# Viewpoint: IARC’s aspartame report echoes globally-rejected glyphosate cancer determination

Food additives like artificial sweeteners are relentlessly tested by health authorities, researchers, independent labs and activist scientists (while we rarely examine natural food products for the same health risks). After three decades of intense scrutiny, aspartame has continuously been declared as safe for human consumption by all national regulatory agencies and EFSA.

As it is a chemical used by large corporations in the food industry, it has attracted the unending ire of activist zealots who have (rather unreasonably) devoted their lives to spreading fear and disinformation on aspartame. Now, with the Ramazzini cabal working with NGOs, some media-savvy activist scientists and US tort law firms, they managed to take control of the ball with an International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) monograph on aspartame. After three decades, their time is now.

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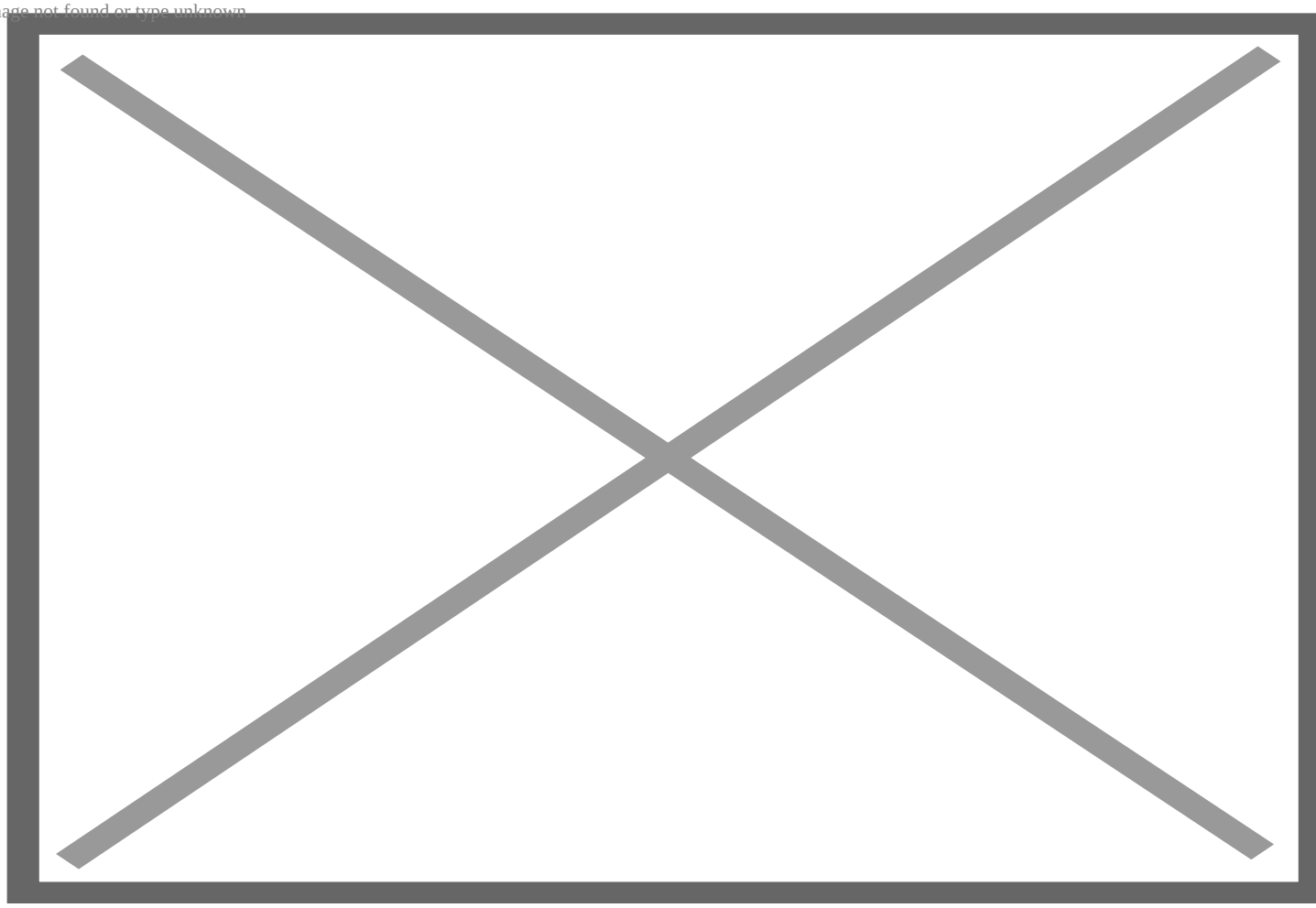

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Only one little problem… The IARC Monograph 134 on aspartame is illegitimate.

## JECFA or IARC?

Within the WHO, there is a specific scientific body tasked with assessing and monitoring food additives like aspartame. It is known as JECFA (The Joint Food and Agriculture Organization/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives). On their website, they describe their remit:

> *JECFA serves as an independent scientific expert committee which performs risk assessments and provides advice to FAO, WHO and the member countries of both organizations, as well as to the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC).*

The Codex Alimentarius Commission responsibility is important as any international trade standard and any trade dispute refers back to the CAC (which relies on JECFA's risk assessments). Their work is important and seriously managed.

JECFA last did a chemical and technical assessment of aspartame in 2015 with follow-ups at their 19th, 20th, 21st, 23rd and 24th meetings where they allocated an ADI (acceptable daily intake) for aspartame of 0-40 mg/kg bw. At their 25th meeting, further rat and human studies were assessed and their previous ADI was confirmed. In 2021, JECFA scheduled a re-assessment of aspartame to take place from June 27 to July 6, 2023.

As JECFA is the official body to assess food additives within the WHO, why on earth is IARC sticking its nose in where it doesn't belong by doing a monograph themselves on aspartame (at practically the same time as JECFA's re-assessment)???

There are several possible reasons why IARC insisted on pushing through and conducting a monograph on aspartame when it was clearly out of its jurisdiction.

- First, the Collegium Ramazzini fellows have no influence on JECFA experts. It would be difficult to conduct their aspartame campaign operations via an agency upon which these activist scientists have no leverage. As the last chapter demonstrated, Ramazzini has been trying (and failing) to condemn aspartame for two decades, so using IARC to do what they always do – declare aspartame as a carcinogen – is a walk in the park.
- JECFA conducts risk assessments (while IARC conducts hazard assessments). So when JECFA concludes that aspartame is safe at a certain dose (basic common sense) of up to 40 mg/kg bw per day, then people understand how many diet sodas they can safely drink per day (depending on the body weight, the safe limit is around 36 cans per day). This is far less impactful than an IARC hazard-based declaration that aspartame is probably carcinogenic (regardless how much you have consumed in your lifetime – one can of diet soda will tick the box).
- US tort lawyers cannot take soda manufacturers to court on the basis of a risk assessment that says aspartame is safe when consumed in moderation. The Predatorts would have to show, in court, that their plaintiffs were reasonable in consuming so much soda. It would be much easier to pay a Ramazzini fellow to take the stand and declare "WHO, aspartame, cancer … please leave my consulting fees at the door!".

- Finally, IARC doesn't care about other organisations in the WHO or internal protocols. They never listened in the past to WHO concerns and IARC's management, evidently suffering from a Messiah Complex, believe their methods are far superior than other scientific agencies. They are only nominally part of the WHO when it suits them (to claim credibility), but otherwise IARC acts autonomously, relying on its 27 Member States for funding and decisions.

Frankly the WHO should have dissociated itself from this malignant tumour after the glyphosate debacle, but that would have taken courage, a virtue in short supply in international organisations.

## The lady's not for turning

IARC is also ignoring the requests of two of its largest Member States. Japan and the United States, members of the IARC board, wrote the WHO last year requesting that IARC not conduct a monograph on aspartame as it was the jurisdiction of JECFA and two different WHO studies with potentially different conclusions would confuse the public. Under transparency requirements, the United States FDA published their letter dated 12 August 2022. They summarise their key messages:

> *In our opinion, JECFA is better suited to assess any risk associated with the consumption of aspartame because it considers all relevant toxicological endpoints, including carcinogenicity. Furthermore, JECFA is the primary source of scientific advice for the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) pertaining to food additives, which is aspartame's primary use and thus important to Codex Member States that base their food safety measures on Codex Alimentarius food safety standards. For these and other reasons outlined in the US Letter to WHO on Aspartame, we believe that a JECFA review of aspartame would have a greater impact on food safety, and public health, than one conducted by IARC*.

This seems very clear and unequivocal: IARC needs to back down. Given this letter was sent 10 months before the date of the panel meeting, IARC had enough time to drop aspartame from their monograph (they have made late changes before, as was the case with Monograph 112).

The WHO reply came almost seven weeks later on 29 September 2023 and claimed that they were complementary because IARC was going to do a hazard assessment while JECFA was conducting a risk assessment. What they failed to admit, and what the FDA representatives surely knew, is that the only difference between the two is that you first conduct a hazard assessment and then measure exposures in a risk assessment to see if those hazard observations are significant. JECFA would not need further hazard information as they have access to the same studies. In other words, an aspartame hazard assessment would be meaningless unless your goal is to confuse individuals and feed opportunists.

What is stunning to consider is that in 2017, after the internal conflicts IARC made within the WHO when their glyphosate monograph contradicted other WHO studies, the IARC director was called in to be givena warning and a reminder that they need to coordinate with other WHO scientific committees to avoid another case of contradictory and confusing messages on the safety of certain substances. The WHO seemed to already have been aware that IARC was planning an aspartame monograph because they specifically mentioned that JECFA would have priority:

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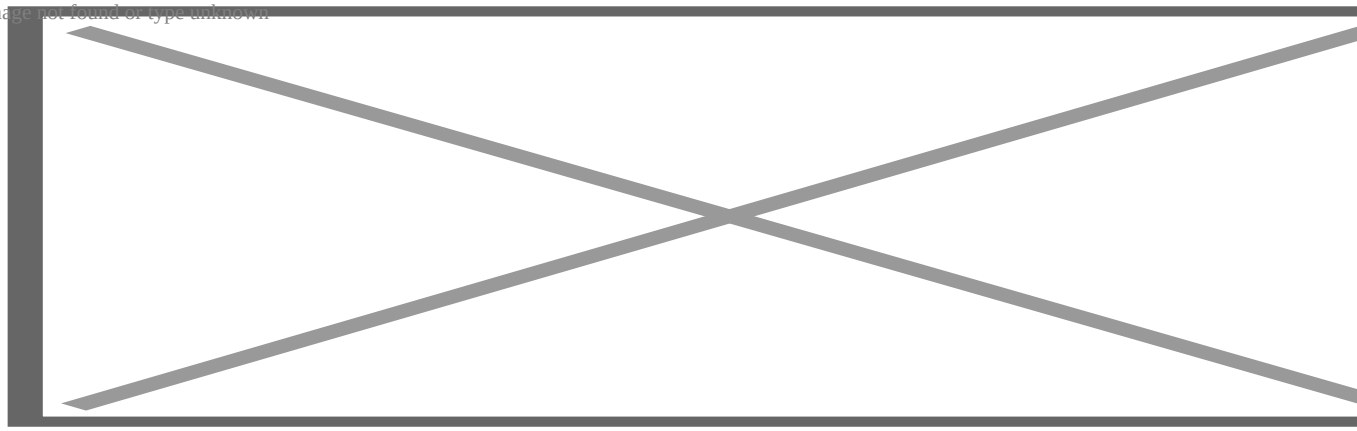

The WHO has never said this meeting happened and that they agreed to do two separate studies

Needless to say IARC ignored the WHO request here and pushed forward with their own aspartame monograph. They tried to claim in their Director's Report in March, 2023 that the two studies at the same time by two different agencies was necessary. More interesting, perhaps to defend themselves from the Japanese and American criticisms, they agreed to the US demand to withhold publication of the IARC results until after the JECFA meeting closes on July 6.

This raises a conflict between what the WHO said in reply to the US FDA letter and what the IARC Director's Report said. The WHO letter stated that IARC would provide their aspartame monograph to JECFA and that JECFA would then integrate this hazard assessment into their overall report.

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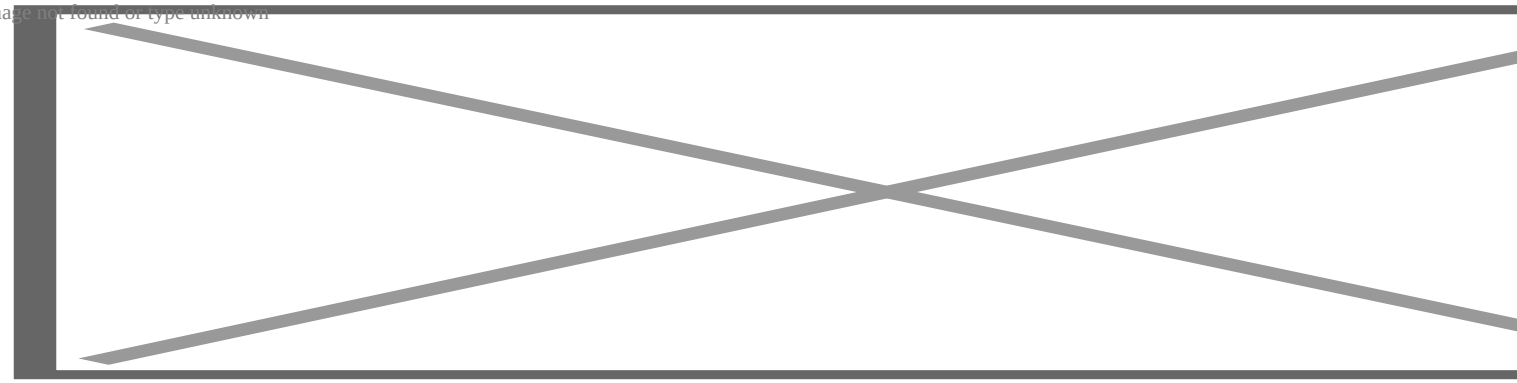

In other words, according to the WHO's secretariat, there would be only one publication, that being from

JECFA. In the IARC Director's Report, however, it states that "*the IARC meeting summary will be published in The Lancet Oncology shortly after the JECFA meeting*". IARC said nothing about JECFA being the sole publisher of their monograph (which involves several other substances). IARC is once again ignoring the WHO's decisions and public statements.

And let's be serious. What my series on IARC's Dirty 30 demonstrated is that these research zealots will stop at nothing to win an argument, including subcontracting attack journalists at LeMonde to undermine agencies like EFSA, threatening journals that don't remove critical articles about their monographs and straight out lying when confronted with scientific integrity charges. Let's not think for a moment that IARC will quietly listen to the JECFA decisions about the validity of their Monograph 134.

Because IARC refused to listen to the WHO or its own Member States, JECFA was forced to publish a paragraph linked to their homepage to try to explain what IARC is doing and then stretched to justify why their studies are complementary. If you wonder why so many scientists hate the Ramazzini-IARC cabal, you need look no further than the short, sharp tone of this WHO press release. Like the WHO's IPCS report that contradicted IARC on their glyphosate findings (at the same time schooling the media in their press release on the difference of a risk assessment and a hazard assessment and why, without exposure levels, hazard assessments like IARC's are basically useless), come July, you will begin to be able to measure the snark coming out of Rome.

Like the little bully that it is, animosity aside, IARC is once again getting its way. But they still had to go through the motions of conducting a hazard assessment working group on aspartame. Will they invite all of the best known scientific experts on aspartame to sit on their panel? Come on now, this is IARC. They're inviting their friends from their network.

## IARC's aspartame monograph working group panel members

We have seen in the past how IARC monographs have brought individuals into their expert panels with little or no expertise in the field of study, no publications and no value to the process. Perhaps the most famous case is how IARC's Kurt Straif allowed his Ramazzini friend and Predatort mercenary, Chris Portier, to be a late addition to Monograph 112 (after the herbicide, glyphosate. was mysteriously added six months later to a monograph focusing only on insecticides). Portier admitted under oath that he had never worked or published on glyphosate.

Who then will be sitting on the aspartame expert panel?

A toxicologist I interviewed, with more than ten years' experience on aspartame, was stunned by the number of people on the panel who had zero expertise on food additives or artificial sweeteners (I suppose all of the experts are serving on the JECFA aspartame panel later this month). But I have followed IARC long enough to know that nothing surprises me. You don't look for expertise, you look for networks and opportunists.

One of the curious things about the participants to IARC Monograph 134 expert panel is that a large number of the members had recently sat on a completely unrelated IARC monograph. The table below shows the two monographs: on the left, the experts who were on IARC's Monograph 128: Acrolein,

Arecoline, and Crotonaldehyde (held remotely in 2020) and the same experts presently occupying important chairs at the IARC aspartame monograph working group. As members of the expert panel are not allowed to be paid for their time on the IARC panel, I wonder why almost a third of members of Monograph 128 were selected again for Monograph 134. Say what you like, at least when the Ramazzini Don, Martyn T Smith, used to show up in Lyon, it was to secure lucrative litigation consultant contracts and to ensure that IARC cites at least ten of his publications in their monograph.

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Was IARC just too lazy to send out a call for experts? Did they even want to have experts on their monograph panels? Are these members all just really nice people IARC administrators liked to have around?

I thought, with the days of Loomis, Straif, Guyton and Wild well behind us, that IARC would have cleaned up their act but they seem to be the same “Agency for Hire” with little regard for scientific integrity or basic professionalism. Not to mention their continued, obsessive anti-industry bias.

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How professional is it for IARC, in their official List of Participants, to refer to industry observers, who have no role in the process, with the assumption that their undisclosed consulting fees must be “substantial”? A) does that matter and B) how much do UN staff receive each month? Not only unprofessional, IARC staff are also, simply put, petty.

## Dr Touvier

One particular member of the IARC aspartame expert panel is an interesting actor in the activist campaign against food additives. Mathilde Touvier is a French epidemiologist associated with ongoing studies known as NutriNet-Santé in France. Results have raised alarm bells about most every processed food ingredient but studies like NutriNet-Santé are always questionable as they rely on self-reporting from a certain class of motivated volunteers with various lifestyle factors (a research method that is often unreliable).

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Mathilde Touvier Credit: BBC Panorama

Touvier is something of a media darling. Not a week goes by where she is not on some morning wellness TV show or some gala lecture expounding on the dangers of processed food like aspartame. While she pulls out her white coat when it suits the media, her message is well-crafted, polished campaign material, not only citing her research but then following it up with a good dose of anti-industry rhetoric and simplistic, naturopathic solutions. In many of her presentations, she is positioning herself as a hero standing up to the food industry. A modern-day Marianne.

But by any scientific standard, Dr Touvier has also behaved unethically.

A good deal of screentime was given to Touvier during a recent BBC Panorama special about the evils of aspartame and other food additives, mysteriously timed to coincide with the beginning of the IARC aspartame monograph meeting (if you think this was just a coincidence and not politically orchestrated by interest groups, then you are profoundly stupid).

At a certain point during the "news" programme, Touvier revealed some important new data from her research. She admitted the findings were not yet published and not yet peer reviewed but Touvier knows the power of the BBC would be far greater than any journal article (and also assumes, I suppose, that a peer review validation of her research would not have mattered).

> *BBC's Panorama was given exclusive access to Dr Touvier's early results.*
>
> *They are yet to be peer reviewed – a crucial verification step for scientific studies – but she said they are still concerning.*
> *"We observed significant associations between emulsifier intake and increased risk of cancer overall – and breast cancer notably – but also with cardiovascular diseases," she says."*
>
> *Source*

These are important charges that have not yet been validated. An important part of the scientific process has always been that research must first be subjected to scrutiny by one's peers before any claims are made public. Touvier's behaviour here goes against every standard of academic integrity, but if you are a media darling like her, then it is easy to forget such ethical standards when that beast needs to be fed.

This is typical of the calibre and character of an activist scientist. Collegium Ramazzini should give Mathilde Touvier an honorary fellowship (except her publicist has probably advised her to keep her distance from that reputation-sucking serpent).

When the Predatorts use the IARC aspartame monograph to take companies like the Coca-Cola Corporation to the cleaners for billions of dollars, they would do very well to hire Mathilde Touvier as their lead litigation consultant. While the money is incredibly good, I'm sure Touvier is already looking beyond that (to the film rights). Maybe she should already contact Jennifer Baichwal – I'm sure she'll be free to take another slam at industry on behalf of her Predatort funders.

This sordid story is a slow moving trainwreck.



## Ramazzini representation

Given the time and energy that the Institute Ramazzini has invested in their two-decade campaign against aspartame, shouldn't they have loaded the deck at IARC with their foot soldiers?

Of course head of research at Ramazzini's Cesare Moltoni Center, Daniele Mandrioli, attended the IARC aspartame panel. Daniele seems to be showing up everywhere these days but has been quite busy working with NGOS like Pesticide Action Network campaigning against glyphosate. As he usually ends his speeches asking for donations to his research centre, I can only assume that his involvement this week in Lyon was purely financially motivated.

Surprisingly, the Ramazzini Godfather of the 10 Key Characteristics, Martyn T Smith, did not participate in the IARC aspartame panel. As it is perhaps time to groom the next generation, Smith sent his Berkeley colleague and protégé, Luoping Zhang, to ensure that his new checklist methodology will be respected. She was one of the co-authors on Smith's Key Characteristics paper. Luoping Zhang has also published papers related to Smith's main litigation consulting fields (benzene and glyphosate) so with this IARC experience it seems she is now ready to become a star witness for the plaintiffs.

ramazzini

## A monkey on my back

Quite honestly though, each of the 27 IARC Member States could send a pack of baboons to Lyon for ten days of meetings on aspartame and the outcome would have been the same. Between the inevitability of a hazard assessment finding the remote possibility of a cancer to the Ramazzini 10 Key Characteristics acting as an automated cancer checklist for practically any substance, there is no need to have any expertise at all for the IARC monographs. That people still take this little agency seriously is a mystery to anyone who bothers to look behind the curtain.

But you can't put a baboon on the stand in an American courtroom to serve as an expert witness for the Predatorts using hundreds of thousands of plaintiffs to drain a targeted soda company out of a decade of income. So this little dog and pony show will now move from Lyon to Atlanta.

And the AsparTort series will now also move to Part 4, focusing on the Predatorts who have been lurking in the shadows over the last year, funding scientists, NGOs and media organisations to prep for the aspartame litigation circus. As these "Sugar Daddies" need to move fast to be able to claim their honey-pot spot on the Aspartame Plaintiff Steering Committee, we'll see them coming out of the woodworks in the coming months. Although this scandal just writes itself, someone should really say something about it.

How can these research recidivists keep getting away with this? I asked that in a previous SlimeGate series after exposing 30 cases of corruption within IARC that were largely ignored by the media and the scientific community. The shrill shill shouts of "Monsanto!!!" (often by IARC staffers themselves) was enough to keep any journalist from looking at the evidence and doing their job. With aspartame, will anyone have the courage to look at IARC's scandalous behaviour or will public outrage toward large food corporations prevent clear thinking and fair reporting? Or will aspartame be like the glyphosate Predatort scam – the media will blindly cover the court cases with rage and fury against the corporate greed and malfeasance and not realise the entire tort house of cards is resting on the fatal combination of opportunism, ignorance and incompetence. It all started in June, 2023.

Slime always rises to the top.

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