

Viewpoint: How distributing misinformation about farming, food and agricultural biotechnology became a big business

B iotechnology began to be applied to crop agriculture in the early 1980s, with the first commercialized products coming to market in the [mid-1990s](#). Biotech-developed crops, fruits and vegetables have been approved for production and consumption, following over [4,400 risk assessments by government scientists](#) in over 70 countries. Over the past 25 years, no adverse health effects have been proven (although you can always find false claims made on the internet), confirming the validity of the risk assessment conclusions. Yet, despite billions of consumers safely purchasing and eating biotech or genetically modified (GM) foods, deliberately misleading information still abounds. The objective of misinformation is to scare, persuade, and instill fear into individuals about consuming perfectly safe products.

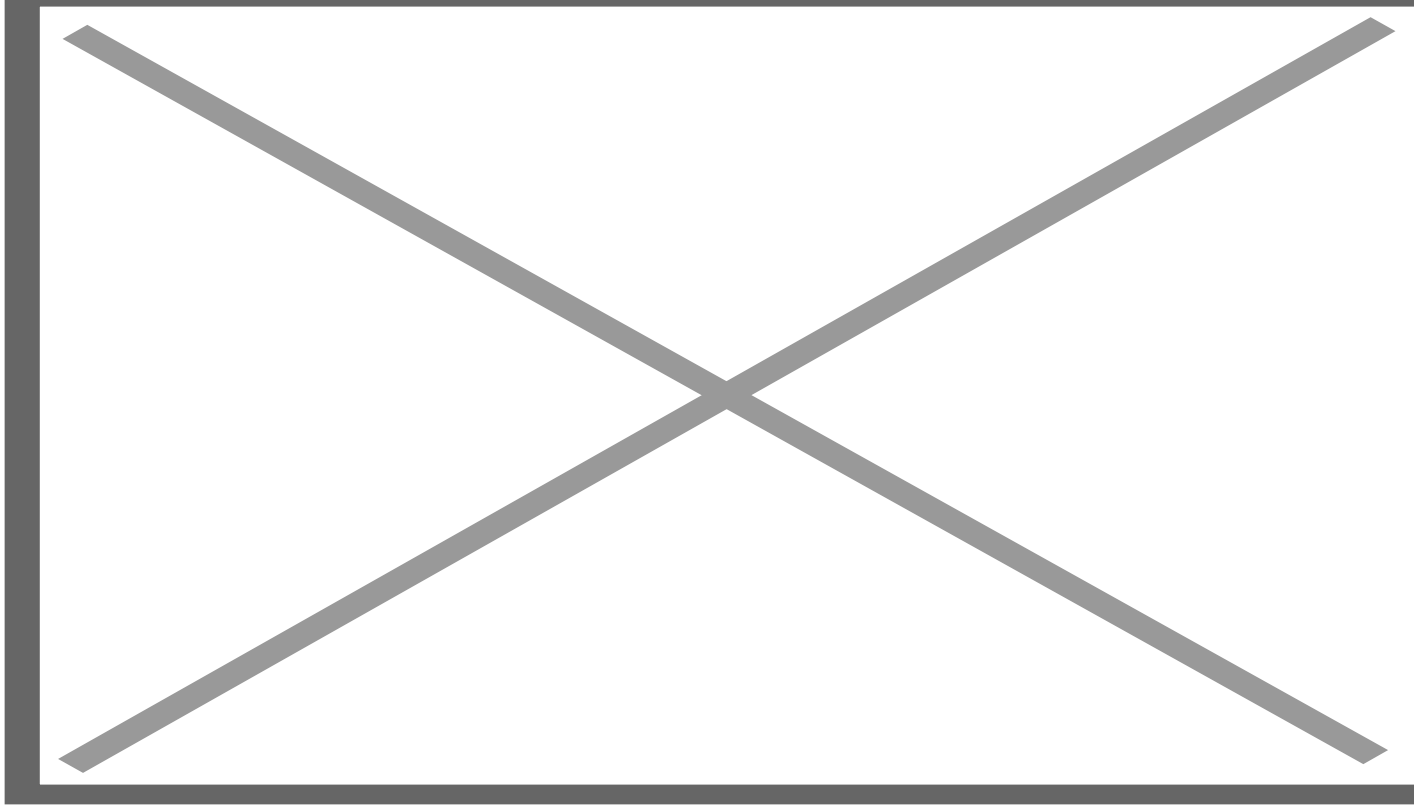
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Not just an agriculture issue

Throughout 2020, the world witnessed the rapid pace of Covid virus research and vaccine development. This work was carried out by biotech companies, and the Covid vaccines that we have are also biotech products, having been developed by innovative genomic sciences. Similar to GM foods, biotech vaccines have redefined the next stage of their industry and opened up opportunities. However, this has almost meant that as vaccine rollouts began in 2021, the circulation of misinformation about the safety of Covid vaccines steadily increased, raising questions in millions about the safety of Covid vaccines. False and incorrect information has been spread by anti-vaccination groups, organizations, and even our social media influencers ([Nicki Minaj](#) being the more recent offender).

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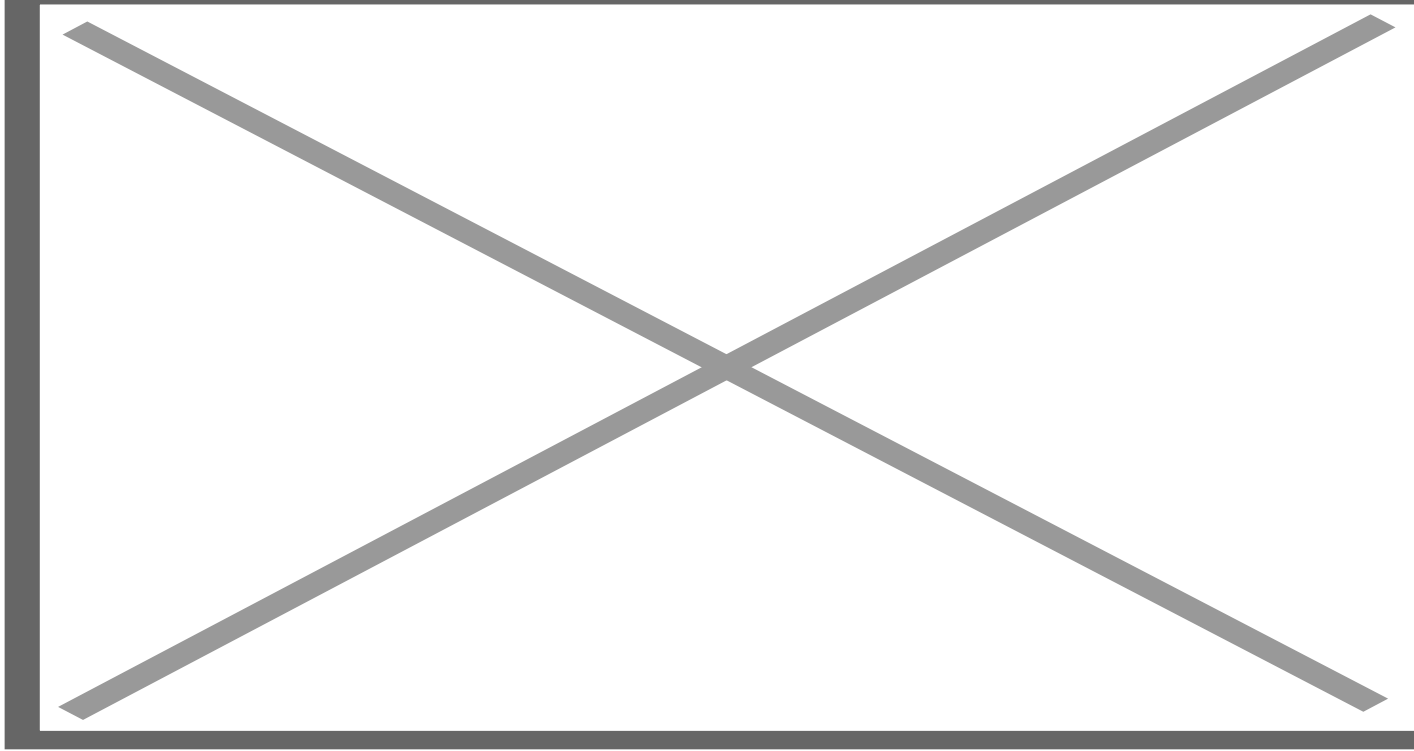
Credit: ABC News Australia

As someone who has long communicated the safety and benefits of biotech crops and foods, it's very interesting to observe the frustration of politicians about the misinformation campaigns of anti-vax groups. In the world of safe biotech crops and food, these same politicians don't demonstrate the same level of frustration surrounding misinformation. Additionally, mainstream media has voiced its frustration about the spread of Covid vaccine misinformation. The irony of this is particularly galling as mainstream media has played a significant role in the dissemination and spread of misinformation about the safety and benefits of biotech foods.

It's all political

Political parties in many countries have contributed to the spread of misinformation about biotech foods (none of which we will link to, because we do not want to promote their ideas). From calls for bans on technologies to insinuating that consumption of biotech foods causes an assortment of harmful health effects, including being responsible for causing cancer. Mainstream media has collaborated in spreading misinformation by airing programs that included untrained activists claiming to be experts, when the reality is that they have no formal training or expertise to back up their accusations of harm and danger.

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Credit: Andy Katz/Zuma

Politicians and mainstream media should not be surprised there is a substantial proportion of populations that are uncertain or hesitant to receive a biotech developed Covid vaccination. Both groups have been compliant in disseminating misinformation for the past 20 years about the harms and dangers of biotech foods, so why wouldn't they do the same for Covid vaccinations? The frustrations expressed by politicians and media in food secure industrial countries reveals their glaring hypocrisy, as it was easy for them to be opposed to biotech foods as the shelves in the grocery stores they shop at every week are full of healthy nutritional options. Suddenly, now that their health and economy may be adversely affected, they rage and yell at the problem they helped to create.

The triangle of politics, media, and money

The problem is that politicians and the media have objectives, especially ones that are capable of financially benefiting them. Distributing misinformation is big business, that can be very lucrative. Politicians and media have financially benefited from their opposition to biotech foods, deliberately ignoring thousands of articles confirming evidence of their safety and benefits. It would be refreshing, although completely unlikely, for politicians and the media that have publicly opposed biotech foods, to now stand up and publicly admit they were wrong about the safety of biotech products, be they vaccines or foods.

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