

CORRESPONDENCE

It is true that I have served both formally and informally as scientific advisor to many organizations, including the Natural Law Party, and have been an invited speaker at conferences sponsored by a range of organizations, including the National Agricultural Biotechnology Council, the Indonesian National Academy of Sciences, the National Agricultural Forum, the National Nutritional Foods Association, International Quality and Productivity Center (UK), and at functions sponsored by other organizations clearly in the mainstream of the biotechnology and agri-food industries. To emphasize one end of the spectrum of organizations with which I interact seems misleading.

It is also true that I have criticized certain standards and practices that have been adopted by parts of the biotechnology industry and by some regulatory agencies. These criticisms are not politically motivated, but are based on professional and scientific concern over the impact of those practices. Given that I am a biotechnologist by profession, have contributed to this field for over two decades, and

continue to contribute actively, I feel justified in expressing my professional opinion.

Furthermore, I find it highly inappropriate for special interests within the industry to attempt to marginalize these science-based views by calling them "political." These views certainly have an ethical and human-rights dimension, but that does not make them political.

Even if the statements in your article were accurate regarding my views (which is not the case), it would be highly inappropriate to extrapolate from those to Genetic ID's corporate policy.

The management and equity holders in every company have their own political and other perspectives. These do not reflect upon the policies of the company employing them. Genetic ID has scrupulously avoided political involvements, such as donating to political parties, while other corporations gladly seek out such associations. Are the corporate strategies of Monsanto, DuPont, and Novartis to be categorized as political plots simply because these companies donate to one or more political parties or because the individuals managing those companies espouse certain political views? I think not, and to attribute such motives to Genetic ID is misleading.

*John Fagan
Chief Scientist
Genetic ID
Fairfield, IA*

John Hodgson replies:

Dr. Fagan argues a number of points in a lawyerly fashion. Lawyers often seek to unpick the fabric of an arguments by pulling peripheral threads from its hem. I will add a few restorative stitches.

First, I have no doubt that the recorded correspondence between Genetic ID and TNO does not explicitly discuss political dimensions. However, senior TNO officials have said that the connections of Genetic ID with the Natural Law Party were "not a positive thing for TNO," a view which certainly justifies the article's claim that the political connections "in part" led to the split in the collaboration.

Second, I cannot accept that it is "certain segments of the biotechnology industry" that spread "stories" about Dr. Fagan and a connection with the Natural Law Party. The associations would be clear to anyone with a Web browser. http://www.natural-law.org/Newsletter3-GE/GE_Nwslrtrtext.html, for instance, gives us Dr. Fagan's views on genetic engineering as told to the *Natural Law Party Newsletter*. Furthermore, Dr. Fagan's book, "Genetic Engineering: The Hazards. Vedic Engineering: The Solutions" is published by

the Maharishi University of Management Press (<http://miu.edu/press/books.html>), a division of the Maharishi University of Management founded by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The Maharishi commends Fagan's book thoroughly: "This book reveals the poison to be purified and brings to light the nectar to revitalize life on earth." In addition to his post at Genetic ID, Dr. Fagan is co-director, physiology and molecular and cell biology PhD program, and dean of the graduate school at Maharishi University of Management (<http://www.natural-law.ca/genetic/JFaganCVBio.html>).

Third, Dr. Fagan feels it is "misleading" for his associations with the NLP to be highlighted and his other mainstream connections ignored. In any article, an editor will have to decide what is and what is not relevant. In a piece that deals with a stance against genetic engineering—a position shared by Dr. Fagan and the Natural Law Party (and others)—and the commercial activities of Genetic ID, establishing the NLP connections is a relevant thing to do. Reviewing the rest of Dr. Fagan's CV is not.

Fourth, Dr. Fagan argues that his criticism of biotechnology is based on professional and scientific concerns and is not politically motivated. If Dr. Fagan wishes to remain apolitical, he should avoid obvious and public associations with political movements. Furthermore, critics may detect a different motivating force, that of commerce, in the string of logic in Dr. Fagan's publications. Thus (and I paraphrase), "Genetic engineering is potentially hazardous," therefore, "Consumers may worry," therefore "We should give them choice," therefore, "We must test foods for genetically modified components," but "Only the best will do," and "Ours is the best test."

Finally, Dr. Fagan believes it is "inappropriate" to extrapolate between an individual employee's views and the policies of a corporation. However, as most companies in biotechnology would testify, an individual voice is more likely to count within a small company like Genetic ID than in large multinational corporations.

Erratum

Last month's Business and Regulatory News Brief "Birth control for alley cats" incorrectly reported that researchers have successfully immunized female cats against pregnancy and that the vaccine causes eggs to be destroyed by the immune system prior to implantation. The *Salmonella* vaccine expressing the ZP epitope will actually be tested using an oral delivery route in female cats beginning in May 1998, and the antibodies that recognize the zona pellucida actually prevent fertilization by blocking the ability of the sperm to bind to the egg. *///*



NATURE BIOTECHNOLOGY SPONSORS BIO '98 ROUNDTABLE ON PHARMACOGENOMICS

Nature Biotechnology will sponsor a roundtable discussion at Bio'98 to consider the real prospects for designing therapies that take into account genetic variation. Entitled "Pharmacogenomics: Revolution or reaction," the roundtable will explore current scientific understanding of genetic variability, the technology for harnessing this understanding to create "personalized" medicines, and the opportunities for exploiting its commercial potential.

The panel will be moderated by Andrew Marshall, senior editor at *Nature Biotechnology*. Panel members will be Aravinda Chakravarti, professor of genetics and medicine at Case Western Reserve University; Daniel Cohen, chief genomics officer and executive officer at Genset, S.A.; William Haseltine, chairman and CEO of Human Genome Sciences; Robert Lipshutz, director of genome informatics, Affymetrix; and George Poste, chief science and technology officer, SmithKline Beecham.

The roundtable will take place at the Bio'98 International Meeting & Exhibition, New York Hilton and Sheraton, in New York City from 10:30 am to 12:00 noon on June 16. For further information, please contact Stephen Cass, editorial assistant, *Nature Biotechnology*, 1-212-726-9335; email: biotech@natureny.com