

Viewpoint: For decades, environmental NGOs have ‘disseminated propaganda deliberately targeted at misinforming the public’ — and there are real life consequences

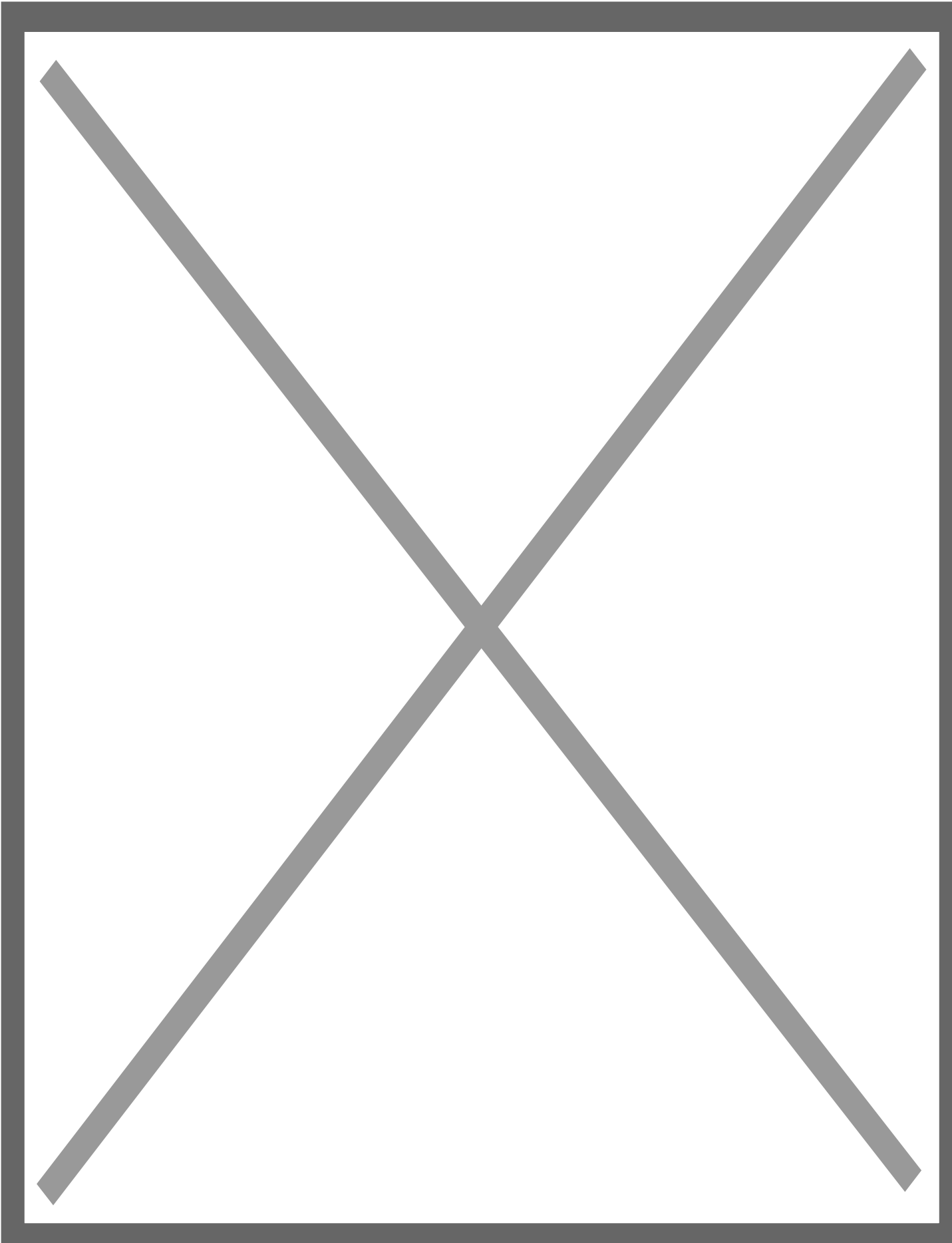
For over 20 years now, activist environmental non-governmental organizations (eNGOs) like Greenpeace, Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, the Third World Network, the Pesticide Action Network and hundreds of others, have disseminated [propaganda deliberately targeted at misinforming](#) the public. The misinformation these eNGOs have been sharing with the public is presented as “information” and has mainly been about [modern agricultural practices](#) that involve the use of chemicals and genetically modified crops. Between 2012 and 2016, activist organizations spent [over US\\$850 million](#) advocating against [biotechnology](#). While many of these organizations have been focused solely on agriculture and the environment, many have been involved in disseminating anti-vaccination content. The goal of these organizations is to reduce the public’s trust in science. While the social costs of deliberately deceiving the public were minimal in previous years, during the past year of the Covid-19 pandemic, the costs are visibly more noticeable.

The success of eNGO misinformation campaigns is now being measured in the rate of needless deaths resulting from citizens too terrified to receive a Covid-19 vaccine and thereby continuing to spread the virus. Spending 20 years to ensure the public lacks trust in science and innovative food and health products now puts these eNGOs in a precarious position, as they have remained silent in their opposition to all of the Covid-19 vaccines that have been developed using biotechnology. All Covid-19 vaccines have been developed with the help of biotechnology, yet not a single eNGO has publicly stated or supported the safety of these vaccines. Why is this the case? The reason is that if eNGOs do have to publicly support biotech Covid-19 vaccines, then people all over the world would realize that they have been lied to by these eNGOs and will stop providing donations to them, resulting in most of them ceasing to exist. When your entire business is based on lying to the public, the truth can have a devastating impact on the ability to survive once the truth is learned.

Science and agriculture have too small a budget to refute eNGO mistruths

This crisis has developed due to the imbalance of factual information to counter eNGO propaganda. The agriculture and food industries have worked diligently to provide information to the public that is factual. It seems odd to write about information being factual, but sadly for those of us that are trying to help communicate about science, this is our reality. eNGOs aren’t accountable to anyone and are free to deliberately mislead the public with whatever emotional statements they feel like making. Science communicators need to provide evidence, which, while important, isn’t capable of generating a corresponding emotional response.

Image not found or type unknown



Credit: CDC

The simple truth is that far less money is invested in providing this factual information to consumers and the public. One factor that plays a role is the lack of ability for governments and regulatory agencies to proactively communicate about the safety and benefits of new agricultural and food technologies. Governments and regulators have FAQ web pages that provide information when it is requested, as well as sources that can be referenced by those seeking further details or information. What governments and regulators cannot do is promote the safety or environmental benefits of agricultural and food innovations. This results in a communication void about the benefits and safety of these innovations. Governments and regulators are viewed by the public as trusted sources of information about food security and food safety, yet they have virtually no capacity to promote this. This information void has largely been filled by disinformation and misinformation from eNGOs.

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other 'disruptive' innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter.

[SIGN UP](#)

Given that eNGOs have worked tirelessly for over 20 years to terrify the public, the result is now a public that is fearful of innovations, resulting in science such as Covid-19 vaccines being feared or even avoided. Numerous jurisdictions are reporting thousands of vaccination spots are not being filled, resulting in tens of thousands fewer people vaccinated each and every day. While vaccines aren't a cure for Covid-19, [they help reduce the spread of the virus](#), resulting in fewer individuals having to be hospitalized. Lower vaccination rates will contribute to higher mortality rates from Covid-19 than would have been the case with greater levels of public trust. The responsibility for these needless deaths lies with those eNGOs that have deceived the public about what is safe and what is not.

Stuart J. Smyth is a professor in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics and holds the industry funded research chair in Agri-Food Innovation at the University of Saskatchewan. Follow him on Twitter [@stuartsmth66](#)

A version of this article was originally posted at [SAIFood](#) and has been reposted here with permission. SAIFood can be found on Twitter [@SAIFood_blog](#)