

The Destructive, Moral, Political, Scientific, and Genetic Expediency of Transgenic Food and Agriculture and the Myopic Culture Supporting It

In 1992 on behalf of the Bush-Quayle administration, Vice President Dan Quayle declared transgenic food Generally Recognized As Safe (GRAS). Perhaps, President Bush let his Vice President be the point man on the announcement because he knew a crime being perpetrated, but perhaps they were both blinded by overriding personal enthusiasm and high hope for transgenic food. Maybe they looked forward to eating it, and if so, we need to ask them now how that worked out for their health.

Subsequently, as the result of discovery in a court case, boxes of official documents showed the White House decision, facilitated by Deputy FDA Commissioner Michael Taylor (who had formerly served Monsanto as an attorney and would later become their chief lobbyist), over-ruled scientific wisdom and prudence at the agency. The record showed FDA scientists were concerned about potential allergies, toxicity issues, new diseases, and nutritional compromises. Objective, independent, long-term research examining the healthful safety of GMO food was called for but it was overruled by the political deciders.

They believed they lacked authority under existing law to do the recommended testing. No law then or now requires the FDA to test the safety of any food. They are required to determine the safety of food additives but not of food. Food is sold without safety testing. Meanwhile, Monsanto and other biotech companies needed to avoid learning anything awkward to their objectives; their own testing was designed to be brief and cursory, so they would not learn anything adverse to their commercial interest.

Inflicting Transgenic Food on People Without Informed Consent

If the FDA had wanted to responsibly handle the concerns of their own scientists, they could have promoted public debate on the issue, and they could have asked Congress for the needed testing authority, but they clearly wanted to support and advance the biotech industry objectives, so they did not do that. Effectively, political leaders and the companies decided to let the U.S. people and the people of other nations be their guinea pigs in a continuing experiment to see how health is affected. The trouble is: no one in the government or observably in the industry is keeping any data. It seems they do not want to know, or maybe they do not want people to know the impact of their decisions. Some say they want to control population growth, but without evidence, that is only a conspiracy theory.

Medical professionals have observed a 40% increase in digestive ailments since transgenic food has been introduced, and they have seen a decrease in reproductive fertility as well as a great increase in food allergies. The observed symptoms disappear when transgenic food is removed from the diet. That is the reason the Association for Environmental Medicine, Kaiser-Permanente, and Dr. Joseph Mercola, among others, have recommended people not eat transgenic food. Even with problems as large as they are, no studies establishing causation have been pursued in the U.S. That could serve to lower the income of the medical establishment, and they are a bigger lobby than the biotech industry.

The trouble is, the United States is on track, according to Dr. Ezekiel Emmanuel, who has helped work on healthcare policy at the Office of Management and Budget, there will be by mid-century only two types of people in the United States: patients and healthcare providers. That, of course, is a dead-end.

Putting Corporate Interests Ahead of the Public Interest

At the time transgenic food was publicly released in Britain and elsewhere without extending people any right of informed consent, Arpad Pusztai and his team at the Rowett Institute in Scotland were developing protocols for testing the safety of transgenic food, but that work was ended when Prime Minister Blair was alerted to the threat it posed to the biotech industry. Pusztai was fired, and the attempt was made to discredit him. His data was confiscated at least until the British Parliament called for a public hearing on the matter six months later. The protocols could have been used in the United States if the

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political will had existed to serve the public interest, but the politicians wanted to serve the interests of the biotech industry, squelching any public right to know the potential or actual risks associated with the consumption of transgenic food. Reprehensible anti-democratic politics triumphed responsible science.

President George H.W. Bush and his political collaborators proved willing to deliver a profitable plum to the biotech industry without prudent concern for the possible or likely consequences. He favored deregulation and set aside prudence to promote a chimera. Business was allowed unbridled freedom without attention to the now emerging and unconscionable public health and environmental costs.

Democrats No Better Than Republicans; Medical Establishment No Better Than Monsanto

The Democrats could have repaired the failure a year later in 1993, but they, too, responded obsequiously to corporate lobbying; they needed to milk the biotech cow for campaign contributions just as much as Republicans. They could see the investor money lining up to pursue the transgenic profligacy. Following the money has long been more important than the public health in the United States, especially with the healthcare industry also more interested in fattening revenues than in improving public health.

For example, if the American Medical Association had wanted to concern themselves with the public health, they could have taken a position on transgenic food or launched an investigation of it among their own members, but they have not done that. A still larger and more vexing problem is a culture disconnected from biology, especially food-related biology. This culture has seemed to believe people can eat anything and rely on pharmaceutical medicine, surgeons, and an oblivious, habitual, happy-go-lucky abandon to overcome any problems that might arise as a result of their vacuous, wishful irresponsibility.

The United States has spawned a myopic culture, disrespectful of the natural heritage while revealing a desire to live for today and letting the future take care of itself. The myopia is reinforced by a 90-day business performance time horizon and a two-year electoral focus of the political system. Not even religion or morality has encouraged or required people to assume responsibility for longer-term consequences of their intentionally oblivious and profligate ignorance. The U.S. patron saint is Alfred E. Newman, and "What Me Worry?" is the national motto. The nation's President even has Newman's ears.

The Sophist Dogma of "Substantial Equivalence"

Underlying the wishful decision calling transgenic food "GRAS" was the so-called Doctrine of Substantial Equivalence proclaiming transgenic food basically same as non-transgenic food even though it was found to be unique enough to deserve a utility patent. For decades and more, arrogant expediency has been the reigning political philosophy and dominant lifestyle. Any simpleton should understand the trouble it portends, but in the United States, it is accepted as courageous, inventive Capitalism with twin political sycophants to promote it. Instead, it should be branded as foolish, life-destructive nonsense.

The Dogma of Substantial Equivalence hopes people will believe it possible to add a trait to a plant or an agricultural crop the same way they put on hats or shoes, but genetics is more complex than that. Even the hybridization preceding transgenesis has been a myopic expediency. It is based on a similarly and overly simplistic claim suggesting yields can be increased without changing the nutritional and healthful character of food. Compromises have been tolerated and left uninvestigated or maybe only unreported along with other profligate, endangering shortcuts of the industrial agricultural system. This is what happens when only yields and money matter. Soil culture is destroyed and ecology is ignored.

This is a symptom of the U.S. mental process. Corporations pursue whatever delivers the quickest buck, while their obsequious, indentured politicians follow the money more than common sense. Two decades of transgenic food folly is too much, but if we do not succeed through one lawsuit, we will still need to find other ways to persist. This is a campaign for survival, so giving up is not an option. Bringing a lawsuit may be the only way at present to address the tragic failures of the political culture.

The lawsuit places hope in federal judges will not be as arrogant, myopic, and closed-minded as the corporately obsequious politicians, but that may be wishful, too; judges may be collaborating appendages of the same culture and political system locked in dysfunctional gridlock. No guarantee certifies the moral character of people who have built their careers as collaborative, cooperating, facilitating functionaries within an expedient money-driven political and economic system.

Time will provide the answer and with it may come knowledge like Adam and Eve learned when they ate the apple. We have been given our own Garden of Eden to live in, appreciate, and cherish, and we are destroying it in service to unbridled corporate exploitation, abuse, and neglect.

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