

Monsanto's Communications Guru to Visit the UK: Instead of Promoting GM, Take Responsibility for Your Company's Actions in Wales

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Monsanto is preparing a fresh effort to promote genetically modified (GM) crops to the UK public, according to a piece in [The Scottish Farmer](#). The article notes the company recently appointed former World Bank communications strategist Vance Crowe as its 'Director of Millennial Engagement', a job that involves convincing the public about the benefits of GM.

In March, Vance will be in the UK to give a series of talks, including one in Glasgow as a guest of Glasgow Skeptics, an organisation committed to "promoting science and critical thinking." However, according to the article, it seems that organiser Brian Eggo may have already made up his mind on GM. He talks about public fear of GM having held back the technology and says the ban on the growing of GM crops in Scotland was a decision based more on ideology than any actual risk to public health.

Eggo stresses that Glasgow Skeptics is not a pro-GM body but simply wants to air the scientific facts in a neutral setting, "putting aside personal biases, ideologies and preconceived ideas in order to examine what is true."

Well, it's not a good start, is it? While wanting to appear neutral, Mr Eggo has already tainted the upcoming event with his own preconceived idea that the views of those promoting GM are based on science, whereas those who oppose GM food are basing their views on ideology and emotion.

Over the years, this has been a tactic that the industry has used in an attempt to discredit critics of GM. It is the thin end of a very large wedge, one that begins by saying the public are confused and have been misled by anti-GM ideologues and ends with vicious ideological-driven pro-GM onslaughts exemplified by the likes of UK politician [Owen Paterson](#) or scientists such as [Richard John Roberts](#) or [Shanthu Shantharam](#), who fail to appreciate where the line between science ends and public relations begins.

It has been stated many times before, but it is worth repeating: there is plenty of scientific evidence that questions the health and environmental impacts of GM, and there are many respected scientific institutions that have expressed concerns. There is no scientific consensus on GM, and, although the industry likes to portray it as such, it is not some small bunch of maverick scientists who have serious concerns about the technology (for example, see [this](#) about the lack of consensus on safety with regard to GM, and [this](#) and [this](#), which both challenge the need for and efficacy of GM: these publications cite official reports and statements as well as dozens of [peer-reviewed] academic sources).

Moreover, the onus should not be on critics to prove GM is safe. The onus is on regulators to demand long-term independent epidemiological studies are carried out instead of relying on the industry-invented tactic of labelling GMOs as ‘substantially equivalent’, which is [bogus and unscientific](#).

But GM is not only about ‘science’. There is, however, a strategy to marginalise other voices and to try to keep the GM debate focussed on ‘the science’. There are two main reasons for this.

First, science is being used as an ideological device, whereby it is hoped the public will automatically defer to scientists, who ‘know best’. Scientists can therefore utter any form of nonsense (and they have) and the hope is the layperson will bow to a GM [scientific priesthood](#). The pro-GM lobby hopes that appeals to authority and smearing critics will suffice.

Second, by keeping the debate firmly focused on the (corporate-backed) science of GM and constantly smearing critics as ‘anti-science’, wider discussions about the issues that determine affordable, plentiful and healthy food are sidelined. GM acts as a financially lucrative ideological device: a bogus techno quick-fix promoted by the [vested interests](#) of an agritech/agribusiness cartel that neatly diverts attention from the need to address the structural factors which drive inequality and food insecurity and which those interests profit from and have helped to create.

It is interesting that Monsanto is sending a communications strategist to the UK to try and ‘educate’ the public about GM. With the UK on the verge of leaving the EU, the fear is that a US-UK deal could soon be done which could entail GMOs flooding the UK market. The spin machine is thus gearing up. In fact, the UK government has been [oiling its wheels for some time](#) as GeneWatch UK disclosed in 2014. But this isn’t unique to the UK. For instance, [Health Canada](#) also thinks its role is to product promote on behalf of Monsanto and appears to feel a need to develop a strategy for spinning a positive message about GM to the Canadian public.

Monsanto feels the UK is ripe for picking. The public had better brace itself.

When he visits the UK, perhaps Vance Crowe would like to address the people of Wales and say something about the [poisoning of the population](#) that his company has played a major part in. However, the standard company defence mechanism is to try to convince people that the ‘new’ Monsanto is not like the ‘old’ Monsanto, even though Dr Rosemary Mason shows that Welsh adults and children continue to suffer and the company still profits from the massive amounts of glyphosate (the active ingredient in Roundup) being sprayed there.

Monsanto produced tonnes of Agent Orange unmindful of its consequences for Vietnamese people as it raked in super profits and that character remains. We need only read Dr Mason’s [publications](#) to appreciate that character or consult [experts in Argentina](#). In fact, we need only refer to Monsanto attorney Trenton Norris, who argued in court against California’s initiative to place a cancer warning label on the company’s multi-billion-dollar earner Roundup.

[Norris recently said](#) that the labels would have immediate financial consequences for the company. He stated that many consumers would see the labels and stop buying Roundup: “It will absolutely be used in ways that will harm Monsanto.”

Once again, a case of profit before people.

Despite the massive body of evidence pointing to the [health- and environmentally damaging impact](#) of glyphosate, Monsanto is [launching a full-frontal assault](#) on science, scientific research and institutions whose findings contradict the company line that glyphosate is harmless. But anyone who is aware of the history of Monsanto, especially where GM is concerned, knows that attacking scientists and subverting science is par for the course (see [this](#) and [this](#)).

Maybe Brian Eggo from Glasgow Skeptics should take this into account when attempting to depict Monsanto being on the side of science. It merely buys into the PR message the pro-GM lobby has been pushing ever since GM food was [fraudulently](#) placed on the commercial market.

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