

'Win for science' as French court dismisses defamation lawsuit by anti-GMO scientist Seralini

In a major victory for science, a French court on 17 October dismissed a defamation lawsuit by the notorious French anti-GMO activist scientist Gilles-Eric Seralini, finding instead in favor of three fact-finding journalists whom Seralini had sued for calling his work “fraudulent.”

Geraldine Woessner, one of the three journalists targeted by Seralini, announced on X/Twitter:

I am pleased to announce that jurisprudence has FINALLY changed: in the defamation case brought against me by Gilles-Eric Seralini, for having referred to his 2012 study on GMO-fed rats as ‘fraudulent,’ the court has just ruled in my favor. Have a great day!

She added:

My colleagues @MacLesggy and Patrick Cohen, who was also being pursued, have been acquitted.

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Fraudulent and misleading

The case dates back to 2019 when Seralini, a French biologist at the University of Caen, sued Mac Lesggy, Patrick Cohen, and Geraldine Woessner for defamation after the three journalists had described the findings of his controversial – and subsequently retracted – study on rats fed on GMO corn and Roundup as fraudulent and misleading.

[Patrick Cohen](#), for instance, had referred on French television to Seralini’s controversial paper as “one of the worst scientific deceptions of the past ten years.” Seralini, through his lawyers, then filed a complaint for defamation in the Judicial Court of Paris, France, demanding 50,000 euros from each journalist in damages and claiming his health had suffered in the controversy.

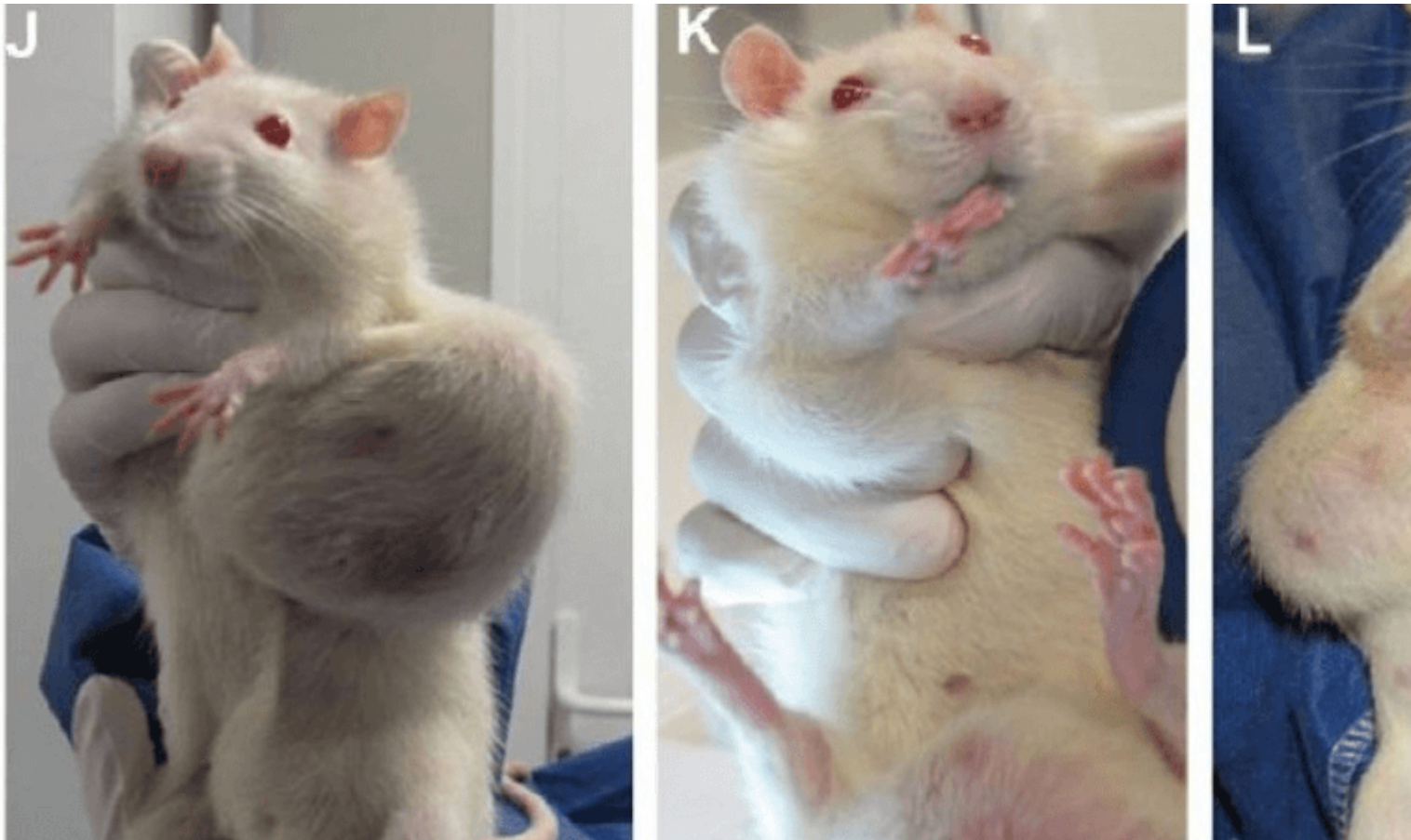
However, the court rejected Seralini’s arguments. Referring in particular to Woessner’s use of the term “fraudulent” to describe his 2012 retracted paper, the French court ruled that in using the term, she had relied on “an abundant factual basis” which justified “using this semantics, which should not be understood in the strict sense of scientific fraud, but rather as the criticism of acts contravening the ethics that should surround the production and media coverage of scientific work.” According to the judges, Woessner acted in good faith and was acquitted of the defamation charge.

Being denied a valuable product

Scientists were jubilant on hearing the news that the French journalists had been cleared. “Great news for science and freedom of speech!” tweeted Channa Prakash, professor of plant molecular genetics at Tuskegee University in the United States. “Let’s call fraud a fraud!”

Prakash added: “This fraudulent paper claiming that GMOs cause cancer in rats was used by several countries, including Kenya and India, to ban or halt GM crops. Sèralini should be asked to pay for damages done to farmers in these countries for being denied a valuable product because of his mischief.”

Although the flaws in the original 2012 publication were immediately evident to many scientists and later led to it being retracted by the journal Food & Chemical Toxicology, Sèralini’s paper caused enormous media and public furor because it contained gory images of rats with gigantic tumors. The Kenyan government proceeded to ban GMO imports, a ban only recently lifted by the Ruto government and now mired in court cases launched in Nairobi by anti-GMO campaign groups.



Perfect example of flawed science

Commenting from Kenya, Professor Richard Oduor, Kenya University Biotech Consortium (Kubico) chair and Acting Registrar, Research, Innovation and Outreach at Kenyatta University, said the case was bound to be dismissed and added, “he [Séralini] should apologize publicly.”

Dr Paul Chege, a Kenyan crop biotechnologist, said Seralini’s paper was a perfect example of flawed science, which is why it was retracted. “However, this paper had a powerful influence on crop biotech policies in the Global South. I am happy that we are turning a corner now and formulating agri-biotech policies based on facts,” Dr Chege added.

Kenya’s Dr Susan Moenga, a biotech researcher at NuCicer who works on chickpeas, said the verdict is welcome, but we must move on. “Going forward, we should build robust science communication to the public so that we do not find ourselves in the same situation as we did ten years ago,” Dr Moenga said. “I am happy that Kenya is taking a leading step in genetic engineering adoption, allowing innovation in our space and context supported by rational regulatory frameworks.”

Delusional conspiracy theories

Speaking to the [Alliance for Science](#), Géraldine Woessner said she felt “relieved” by the judgment of the French court. She noted that while “our witnesses [were] eminent specialists on the issue,” Séralini had relied on testimony from three people: a professional anti-GMO lawyer, “a specialist on the ecology of penguins with no expertise on the subject,” and a Greens MEP who is “the former boss of Biocoop, an organic food giant.”

Woessner also pointed to the long-term damage left by the Séralini controversy, which has meant that public research on GMOs “is no longer feasible in France” and has left a media legacy of “delusional conspiracy theories” and mistrust in science “for which we have collectively paid the price, during the Covid crisis.” She added: “Everything remains to be done to repair the enormous societal damages inflicted” by the whole affair.

Dr. Victor Oria (PhD) is a LEAD Fellow, Prof Janine Erler Research Group, Biotech Research and Innovation Centre – University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Find Victor on X [@Nyuka_Bel](#)

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