

Emails show anti-GMO organic activists driving food and farming policy at Consumer Reports

On their website, Consumers Union [publisher of Consumer Reports; Read Genetic Literacy Project's Profile of [Consumer Reports](#)] claims to be impartial and unbiased. So why are they actively collaborating with anti-biotechnology groups and the organic industry behind the scenes?

Recently obtained emails from Washington State University via a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request show Senior Staff Scientist Michael Hansen [NOTE: Read Genetic Literacy Project's Profile of [Michael Hansen](#)] using his Consumers Union email to actively participate in the [gmolist](#) —the 'Independent' anti-biotech scientists and activists Google Group for secret coordination and planned attacks.

Michael Hansen
Michael Hansen

In one email he describes environmentalist Mark Lynas and ex-Greenpeace turned Golden Rice promoter Patrick Moore as “puppets for industry”. He recommends using Belinda Martineau as a counter to them, being a qualified scientist critical of the technology.

From: gmolist@googlegroups.com on behalf of Michael Hansen <mhansen@consumer.org>
Sent: Thursday, June 11, 2015 9:51 AM
To: Hilbeck Angelika
Cc: Claire Robinson; Eva Novotny; gmolist@googlegroups.com
Subject: Re: [gmolist] new nominee for the GMO Science list

I wholeheartedly support adding Belinda to this list. I know her and her work is great. Her book, "First Fruit," published in 2001, is a great read, and also a very public presentation of her changed views. Here's the quote from it that I have been using in talks for 14 years: "Rather than personal opinion, the scientific community should give the public facts, hard facts; the results of studies that indicate these foods are safe to eat . . . simply proclaiming 'that these foods are safe and there is no scientific evidence to the contrary' is not the same as saying 'extensive tests have been conducted and here are the results.' In fact, without further elaboration, 'no scientific evidence to the contrary' could be construed as 'no scientific evidence, period.'"

I also agree with Angelika and Michael about trying to use Belinda as a counter-character to Lynas or Patrick Moore, or any of the other puppets for industry. That said, it would be good to have a list of questioning scientists. The only problem with that, at least in the US, is that they have to be retired or not really in academia since the industry will go after them in a strong way. There are a number of scientists who are allies in academia, but any of those that speak out publicly in the US do face significant retaliation, so the list will be restricted to activist scientists.

Michael

Michael Hansen, Ph.D.
Senior Scientist
Consumers Union

If Hansen had used a private email address, one could allow for him as a private individual to communicate with people sharing his views as he chooses. But here he is seen acting in official capacity for Consumers Union.

Members of the gmolist with industry connections include:

- Sarah Compson of the Soil Association in the UK
- Janet Cotter of Logos Environmental, whose business offers “advice” to NGOs about biotechnology.
- John Fagan [Read Genetic Literacy Project’s Profile of [John Fagan](#)], the original founder of Genetic ID used by the Non-GMO Project [Read Genetic Literacy Project’s Profile of [Non-GMO Project](#)] to test food.
Jim Diamond of the Sierra Club
- Ken Roseboro of the industry funded trade magazine, The Organic and Non-GMO Report
Charles Benbrook [Read Genetic Literacy Project’s Profile of [Charles Benbrook](#)], organic industry consultant

This last name on the list, Charles Benbrook, is perhaps the most controversial of them all. Consumers Union has used him in many reports to promote the organic food industry and instill fear into families about eating fruits and vegetables. Most recently in 2015 he consulted with their staff scientists on an article with many false and misleading claims. The report mentions that “natural” pesticides used in organic farming are generally safer than “synthetic” pesticides used in conventional farming practices, an untrue statement.

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Consumers Union failed to disclose the funding Benbrook has received from industry for his consulting services as well as his research during his time at Washington State University. This is information that Consumers Union should have been aware of with Michael Hansen and Benbrook collaborating together in the gmolist.

Former United States Surgeon General Koop once described Michael Hansen’s fearmongering campaign as “baseless, manipulative and completely irresponsible.” Considering that Consumers Union has always taken a pro-vaccination stance, Hansen is also a danger to public health. Steven Druker, Claire Robinson, and John Fagan on the gmolist are all part of the Maharishi Transcendental Meditation cult which was

responsible for a measles outbreak in Iowa (Claire Robinson is the manager of the gmolist).

Consumers Union claims to empower “consumers with the knowledge they need to make better and more informed choices” and claim to be free of “commercial influences”. This may be true on matters such as interest rates and warning about the dangers of cigarettes. When it comes to our food supply their senior staff scientist appears to be deeply influenced by corporations with the goal to spread fear rather than knowledge.

This article originally appeared on We Love GMOs and Vaccines here and was reposted with permission of the author.

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