

What I'm Reading



By *Chuck Dinerstein* — July 12, 2019

A reader's comment led me to a very human picture of a scientist conflicted with the research he had done on GMOs. I ran across a whole different approach to debunking, specifically Netflix's "What the Health." And finally, an article describing how our foods have changed so dramatically. Not from "industrialization" but the gentle nudges of farmers for millennia who've domesticated our crops.



Courtesy of *Jens Schott Knudsen* on
[Flickr](#) [1]

A weekly look at what was interesting, at least to one of us, but didn't make it into Dispatch or the website.

Gripping objects is part of our daily lives, so familiar it is mostly unconscious. It has invaded our speech and thoughts, as anyone who has been asked to grasp an issue will concede. “Gripping, then, is a deep part of our biology and evolution as a species. It’s also part of a long story in which we have been getting weaker for millions of years, largely because of a decline in physical activity.” My medical experience with gripping, more precisely grip strength, grew out of my interest in patient frailty, an issue vascular surgeons and others caring for geriatric patients are very familiar. Grip strength is an excellent measure of frailty and subsequent adverse outcomes. Nautilus provides an excellent review of some of the science as well as its evolutionary or cultural meanings in [Raising the American Weakling](#) [2] (15-minute read)

One of our readers, wrote to us recently about an article in the natural news on a “Monsanto” scientist refuting their work on GMOs. The article itself was filled with those challenging to dispel half-truths, beginning with the fact that while the scientist had worked with Monsanto, a name engendering an emotional response, liberally sprinkled throughout the article, the work he felt “torn over” was done for Simplot, a very large company supplying potatoes to McDonald’s. In our back and forth I found a very candid interview with Dr. Caius Rommens, the “repentant” scientist. You can read it [here](#) [3]. Dr. Rommens raises some real concerns about his work, the peculiarities of potatoes, and the unintended consequences of working with limited information. He writes as a scientist, about the messiness and incompleteness of science. The pro and anti-GMO factions are often represented as caricatures; I found the interview with Dr. Rommens an opportunity to look at another point of view without the preconceptions and bias. You may not agree with his experience, but I think you will find it humanizes the debate. (20-minute read)

From the website, Information is Beautiful, comes a [scene by scene fact check](#) [4] of Netflix’s documentary “What the Health?” These infographic designers present their “debunking” in a truly beautifully designed and easily accessible manner, consistent with the website’s name. The interactive material, which fact checks each claim scene by scene, shows in the authors’ words, “There are a lot of good reasons to go vegan, but What The Health isn’t necessarily one of them. Many of its claims have a nugget of truth, but are exaggerated to the point of falsehood.”

For some reason, be it our limited lifespan or an inability to understand evolutionary time fully, we often believe our environment is immutable. The Grand Canyon is so awed inspiringly large that we have a tough time visualizing it as a gulch or ravine in its distinct infancy. While the time frame differs, the difficulty in conceiving the world's slow continual changing applies to our food. Yes, an heirloom tomato looks different than one in a peel pack. But in that instance heirloom represents a shift over 100 years, not millennia. From the website, Curiosity.com comes a look at [“What Fruits and Vegetables Looked Like Before Humans Intervened.”](#) [5] It is a reminder that GMOs are a technique that humans have applied for eons as they have domesticated fruits and vegetables to meet our needs, both in nutrition and taste.

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Links

[1] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/pamhule/5359005096>

[2] <http://nautil.us/issue/73/play/raising-the-american-weakling-rp>

[3] <https://drlwilson.com/Articles/PANDORA.pdf>

[4] https://informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/what-the-health-netflix-documentary-fact-checked-debunked/?utm_source=MAIN+Newsletter+-

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[5] https://curiosity.com/topics/this-is-what-fruits-and-vegetables-looked-like-before-humans-intervened-curiosity?utm_source=email&utm_medium=atlasobscura&utm_campaign=partner&utm_source=Atlas+C

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