

Big Organic and Big Ag both fund expenses, research as GMO debate intensifies

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article from The New York Times to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.**

The debate over [bioengineered foods](#) has escalated into a billion-dollar food industry war. Companies like Monsanto are squaring off against major organic firms like Stonyfield Farm, the yogurt company, and both sides have aggressively recruited academic researchers, emails obtained through open records laws show.

There is no evidence that academic work was compromised, but emails obtained through open records laws show how academics have shifted from researchers to actors in lobbying and corporate public relations campaigns.

In 2011, Monsanto gave a grant to Bruce M. Chassy, a professor emeritus at the University of Illinois, to support “biotechnology outreach and education activities”. In an interview, Dr. Chassy said he initiated his work to persuade the EPA of the safety of certain pesticides before Monsanto pressed him.

Like the biotech companies, organic industry executives believed they could have more influence if they pushed their message through academics.

The organic foods industry has a direct financial interest to raise consumer concerns, because federal law requires that any product labeled organic in the United States be free of ingredients produced from genetically modified seeds. So if consumers move away from G.M.O.-based sources, they sometimes switch to organic alternatives.

Emails and other documents obtained by The Times from Washington State, where Dr. Charles Benbrook served until earlier this year, show how the opponents of genetically modified foods have used their own creative tactics, although their spending on lobbying and public relations amounts to a tiny fraction of that of biosciences companies.

At Washington State, Dr. Benbrook [was supported](#) by ... Organic Valley, Whole Foods, Stonyfield and United Natural Foods Inc. The companies stayed closely involved in his research and advocacy, helping him push reporters to write about his studies, including one concluding that organic milk, produced without any G.M.O.-produced feed for the cows, had greater nutritional value.

Dr. Benbrook said the organic companies turned to him for the same reasons Monsanto and others turn to academics. “They want to influence the public,” he said.

**Read full, original post:** [Food Industry Enlisted Academics in G.M.O. Lobbying War, Emails Show](#)