

Grass Fed Cows And Better Milk: Is Industry Funding A Bad Thing When It's An Organic Corporation?



By Hank Campbell — March 2, 2018

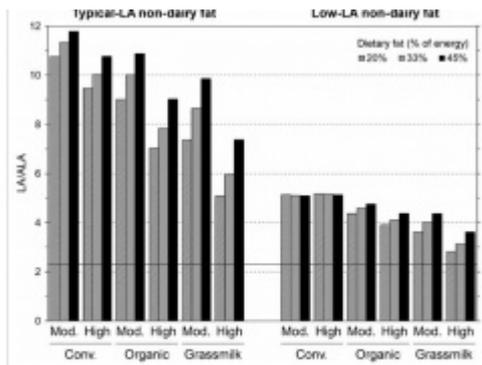


Figure 2. [Open in figure viewer](#) | [Download Powerpoint slide](#)

Decreases in dietary LA/ALA ratios for an adult woman consuming two levels of conventional, organic, and grassmilk dairy products and two types of non-dairy fat. The diets contain moderate ("Mod." 3 servings/day) or "High" (4.5 servings/day) amounts of dairy products made from conventional ("Conv."), "Organic" or "Grassmilk" in the contexts of total fat contributing 20%, 33%, or 45% of energy, and non-dairy fat containing typical

A new paper which claims that cows fed "organic" grass [provide nutritionally superior milk](#) [1] is sure to set off cheers among the organic customer base who have long wanted to believe that buying organic was not just a process choice, but a health one. There is just one problem. The research was funded by industry, the Organic Valley brand, the very thing organic consumers say is wrong with Industrial Farming. Multiple co-authors disclosed their financial conflicts of interest due to being affiliated with the company, and one co-author, Dr. Chuck Benbrook, is an agricultural economist who was unceremoniously kicked out of the school where he was a glorified adjunct once his organic industry funding dried up. He is the poster child for industry shill.

Of course, all that is way down at the bottom of [only one site that carries press releases](#) [2], [Science Codex](#) [3], and it doesn't appear anywhere else - on other press release sites there is just a vague mention that "All samples came from farmer members of CROPP Cooperative and were tested by an independent laboratory" which sounds innocuous enough if you don't know what CROPP is.

What the University of Minnesota chose not to include in their press release about [the Food Science and Nutrition paper](#) [4] is that CROPP Cooperative *sells grassmilk* via its Organic Valley brand. The company is literally selling products these scholars just endorsed. They chose not to include that even though everyone with access to the paper and Google can find it out. The authors basically disclosed their corporate funding proudly, albeit in a sneaky way they hope organic customers or pro-science journalists won't notice. **(1)**

Will journalists against conventional agriculture notice? It's easy to imagine the response from

Danny Hakim or Eric Lipton at *New York Times* if Monsanto was buying GMO stuff from academics who then wrote a paper finding GMOs were nutritionally superior to the mutagenesis-derived genetically engineered foods that make up many organic strains of produce. They would have a field day alleging that science is a corporate conspiracy. **(2)** Then politically-allied industry vassals like Paul Thacker, Charles Seife and Liza Gross would chime in and Organic Consumers Association would tell Carey Gillam to write a blog post linking to all of them and then it would show up in *Russia Today* as more evidence that evil capitalists should pay for their imperialist crimes against beets.

Instead, this is being treated like it is legitimate research.

Well, is it?

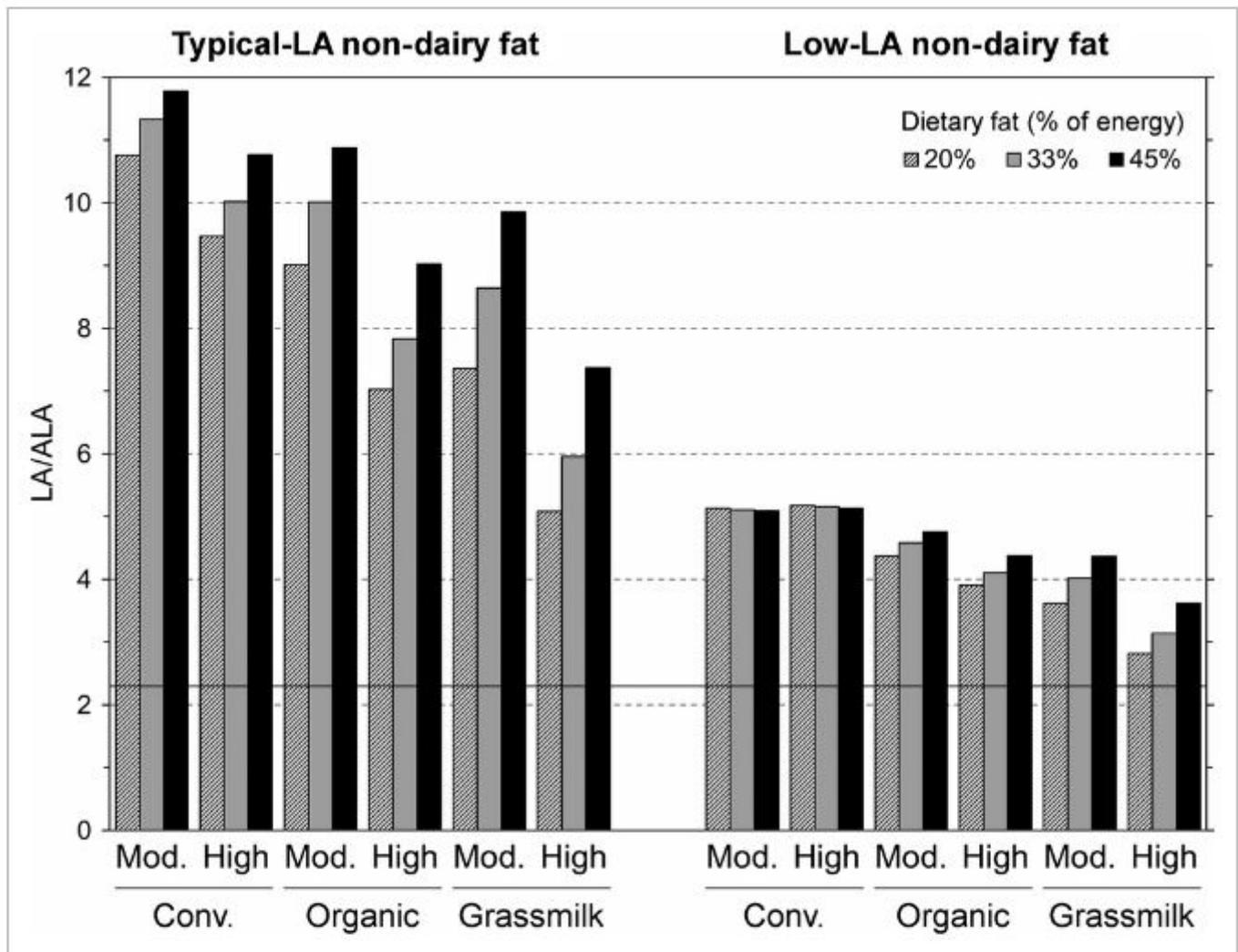


Figure 2.

[Open in figure viewer](#) | [Download Powerpoint slide](#)

Decreases in dietary LA/ALA ratios for an adult woman consuming two levels of conventional, organic, and grassmilk dairy products and two types of nondairy fat. The diets contain moderate "Mod." (3 servings/day) or "High" (4.5 servings/day) amounts of dairy products made from conventional ("Conv."), "Organic," or "Grassmilk," in the contexts of total fat contributing 20%, 33%, or 45% of energy, and nondairy fat containing typical amounts of LA (left side) or low amounts of LA (right side)

Maybe, maybe not. [Benbrook \[5\] has a bad habit of massaging study setup to achieve a goal rather than being prospective \[5\]](#) and CROPP Cooperative funded his activism while at Washington State University where [he literally offered to produce results for a fee \[6\]](#). Conflicts of interest are a thing for a reason and these authors certainly have plenty. But other than Benbrook we have no evidence the authors are blatant shills, instead it may be that organic food corporations give them money because they like the work and want them to keep doing it.

You know, like Coke did when they funded a research group which said for 30 years that *gasp* if you burn more calories than you consume, you will lose weight, even if some of those calories are from soda. Or when a pesticide company was told by EPA to fund studies that EPA would design to see if a mildly toxic herbicide turned boy frogs into girl frogs.

But directly funding work for hire in media? I assume they once did but chemical, food, medicine, etc. companies don't do that any more. Yet we know organic ones still do and that Benbrook is still being funded by them throws the integrity of this entire paper into doubt, no differently than if Gilles-Eric Seralini or Andrew Wakefield or Tyrone Hayes was involved.

Organic food corporations and trade groups are clearly a lot more like 1950s Big Tobacco companies than Big Tobacco is today.

NOTES:

(1)

Charles M. Benbrook, Donald R. Davis, Bradley J. Heins, Maged A. Latif, Carlo Leifert, Logan Peterman, Gillian Butler, Ole Faergeman, Silvia Abel-Caines, Marcin Baranski. **Enhancing the fatty acid profile of milk through forage-based rations, with nutrition modeling of diet outcomes.** *Food Science & Nutrition*, 2018; DOI: [10.1002/fsn3.610](https://doi.org/10.1002/fsn3.610) ^[7]

ETHICAL STATEMENTS

This study does not involve any human or animal testing. Regarding conflicts of interest, CROPP Cooperative sells grassmilk via its Organic Valley brand.

MAL is the Executive Director of Research & Development and Quality Assurance at CROPP Cooperative. LP and SA-C are on the research and technical services staff of CROPP Cooperative. BJH is faculty supervisor of the University of Minnesota West Central Research and Outreach Center's organic dairy, which markets its milk through CROPP Cooperative and Organic Valley.

CMB was Chief Scientist of The Organic Center, 2005–2012, funded in part by CROPP Cooperative; DRD was a consultant to same center, 2011–2012.

CMB was program leader for the Measure to Manage program at Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources, Washington State University, 2012–2015, for which CROPP was a funder; DRD was a consultant to the same program, 2012–2015.

(2) It isn't. We have a t-shirt that says so.



[8]

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/03/02/grass-fed-cows-and-better-milk-industry-funding-bad-thing-when-its-organic-corporation-12656>

Links

[1] <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/fsn3.610/full>

[2] <http://www.sciencecodex.com/forage-based-diets-dairy-farms-produce-nutritionally-enhanced-milk-619311>

[3] <http://www.sciencecodex.com/>

[4]

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/fsn3.610/abstract;jsessionid=B3A171C7E38E33DFDFA5C03CA00623EB.f03>

[5] http://www.science20.com/science_20/the_dying_gasp_of_chuck_benbrooks_credibility-156906

[6] <https://geneticliteracyproject.org/glp-facts/charles-benbrook-former-washington-state-adjunct-consultant-organic-industry/?source=acsh.org>

[7] <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/fsn3.610>

[8] <https://www.cafepress.com/acsh.235273166>