some of the issues discussed in Codex meetings. The FAO says: "Codex standards are based on the best available science assisted by independent international risk assessment bodies or ad-hoc consultations organized by FAO and WHO."

Codex standards serve in many cases as a basis for national legislation. It decides on minimum food residue levels for pesticides, allowable amounts of aluminium, lead and arsenic in food and which substances or products are dangerous. These decisions affect the products and markets of huge corporations that have hundreds of millions of dollars at stake.

The ILSI has infiltrated key national and international food and health regulatory and

decision-making bodies in an attempt to lobby away or discredit any potential decision that may affect their bottom line (see [The opaque world of Codex Alimentarius and Monsanto 'toxic' relations](#)).

According to [Ivica Kelam](#) of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek in Croatia:

“The ILSI enjoys close relationships with regulatory bodies including the Joint WHO/FAO Expert Committee on Food Additives and the European Food Safety Authority, which rely on the substantial resources controlled by the ILSI. The organisation not only influences Codex standards through direct cooperation with national and international regulators but also indirectly through the networks it develops.”

Funders of the ILSI have included at some point Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Mars, Mondelez, General Mills, Nestle, Kellogg, Hershey, Kraft, Dr. Pepper Snapple Group, Starbucks Coffee, Monsanto, CropLife International, Syngenta, Dow AgroSciences, Pioneer Hi-Bred, Bayer CropScience, BASF, Cargill, Unilever and Campbell Soup (see the reports [Pushing partnerships: corporate influence on research and policy via the International Life Sciences Institute](#) and [ILSI is a food industry lobby group](#)).

Bryce Martinez is up against some very powerful forces that will do everything they possibly can to stave off any challenge that could potentially represent a critical threat to their power, profits and practices.

Glaring Hypocrisy

In late 2020, the Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHA) released [a report](#) that described how Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Nestlé and PepsiCo used the COVID event to aggressively market UPFs.

In Brazil, Nestlé, Bauducco and Danone donated more than 400 tons of food, including UPFs deemed unhealthy according to official Brazilian dietary guidelines. In South Africa, Coca-Cola donated soft drinks to families in townships and multiple healthcare centres.

The GHA notes that big food corporations also touted their unhealthy UPFs as essential, safe products and immune boosters. In Brazil, The ILSI cynically promoted processed foods as allies in the fight against COVID.

In Japan, Coca-Cola encouraged people to exercise at home while 'in quarantine' through online exercise videos, pledging to donate up to one million drinks to app users who tracked 1,000 steps a day. In Brazil, McDonalds posted videos on X showing kids pressuring their parents to go to McDonalds during 'quarantine' to safely pick up food through the contactless drive thru.

The report highlighted how the lack of healthy food regulations worldwide enabled these corporations to polish their public images while undermining public health. The reality is that [research indicates](#) diets high in UPFs may undermine immunity through several mechanisms, primarily related to nutrient deficiencies, inflammation and alterations in the gut microbiome.

The GHA says that the very companies who had already contributed to rising rates of obesity and diet-related diseases exploited the COVID event to position themselves and

their products as “essential” while also, directly and indirectly, influencing public health policy.

A [peer-reviewed study](#) in the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#) showed that increased consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) was associated with more than 10 per cent of all-cause premature, preventable deaths in Brazil in 2019. UPFs have steadily replaced the consumption of traditional whole foods, such as rice and beans, in Brazil (see also the report [Free trade and Mexico’s junk food epidemic](#)).

In high-income countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, UPFs account for more than half of total calorific intake, a much higher figure than that for Brazil. And it is the poorer sections of society that rely more on UPF items because of their low cost. Yet corporate-backed narratives often downplay these risks or frame them as issues of personal responsibility rather than systemic problems.

Studies have associated UPFs with significant increased risks of cardiovascular disease, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity and metabolic syndrome, high blood pressure and abnormal blood lipid levels, anxiety and mental disorders, depression and cognitive decline and impairment. There is also increased risk of certain cancers, particularly ovarian and breast cancers. (See [this](#), [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#).)

The GHAI report described how the very corporations that have driven the spiralling public health crisis to alarming levels were using an event framed as a public health emergency to their advantage. Their cynicism and hypocrisy are impossible to ignore.

What was once nature’s gift (wholesome food) has been transformed to become an industrial commodity. As UPS have come to increasingly dominate diets and wreak havoc on human health, profit margins are boosted and consumers are regarded as mere collateral damage to be rinsed for further profit by the ‘healthcare’ industry.

For further insights, see the author’s books [Sickening Profits: The Global Food System’s Poisoned Food and Toxic Wealth](#) and [Power Play: The Future of Food](#).

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*Colin Todhunter’s book *Sickening Profits: The Global Food System’s Poisoned Food and Toxic Wealth* provides further insight into the issues addressed above. It can be read [here](#).*

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