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Dear Drs. Campbell, Jennings, Aamodt, and Marshall:

Last January, the Center for Science in the Public Interest wrote a letter to the editor of *Nature Biotechnology* pointing out that the journal should have disclosed the conflicts of interest of authors of an exchange of letters concerning genetically modified (GM) foods. In the October 2002 issue ("A different perspective on GM foods," *Nature*

Biotechnology), David Schubert (who has received research and consulting funds from Genentech and Agouron) published a letter questioning the safety of GM foods. In December ("Divergent perspectives on GM food," December 2002), *Nature Biotechnology* published a reply signed by 18 scientists who disputed Schubert's arguments. At least 11 of those authors have close ties to companies that directly profit from the promotion of agricultural biotechnology.

For example, Roger Beachy, Director of the Danforth Plant Science Center, has received substantial research funding from Monsanto and serves as a consultant to the United Soybean Board and Akkadix, an agricultural-gene-discovery company. The Danforth Center itself was launched with a \$70-million pledge from Monsanto, which also donated the Center's 40-acre tract of land, valued at \$11.4 million. Bruce Chassy has received research grants from major food companies and has conducted seminars for Monsanto, Mills Labs, Unilever, Genencor, Amgen, Connaught Labs and Transgene. Chris Lamb is a co-founder of and science advisor to Akkadix, which also funds the John Innes Centre, of which he is the director. Akkadix has also acquired exclusive rights to a gene-discovery technology developed by signer Martin Yanofsky, who, with his colleague and fellow-signer, Julian Schroeder, has exclusive consulting agreements with Akkadix. Charles Santerre was funded by Monsanto to study how training on food biotechnology can change consumer attitudes favorably toward GM foods.

Nature Biotechnology disclosed none of those affiliations to readers and CSPI never received a reply regarding our letter to the editor, which, needless to say, was not published.

We, therefore, read with interest the recent article in the *New York Times* reporting on undisclosed financial ties in *Nature Neuroscience* (Melody Petersen, "Undisclosed Financial Ties Prompt Reproval of Doctor." *New York Times*, August 3, 2003.) Just as the *Nature* policy permitted the author of the November review article on treatment for mood disorders to remain silent about his patent and other significant financial interests in treatments praised in his article, so, too, does the policy permit letter authors who have potentially biasing financial interests not to reveal that information.

In February 2002, the Center for Science in the Public Interest and two dozen prominent scientists wrote a letter (enclosed) urging the *Nature* journals to strengthen their policies and procedures regarding conflicts of interest. A lengthy story about the issues raised in that letter was published in the March 28, 2002 issue of *Nature*. (Frank van Kolfschooten, "Can you believe what you read?" *Nature* 2002;416:360-3)

Among other things, that article pointed out that *Nature's* policy was weaker than a number of its peer publications. You will be interested to know that despite the fact that it was cited as having one of the strongest policies, *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* has taken additional steps to improve its policy, by explicitly expanding the disclosure requirement to "all authors, members, referees, and editors" – be they authors of letters, review articles, or editorials. (See: <http://www.pnas.org/misc/iforc.shtml#Editorial%20Policies>)

Particularly in light of the *New York Times*' article, the undersigned urge you to revisit our recommendations and establish a more robust policy that requires mandatory disclosure of conflicts of interest for all authors, referees, and editors; mandatory disclosure of all information regarding the specific contributions of authors; publication of those disclosures; and rejection of submissions where authors' conflicts are incompatible with integrity in science. Such a policy is a necessary safeguard against potential bias and would ensure that your readers have sufficient information to evaluate the studies, commentary, reviews, letters, and other statements made in the pages of the *Nature* journals.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues and look forward to hearing from you. We also request that you consider publishing this letter in the *Nature* journals as a means of contributing to the debate on the role that journals should play in safeguarding the integrity of the scientific literature.

Sincerely,

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