

Podcast: Meet Mary Mangan—the biologist who crashes anti-GMO events and debunks junk science on Twitter



Mary Mangan.
Image: Cornell
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Science

In October 2018, former Reuters journalist and anti-GMO activist Carey Gillam spoke at a small church in Cambridge, Massachusetts as she toured the US promoting her book [White Wash: The Story of a Weed Killer, Cancer and the Corruption of Science](#). The book is an investigation into Monsanto's alleged efforts to hide evidence that its weed killer Roundup (glyphosate) causes cancer. It builds on four years of open records requests filed by [U.S. Right to Know](#), the organic industry-funded nonprofit Gillam works for.

The audience that night was largely sympathetic to Gillam's thesis—except for one attendee, cell biologist and science writer [Mary Mangan](#). Mangan wrote a scolding review of the book—[Hogwash! A review of Whitewash by Carey Gillam](#)—but offered the author and her publisher a chance to answer 10 questions before releasing the review, which they refused to do. Knowing that Gillam had ignored evidence that refuted her arguments, Mangan decided to ask Gillam the questions in person [watch [a video of their exchange here](#)].

On this episode of Biotech Facts and Fallacies, Mangan joins GLP editor Cameron English to discuss the interaction with Gillam and her unique approach to spreading science literacy on Twitter, through [animated videos](#) and evidence-based articles aimed at a popular audience. Contrary to the psychological research suggesting that [evidence doesn't matter](#) to consumers, facts can change people's opinions on controversial science topics, [Mangan says](#). The key is to adapt to your audience and present the science in a compelling manner.

Mangan also tackles recent biotech controversies, including overheated fears of the [Impossible burger](#), produced with genetically engineered yeast, and Facebook's recent [decision to ban](#) infamous anti-GMO activist Mike "the Health Ranger" Adams, who once [compared Monsanto](#) to the Nazi regime and promoted "[juice detoxification](#)" as a cancer prevention strategy. While Americans view freedom of speech as an inalienable right, does that constitutional protection extend to demonstrably false health claims that can kill people?

Mary Mangan holds a PhD in cell, molecular, and developmental biology from the University of Rochester. She co-founded OpenHelix, a company that provides awareness and training on open source genomics software tools. Follow her on Twitter [@mem_somerville](#)

Cameron J. English is the GLP's senior agricultural genetics and special projects editor. Follow him on Twitter [@camjenglish](#)

The GLP's Biotech Facts and Fallacies podcast is produced by [Sauce Auxiliary](#) and available for subscription on [iTunes](#) and [Spotify](#).