Genetic engineering may lead to a cure for Ebola and other life-threatening diseases

By ACSH Staff — August 26, 2014

In an opinion piece [1] published in today’s Wall Street Journal, Dr. Henry I. Miller, Robert Wesson Fellow in Scientific Philosophy and Public Policy at Stanford’s Hoover Institution and former ACSH trustee, discusses the significant benefit that biopharming can provide for the development of medicines if only regulators can become more tolerant.

In the op-ed, titled Genetic Engineering and the Fight Against Ebola, Dr. Miller references ZMapp, the experimental drug that may be the cure to Ebola. ZMapp is made through biopharming, a method used to create drugs through genetic engineering, which is accompanied by a host of issues related to fear and regulations. He points out that current rules imposed by the USDA are unnecessarily restrictive and are hindering the process of producing ZMapp and similar biopharm drugs. One of the most prominent fears is of biopharm drugs getting into food-grade crops. However, this fear is overblown, as contamination can be easily avoided. The risk of plant-made drugs getting into food products is now virtually nonexistent because companies have switched to facilities with rigidly controlled environments, he writes.

Dr. Miller concludes that in order for ZMapp and similar biopharming drugs that treat a variety of diseases to be produced, not only is more funding required, but also more tolerance and reason are needed from regulators and the food industry.

This op-ed comes at an interesting time in related news, a GMO ban was just overturned [2] in Hawaii’s Kauai island/county. The previous ordinance [3] restricted the proliferation of GM crops and also required labels on foods and beverages made with GMOs that warned of possible consumer health risks ridiculous, seeing as there is no evidence of health problems resulting from GMO foods. The ban was thrown out by a Federal magistrate, mainly on the locality’s lack of authority to supercede the FDA, EPA and USDA on such matters. Hopefully other states will take note and avoid such baseless and illegal measures, including the organic-lobby-promoted label GMOs movement.

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