Five Reasons You're Right Not To Trust Corporate Science Media - The Bloomberg Example

By Hank Campbell — July 13, 2017

Bloomberg Businessweek has written another anti-Monsanto article, nothing special about that, but this time they did something new; they consciously sought to interfere in an environmental lawsuit against Monsanto in California and to promote fear and doubt about the science community and regulators who overwhelmingly accept the science consensus on genetically-modified foods - colloquially called GMOs, because Monsanto received a patent on that one kind of genetic engineering.

It's not the first time members of this team of Peter Waldman, Lydia Mulvany, Tiffany Stecker, and Joel Rosenblatt have presented their anti-Monsanto beliefs to Bloomberg readers, what is distinct this time is that they have essentially copied and pasted talking points from an organic food industry trade group, Organic Consumers Association, to try and create belief in the science equivalent of the Obama Birther conspiracy - that a company is controlling agricultural scientists. They literally used claims we have shown Organic Consumers Association has been shopping around to every pro-organic blogger they can find.
Most of those that bit on the breezy organic-good-guy/regular-farmer-bad-guy OCA narrative are people they pay, so it appeared in the usual Huffington Post blogs and on fringe political sites like Progressive and AlterNet. As is well-known in the science community, when it comes to anti-food, anti-medicine and anti-energy beliefs, those publications are preaching to their core demographic of rich, white people. But they also extend beyond the American left. As has been shown [5], the Kremlin is a big fan of the American environmental movement [6], Russia Today maintains cozy relationships with Organic Consumers and everyone else against food, vaccines or energy, and they carried these OCA claims too.

And now Bloomberg has. Maybe, like with Danny Hakim mangling any understanding of food science [7] for the New York Times or Tucker Carlson having Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on his Fox show [8], an editor signed off on this because they know they are going to get attention from an audience - scientists - who will be outraged and don't ordinarily read their publication. That's new revenue. Maybe anti-conventional-food articles are red meat for a large chunk of their base. Whole Foods is bigger than Monsanto, after all. Or maybe they are developing a credibility problem.

And so we get to me, and you, and the 300 scientists and doctors on our Board of Scientific Advisors, and our millions of readers, and all our donors who fund our mission to be pro-science consumer advocates. These four journalists did no fact-checking of any kind but nonetheless state (emphasis mine):

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\text{Monsanto documents show the company commissioned scientists to publish papers rebutting IARC. Reminiscent of tobacco companies, it also funneled money to front groups, according to a plaintiffs' court filing. The groups, with names such as Genetic Literacy Project and American Council on Science and Health, published articles praising the EPA and attacking IARC, which they called on Congress to defund. The plaintiffs claim that Monsanto established a program called Let Nothing Go, through which it made payments to people with no apparent industry ties to post online comments defending Monsanto, its chemicals, and GMOs in news articles and Facebook posts. “That’s simply false,” says Monsanto’s Partridge. “We don’t need to do that type of stuff.”}
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Let's unpack how they help perpetuate a pro-science conspiracy fable, don't provide any evidence for it, and then given themselves a weasel way out so they have no culpability for what they write.

1. Monsanto documents show the company commissioned scientists to publish papers rebutting IARC.

If a scientist gets a grant from NIH to study roundworms, did NIH "commission" them to publish papers on roundworms? Well, yes. But what does not happen is that scientists who are against roundworm research get a check from NIH and are suddenly for it. These writers attempt to manufacture belief that anyone who ever got a check from Monsanto is a public relations person, not a scientist. What does that infer about journalists, who are all paid by corporations? While our
corporate donations are really tiny, both literally and compared to groups like Environmental Defense Fund or American Heart Association or lots of other non-profits, we have never taken a donation with strings attached. And never will. Any journalist worth their keyboard could have learned that by asking or doing a fact check on predatory lawyers.

I've criticized IARC plenty but never once at the request of Monsanto or any other company, nor did we ever get a grant or any donation to do so. And yet these four journalists still try to fabricate the belief we did. Such obvious manipulation of their readership rightly casts doubt on everything they have ever written.

2. **Reminiscent of tobacco companies, it also funneled money to front groups, according to a plaintiffs’ court filing.**

You see what they did just now? They invoked tobacco companies - even more hated than Monsanto - repeat a claim by an industry trade group whose clients compete with farmers who use Monsanto, and then give themselves a safety valve by noting it is not them saying we are a "front group" for Monsanto, it is lawyers, without ethically disclosing the lawyers got told that by the trade group. You can Google for five seconds and find that out, if facts matter.

Despite repeated requests, Organic Consumers Association has refused to disclose how much involvement they have with the attorneys behind the lawsuit, as in are they giving them money, but since one of the many groups they have created to attack scientists had the legal filing on its website before it was made publicly available, it looks suspicious.

Why would any journalist, much less four journalists, not have asked that awkward question of their only source for a really controversial claim?

3. **The groups, with names such as Genetic Literacy Project and American Council on Science and Health, published articles praising the EPA and attacking IARC, which they called on Congress to defund.**

Wait, suddenly EPA is the bad guy and shouldn't be defended? Hasn't every progressive group been staunchly against limiting EPA at all? We ridiculed the Waters of the United States rule, we attacked them for fabricating claims that fine particulate matter causes acute deaths, yet suddenly we are shills for EPA?

In reality, if these journalists had called to do any fact-checking rather than using OCA talking points - we are the two groups they specifically attacked in their pitches to their email lists and the only two these four journalists dutifully copied and pasted in - to write their article, they would have learned a supreme truth: We are on Team Science. When EPA is right, great, when they are wrong, we say so. It's that simple.

No one here has ever called on Congress to defund IARC. Show us your source, Bloomberg.

They have no source, and this publication did no fact checking. If they had done any fact checking they would have learned that the first director of IARC was on our Board of Trustees. Obviously if the modern activist-driven IARC is manufacturing hazards we will be against that. It is in our mandate to separate health scares from health threats. You know, like Bloomberg journalists used
to do.

4. The plaintiffs claim that Monsanto established a program called Let Nothing Go, through which it made payments to people with no apparent industry ties to post online comments defending Monsanto, its chemicals, and GMOs in news articles and Facebook posts.

Again, the "plaintiffs" were given that "claim" by Organic Consumers Association, as these journalists must have been. It was copied and pasted right from their emails.

Though these four journalists, and certainly industry-funded bloggers like Paul Thacker, use this "Let Nothing Go" stuff, I had never even heard of it before OCA began paying people to promote it.

If we were involved, would there not be a document somewhere - not a lazy smear invented by industry hacks and perpetuated by Russian propaganda and lazy Bloomberg journalists - showing we were involved? Yet there is nothing. So why lump our 300 scientists and doctors into this smear?

Journalists who used some critical thinking and engaged in fact checking would have discovered that nothing they have written about us is accurate. Yet we never got a phone call or an email.

5. “That’s simply false,” says Monsanto’s Partridge. “We don’t need to do that type of stuff.”

Monsanto flatly denies they did it. They are a publicly-traded company. People go to jail for lying in publicly-traded companies. So they are not lying. Yet that is then completely ignored by these journalists. As was my phone number right here on the site. They could have simply asked if they care about the truth.

Finally

How can you trust anything these four write after that? Can we even trust Bloomberg?

Well, if I were a lazy journalist who gets a conspiracy story from an industry-funded trade group and believes it without skepticism, I suppose I would never trust anything they write again. But I am not. I know how to think. So I will take the next thing they do at face value, and not be handcuffed by ideological baggage the way they are.

These four writers would learn a valuable lesson if they got back to some old-school journalism. We can help. They can come by the office and our scientists and doctors will teach them. As a bonus, I will even present the same challenge to them that I present to the anti-science activists they faithfully reprinted: come here and show me evidence anyone is on the take from a corporation and I will fire that person on the spot. However, if you are shown to be lying, you have to make a big, fat, 100 percent tax-deductible donation.

They literally have nothing to lose. Still no takers.