

## COMPETING INTERESTS STATEMENT

The author declares competing financial interests: details accompany the full-text HTML version of the paper at <http://www.nature.com/naturebiotechnology/>.

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1. Schubert, D. *Nat. Biotechnol.* **27**, 802–803 (2009).

## David Schubert replies:

Suzanne Harris has four concerns about my letter in the September 2009 issue of *Nature Biotechnology*<sup>1</sup>. She claims that I implied Parrott's comments were made as a representative of the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI), that I misstated the ILSI agenda and lobbying status, and that I incorrectly stated that ILSI was banned from World Health Organization activities.

The first is simply not true. Nowhere was this implied, for my only goal was to demonstrate that Parrott is not an unbiased academic observer in the transgenic food debate because he has associations with industry-sponsored institutions, such as ILSI. He has, in fact, in the past co-authored letters with industry-backed scientists to *Nature Biotechnology* similar to that of Harris<sup>2</sup>.

The remaining concerns relate to the legal definition of lobbying or are subjective in nature. With respect to the latter, I will only furnish a few additional references, from which interested readers can make up their own minds.

With respect to the agenda of ILSI, although I may be wrong, it seems logical to me that an organization that is heavily funded by the world's largest food, tobacco and transgenic seed companies is going to promote the interests of their support group. Although I did quote a referenced website regarding another group's assessment of the ILSI 'agenda', I recommend an examination of additional documents that some may say reach a similar conclusion. These include citations relating to ILSI activities in "Integrity in Science"<sup>3</sup> published by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI; Washington, DC) and an article by Michael Jacobson<sup>4</sup> that outlines the various ways industry is able to manipulate science and public health policy.

With respect to lobbying, I was not aware of the legal definition of a lobbying group, and in this context both my cited source for this claim and I misused the word. I apologize for this mistake. It should be pointed out, however, that there are many

ways to influence policy independently of formal lobbying, including those outlined by Jacobson<sup>4</sup>, as well as the 'sound science' approach promoted by Newt Gingrich and the Bush administration<sup>5</sup>.

Finally, with respect to the ban of ILSI from WHO activities, I did not claim that they were banned from all WHO activities. Because of space limitations, I cited a text that was heavily referenced regarding the details of the WHO incident. Additional references include the Associated Press<sup>6</sup> and CSPI<sup>7</sup>.

My conclusion that Wayne Parrott is not simply a public sector plant biologist and should not have been introduced as such remains the same and was in fact confirmed by *Nature Biotechnology*<sup>7</sup>. However, it should be the responsibility of *Nature Biotechnology* to document these conflicts of interest, not a concerned reader, such as myself. A similar conflict with industry-funded plant

biologists representing themselves as neutral commentators in the transgenic food debate was documented in these pages many years ago<sup>8</sup>.

1. Schubert, D. *Nat. Biotechnol.* **27**, 802–803; author reply 803 (2009).
2. Beachy, R. *et al.* *Nat. Biotechnol.* **20**, 1195–1196; author reply 1197 (2002).
3. <http://www.cspinet.org/integrity/>.
4. Jacobson, M.F. Lifting the veil of secrecy: corporate support for health and environmental professional associations, charities, and industry front groups. *CSPI and its Integrity in Science Project*, <[http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/lift\\_the\\_veil\\_intro.pdf](http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/lift_the_veil_intro.pdf)> (8 September 2003).
5. Schubert, D. Bush's "sound science": turning a deaf ear to reality. *The San Diego Union Tribune* <[http://legacy.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20040709/news\\_lzle-9schubert.html](http://legacy.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20040709/news_lzle-9schubert.html)> (9 July 2004).
6. Heilprin, J. WHO to rely less on US research. *Associated Press Online*. <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article/article?f=/n/a/2006/01/27/national/w150409S47.DTL>> (27 January 2006).
7. Anonymous. *Nature Biotechnology* replies. *Nat. Biotechnol.* **27**, 803 (2009).
8. Sharpe, V.A. & Gurian-Sherman, D. Competing interests. *Nat. Biotech.* **21**, 1131 (2003).

## International trade and the global pipeline of new GM crops

### To the Editor:

In a previous issue, Paul Christou and colleagues<sup>1</sup> highlighted the patchwork of laws and regulations governing tolerance levels for approved genetically modified (GM) material in non-GM food and in the labeling and traceability of GM products. A related but different problem is that of 'asynchronous approval' of new GM crops across international jurisdictions, which is of growing concern due to its potential impact on global trade. Different countries have different authorization procedures and, even if regulatory dossiers are submitted at the same time, approval is not given simultaneously (in some cases, delays can even amount to years). For instance, by mid-2009 over 40 transgenic events were approved or close to approval elsewhere but not yet approved—or not even submitted—in the European Union (EU; Brussels) (for more details, see **Supplementary Data**). Yet, like some other jurisdictions, the EU also operates a 'zero-tolerance' policy to even the smallest traces of nationally unapproved GM crops (so-called low-level presence). The resultant rejection of agricultural imports has already

caused high economic losses and threatens to disrupt global agri-food supply chains<sup>2–8</sup>.

To assess the likelihood of future incidents of low-level presence of unapproved GM material in crop shipments and to

understand related impacts on global trade and the EU's agri-food sector, we compiled a global pipeline of new GM crops. Our motivation was to obtain a realistic estimate of how many new GM crops will be commercialized in the next years, by whom and in which countries—and when these new crops will be authorized by the different trading partners of the EU.

In this context, we invited a select panel of national regulators, industry representatives, experts from national and international research institutes and actors from the global food and feed supply chain to a workshop organized at the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre in November 2008 to discuss for the first time the issue of low-level presence in view of a growing global pipeline of new GM crops. (For more details, see **Supplementary Notes**.)

