We are what we eat is an age-old adage that has more implications than ever in the context of modern-day science and biotechnological experimentation with the genetic makeup of the food we eat. Whether it is the highly processed corn- and soy-based products that permeate nearly everything we consume or the animals we eat that are fed the same corn-based products, the long-term effects of consuming genetically engineered (GE) or genetically modified organism (GMO) food are yet to be fully documented. (This does not include the cross-breeding of cows and goats with spiders, for instance.) Of course, mankind has been cross-breeding plants for millennia, so some ask: "What is the controversy about?"

The controversy emerges when mega-corporations (also known as big agra) such as Monsanto produce seeds that are injected with the DNA of other species to produce specific effects such as resistance to chemicals and herbicides. Beyond the self-perpetuating – some might say monopolistic – marketplace this creates (Monsanto sells the herbicide Roundup that the seeds it sells are resistant to), critics are concerned about the long-term effects to human health by tinkering with Mother Nature so much.There's a Catch-22 at work here, too. The long-term studies that would allay consumer fears are not pursued by the purveyors of the GMO products, but those same purveyors fiercely defend their intellectual-property rights so that third parties cannot publish their own independent studies done with the GMO products. If the GMO products are so wonderful, then why not open the doors wide on independent research?

One can't help but recall the hands-off approach the public was convinced to take when commercially mass-produced cigarettes were first introduced into the marketplace. All of the marketing and advertising and public relations that permeated our culture – about how natural and wonderful it was to inhale the carcinogens the mega-companies put in a rolled tobacco product – had never before been seen in America. It was not until the government stepped in decades later that there was widespread awareness of the health dangers of smoking. And so it goes with GMOs, the perpetual argument of what role the government should play in regulating such activity and commerce, if any?

In this issue's cover story , Just Label It Executive Director David Bancroft explains how the bio-tech companies such as Monsanto are trying to "have it both ways," and it bears repeating here: "We have these companies, these patent-holders, that will go into Washington, go into a patent office, and they will say, 'Hey. I have this brand-new genetically modified organism, and this is how we created it, and this is how it is substantially different from everything else out there. Please give me a patent.' And then they walk down to the other side of Washington, DC, the FDA, and they say, 'Look, we've got this genetically modified organism, and it's the same as everything else.'"

It is worth noting that the Food & Water Watch organization has identified Iowa and Illinois as target states to introduce legislation to require labeling of GMO food products (RCReader.com/y/fww). While the authority of the states to govern themselves is a very laudable effort, the strategy of the Food & Water Watch agenda should be scrutinized by both of the activist factions most likely to pick up this organization's banner that is ostensibly a watchdog against big agra: the progressive wing of the "left" and the libertarian wing of the "right."

If one subscribes to the "power of the purse" model for societal change, then Food & Water Watch's approach could be considered a Trojan horse and a massive distraction from real, substantive market-driven awareness and consumer activism. As long as the remedy to any concern about safety and health is left to the devices and behavior of government and its awful spawn – the "agencies" – then supporters are lining up for more hypocrisy, pain, and suffering in the future. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) could not be a better example of these unintended consequences.

In the documentary *Gasland* (GaslandTheMovie.com), the filmmakers explain how the EPA (with the complicity of Congress, your "representatives") created variances, exemptions, and privileges for the big oil companies pursuing the highly profitable "fracking" of the earth to get at trapped natural-gas reserves. These laws allowed companies such as Halliburton to not disclose the makeup of the chemicals they used in the fracking process. Farmers who leased fracking rights to big oil started watching their herds of cattle and sheep get sick and die, and the water coming out of their faucets could be lit on fire with a match, but when they tried to sue for damages, they eventually found they had no standing in the courts, as they could provide no evidence of where the harm came from. The information about the chemicals in the fracking mixtures was now legally protected as "proprietary."

How does the fox end up watching the henhouse then? It's called the revolving door between big government and big industry. Whether it's the financial-services sector or the food and agricultural companies, the industries that are to be "regulated" are watched over by agencies run by former leaders, attorneys, and executives of the very companies within these industries. Michael Taylor, who has been an attorney, vice president, and chief lobbyist for Monsanto, was appointed by President Barack Obama as the deputy commissioner of the Food & Drug Administration in 2009. And, of course, who can forget President George W. Bush's appointment of the chair and CEO of Goldman Sachs, Henry Paulson, as secretary of the treasury? These are only two such examples. For an exhaustive look at the revolving door between Monsanto and big government, check out RCReader.com/y/monsanto .

Meanwhile, the question on the Food & Water Watch agenda here in Iowa and Illinois is: Are these consequences – intended or unintended – that will occur with state-mandated GMO labeling (e.g., a GMO-labeling czar who used to be on the board of Monsanto)? Or would it be wiser to push for market-driven awareness and competition? See for yourself and get involved.

There is a free public showing of Jeffrey M. Smith’s documentary *Genetic Roulette* on Wednesday, December 19, at 6 p.m., at the Eastern Avenue branch of the Davenport Public Library (6000 Eastern Avenue). You will find many folks involved in this debate at this screening and can begin your own process of making sense of it all by directly engaging those involved – in addition to reading this issue’s cover story.

And while Smith (an Iowa-based grassroots activist) has his share of critics, people sincerely interested in investigating the downside of a GMO-dominated food world are not seriously engaged unless they explore for themselves Smith’s books and *Genetic Roulette*. The trailer and supporting materials can be found at GeneticRouletteMovie.com
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