

FOIA: For \$100,000 Charles Benbrook offered to ‘ramrod’ ‘independent’ anti-GMO research for Australian activists

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

Exposure of a private email trail has revealed one of Western Australia organic farmer Steve Marsh’s biggest backers sought to fund “scientific” research to present in a “strategic court room” as evidence of genetically modified (GM) crops being unsafe, to help demand a moratorium.

Emails obtained under a recent US-based Freedom of Information request show the proposal in an exchange between WA organic food entrepreneur Georg Kailis and US agricultural research professor Dr Charles “Chuck” Benbrook.

The emails were posted last week, with dozens of other documented exchanges, on MuckRock —a repository website used for sharing government documents between journalists and other interested groups. They are [available here](#). The New York Times had previously released a [trove of Benbrook’s emails](#) secured in a FOIA request,

[The Genetic Literacy Project has a profile of Benbrook’s background and research history [posted here](#)]

Benbrook is credited with publishing a 2012 study suggesting GMOs had caused increased pesticide use in crop production due to glyphosate resistant weeds but the research methodology was attacked by critics.

He has also been shown to have received funding from large organic businesses like Whole Foods to conduct research during his WSU post, highlighting the benefits of organic farming and foods but has denied any conflict of interest.

Kailis has been a long-term campaigner against the use of GMs and is part of the prominent Kailis family fishing and food dynasty, in WA.

“We have some big funders who want to get the science showing lack of safety of GMO in a significant court room,” Mr Kailis emailed Benbrook.

In his reply email, Benbrook told Kailis he would charge \$200 per hour to be an expert witness in the Marsh case.

He also warned about going down the “academic route” but could “ramrod” the proposed research that would question the safety of GMs.

I suspect this job could be done in four to eight months if there were adequate resources to get

the help needed. I will ramrod it, but cannot take it on unless fully funded. My academic program is running on fumes, I need to retain my WSU base for lots of reasons. If someone goes the academic route, it would be 2-4 years before a dissertation is done. The fast route requires hiring and paying top-notch folks to join the team, so the papers can be divided up, and then individual evaluations reviewed/confirmed by the group. I don't have time to do a thorough budget, but expect six figures through publication. I would be glad to get involved as an expert witness in the Marsh case. I charge \$200/hr – I have lots of trial and depo experience.

Benbrook's later added, "Off the top of my head, if I am the ramrod, I would need full control of process and right to be a slave driver/dictator, and at least \$100k, and probably will regret promising to do it for that amount".

In reply, Mr Kailis said his aim was for the proposed research to be "robust enough to take into a "strategic" court room as a summary of evidence of GMO/glyphosate harm to date and be a spur to demand moratorium until further testing and more.

"Yes we will get PR from this research but the end game I aim for is to be in court with ***independent scientific evidence*** of harm versus proGMO (vested) scientific evidence," he said. [Editor's note: GLP bolded the phrase "independent scientific evidence"]

Kailis is also a prominent board member of the UK-based Sustainable Food Trust (SFT) [UK's organic lobby] which also opposes GMs.

Benbrook said his experience as an expert witness in court proceedings was that the publication of research in a peer reviewed journal was "very important in responding to inevitable attacks".

University of Melbourne senior lecturer in food biotechnology and microbiology, agriculture and food systems David Tribe said the FOI email exchange showed that there was a PR plan to produce a predetermined outcome on the efficacy of GMs — not a scientific one.

"This exchange shows that Kailis is prepared to pay for research that has a preordained outcome and is confirmation of bias," he said

Tribe also said the email exchange showed Kailis had a global network of anti-GM and pro-organic connections he was working with.

Despite this network of allies, including the Safe Food Foundation, the organic activists in Western Australia were unable to find a solitary witness who was able to testify at the Marsh v Baxter court case, and give evidence, proving GMs are unsafe.

Read full, original post: Emails expose anti-GM science for hire