

'Of Questionable Evidentiary Weight' — Another Nail In IARC's Glyphosate Coffin



By *Hank Campbell* — September 23, 2016



It seems like a hundred years ago that the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) was considered a neutral force for public good - but it was only 51.

In 1965, when the Agency was created by the United Nations, there was a lot of optimism about science and the future and IARC was created to instill confidence in the public about the difference between real harm and scaremongering.

The optimism was warranted. By the early 1960s, we had the DNA helix, we had the polio vaccine, we had found Coenzyme Q in humans, we had survived our first big environmental scare, [the Cranberry fiasco of 1959](#) [1], with both Presidential candidates (Kennedy and Nixon) wolfing them down to show they were not going to be intimidated by suspect environmental activist claims that had mistakenly made their way into law.

But there was the first hint of opportunism on the anti-science side. By the early 1960s we also had Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring", which was engaged in twisted consumer advocacy and used anecdotes to suggest that science was killing birds and humans.

Still, cranberries and bird hysteria aside, confidence about the future was high. The 1960s was believed to be the decade we were going to cure cancer and aging - but in order to prevent cancer, it was necessary to know how it was caused, which parts were the bad luck of biology, which parts were lifestyle and which were environmental. And that meant an agency that would study carcinogens.

IARC was that agency and, in the beginning, the working groups were composed of the best scientists. Political affiliation was irrelevant to scientists then, just expertise mattered.**(1)** Being a

consultant was not a reason to ban anyone, because it was known that if you were in an applied field and no one wanted to pay you to consult, you probably weren't very good at your job. They did fine work, they knew how to separate health threats from health scares. If they tackled something, it was important.

Yet today they claim [hot water](#) [2] and [bacon causes cancer](#) [3]. What went wrong? The blunt answer is that they ran out of cancer-causing agents so they started inventing them. In recent decades they could quite literally find no product that wasn't giving us cancer. **(2)** They were basically WebMD, except at the U.N. **(3)** Today, when it comes to IARC and credibility among the public, there are the pre-bacon and post-bacon monographs. Pre-bacon - when they declared that sausage and various red meats were the same level of carcinogen as plutonium and cigarettes - got people talking about how far off the rails they had gone. But to the science community, claiming a hot dog was as bad for you as asbestos was just the latest bit of craziness.

To scientists, though IARC looked a little too chemtrails conspiracy theory with their notions about cell phones and cancer, what was really alarming was their finding that the pesticide glyphosate, the main ingredient in the common product Roundup, was reclassified as 2A, "probably carcinogenic to humans."

When the general public even sees "possible carcinogen" they default to "this causes cancer" so "probably carcinogenic" had environmental fundraisers dancing in the streets. IARC knew that would happen and still do. Whenever they are scolded for being bombastic about their claims in order to get media attention, they wave their hands and say things like, 'no, no, we only talk about harm, not risk' but there is no way they are that clueless about media. Especially given the people who get to be on their working groups - people who have been specifically groomed by environmental groups to manipulate media.

When the glyphosate claim first came out, there was confusion, even among Europeans who generally like to embrace any crazy claim (such as that cell phones cause cancer and water will not cure thirst and that ugly fruit is a human rights violation.) IARC was in defiance of every scientific body for decades. Then it was discovered there was a reason they were so wacky. The corresponding author, Christopher Portier, was an "Invited Specialist" for the IARC Monograph 112 Working Group even though he worked for the anti-science Environmental Defense Fund (IARC, 2015b; Porterfield, 2016; Zaruk and Entine, 2016). In recent years, unlike the original IARC, which wanted the best scientists, the modern version specifically excluded anyone who had ever consulted for industry, even though 100 percent of applied science is done by corporations and 60 percent of basic research is. Yet they don't exclude consultants for environmental groups, even those with a checkered eugenics origin like EDF. Who helped create that standard? The same Chris Portier.

Yet blocking out the best scientists in order to only leave the ones who match an ideological litmus test ended up causing the exact problem scientists feared it would. [Writing in the European Journal of Cancer Prevention](#) [4], Robert Tarone (National Cancer Institute, National Epidemiology Institute, ret.) exposed how IARC not only cherry-picked the studies to include, it went even farther and cherry-picked data from within those studies. It's no surprise when dealing with Environmental Defense Fund or anyone else against science, but this was IARC clearly ignoring data that didn't

fit its predetermined conclusions. They had to be done on purpose, no legitimate scientist could make these errors by mistake.

Female mice were excluded in one analysis, for example, when the data clearly showed female mice didn't get cancer. That is not a science paper, that is Gilles-Éric Séralini-type manipulation. But that's just one instance. The real kicker is that they used such shoddy epidemiology - and we all know that epidemiology can show that anything causes cancer or prevents it, **(4)** if a shady proponent is involved - but this was so obviously bad it was castigated with perhaps the second most damning sentence in science **(5)**: "the only significant finding reported for NHL and glyphosate in a US study (De Roos et al., 2003) is of questionable evidentiary weight."

Scientists are rather understated so to the public it may read as "inconclusive." No, in science inconclusive means it is not happening, [this is instead real "Mean Girls" stuff](#) ^[5]. **(6)** It means that the key paper they used for that section was junk science, plain and simple.

"Of questionable evidentiary weight." That's something the original IARC founders never hoped to read about an organization that was designed to be trusted guides for the public on complex health issues, but has become another outlet for environmental scaremongering. But there it is.

NOTES:

(1) Though opportunistic revisionists have taken to criticizing everyone in the 1960s and claiming Vast Corporate Conspiracies, [like one scholar who has been funded by Big Pharma for \\$400,000 claiming a nutrition expert was bought off by Big Sugar](#) ^[6]. For \$500.

(2) They have now. The backlash over sausage was so severe that IARC turned on a dime about coffee. Though they had given it a mild cancer rating previously and were looking at it again - which every other time meant ramping up the hysteria - they changed and suddenly declared coffee was not causing cancer. So at least that part of your breakfast is now safe. Unless the coffee is hot, which they said does cause cancer. [In USA Today, our Drs. Alex Berezow and Julianna LeMieux](#) ^[2] took that apart.

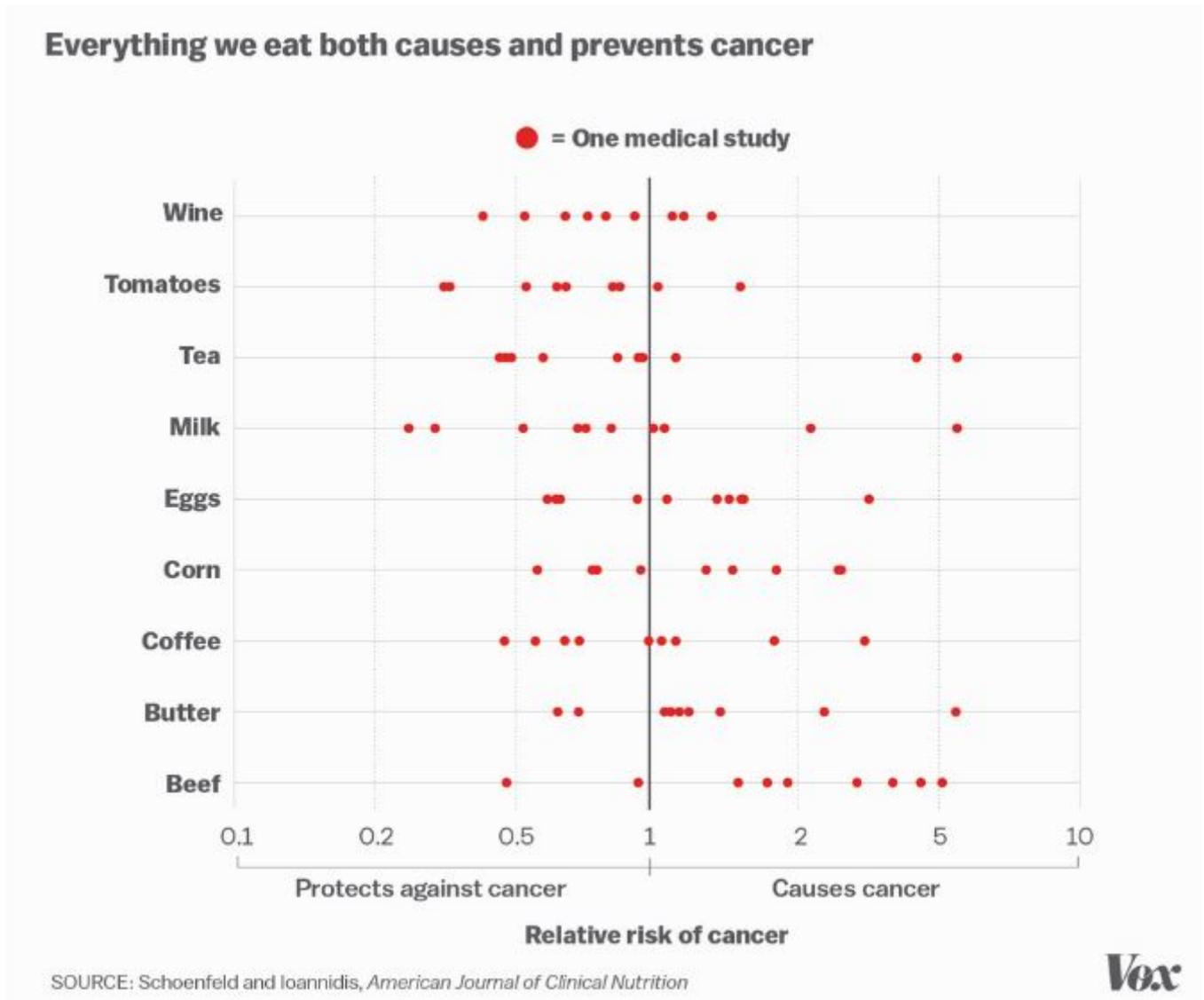
IARC threatened me with legal action over my ridicule of them - here's an idea: If you don't want to be criticized for talking about "risk" when you only estimate "hazard", don't use the term risk 38 times *just in the Q&A* about the monograph. Two examples:

1. "An analysis of data from 10 studies estimated that every 50 gram portion of processed meat eaten daily increases the risk of colorectal cancer by about 18%";
2. And "studies suggest that the risk of colorectal cancer could increase by 17% for every 100 gram portion of red meat eaten daily."

(3)



(4)



From the [American Journal of Clinical Nutrition](#) [7], via Vox

(5) I would argue the most damning apocryphally remains Wolfgang Pauli to a fellow physicist, 'This isn't right. It isn't even wrong.'

(6)



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Links

[1] <http://acsh.org/news/2015/11/24/caveat-comestor-new-yorker-cites-acsh-on-cranberry-scare-of-59>

[2] <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2016/08/10/hot-beverages-world-health-cancer-coffee-column/88511276/?source=acsh.org>

[3] <http://acsh.org/news/2015/10/26/u-n-panel-says-sausage-is-as-dangerous-as-smoking>

[4] <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27552246>

[5] <http://thoughtcatalog.com/nico-lang/2013/02/40-mean-girls-quotes-that-make-everyday-life-worth-living/>

[6] <http://acsh.org/news/2016/09/22/fred-stare-was-not-cahoots-big-sugar-10161>

[7] <http://ajcn.nutrition.org/content/early/2012/11/27/ajcn.112.047142?source=acsh.org?>