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In the US, the industrial food and agriculture sector spent hundreds of millions on communication to influence the media, consumers and policy. What about in Europe?

[Friends of the Earth US](#) recently conducted a research on how companies from the industrial food and agriculture sector have been spending '*hundreds of millions of dollars from 2009 to 2013 on communications efforts to spin the media, drive consumer behavior and advance [their] policy agenda*'.



This huge amount of resources was used to fund '*front groups that often appear in the media as independent sources but [...] serve the interests of the industrial food sector*'. Contributing companies include Monsanto, DuPont, Dow and Syngenta and pro-GMO association of manufacturers. Associations that promote and defend the agendas of pesticide, biotech and conventional food corporations are found among the major beneficiaries of this money.

One of the objectives of this major communication campaign is to shape public opinion by supporting groups that appear to be independent. The tactics have included using female bloggers and spokespersons in order to reach more effectively a female public. Scientists, journalists and others have also been attacked with the view to undermine their credibility.

The campaign comes as a reaction to the growing share of organic products in the food market. In the US, for example, certified-organic product sales jumped by 11.5% in 2013 while farmer markets have more than doubled in a decade and a survey has shown that a large majority of US citizens were concerned about biotechnology. These changes can be in part explained by repeated food scandals and recent blockbuster movies. The campaign uses similar techniques to those that were used in pro-tobacco campaigns of the past in order to shape the story of food, hide truth and sow doubt in the mind of the population as regards the environmental, social and health benefits of organic food.

The table below shows the top 11 *'Food and Agriculture Industry Front Groups'* in the US

Top 11 Food and Agriculture Industry Front Groups

Front Group	Spending 2009-2013*	Leading Corporate Board Members or Donors†	Issue Focus‡	Year Founded
U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance	\$28,677,666	Monsanto, Dow Chemical, DuPont	Defends GMOs, pesticides, routine antibiotic use in livestock	2010
International Food Information Council	\$24,167,350	Coca-Cola, Pfizer Animal Health, Kraft Foods, The Hershey Company	Defends GMOs, processed foods, BPA, sugar, additives, routine antibiotic use in livestock	1985
Center for Food Integrity	\$20,988,003	Monsanto, National Restaurant Assn., United Soybean Board	Defends pesticides, routine antibiotics use in livestock, GMOs	2007
Council for Biotechnology information	\$16,729,325	Monsanto, BASF, Dow, Bayer, DuPont, Syngenta	Promotes safety and necessity of GMOs	2000
Center for Consumer Freedom	\$ 15,880,295	Coca Cola, Tyson Foods, Arby's, Hooters	Attacks minimum wage, Humane Society, organics, sugar-sweetened beverage regulation	1996
American Council on Science and Health§	\$9,107,245	Chevron, Coca-Cola, McDonald's	Defends soda, BPA, GMOs, processed foods, attacks organics	1978
Global Harvest Initiative	\$4,904,123	Monsanto, Elanco, DuPont, IBM, John Deere	Promotes GMOs as solution to feeding the world	2009
Animal Agriculture Alliance	\$2,686,713	National Pork Board, Bayer, Elanco, American Feed Industry Assn.	Defends routine use of antibiotic in livestock and other industrial livestock practices	1987
Protect the Harvest	\$1,371,941	Lucas Oil and Lucas Cattle Company	Attacks the Humane Society, defends industrial farming practices	2011
Alliance for Food and Farming	\$1,205,218	California Farm Bureau Federation, Western Growers, Produce Marketing Association	Defends pesticides, disparages organics	1989
Coalition for Safe and Affordable Food	N/A**	Grocery Manufacturers Association, Biotechnology Industry Organization, CropLife America	Fights GMO labeling, attacks organics	2014

As a result of their work, [Friends of the Earth US](#) formulate some important and very relevant recommendations:

- for the media:
 - *'become familiar, with the landscape of food-industry public relation tactics and front groups'*
 - *'provide adequate funding for investigative reporting necessary to reveal conflicts of interest and to support their staff to report on the complicated issues involved in food and agriculture policy'.*
 - *'maintain robust conflict of interest policies and make those transparent to readers'.*
- for the public:
 - *'be vigilant about looking out for these front groups and their representatives in media stories and be aware when these tactics are being deployed to sway public opinion'.*

- speak up *'if and when ... front groups or their spokespeople [are seen as] portrayed as independent sources in news stories and expressing appreciation when stories on these complex issues are reported thoroughly'*.
- *'educate [themselves] on these issues from trusted academic institutions and non-profit organizations working for the public good, not in the corporate interest'*.

Let's add there that these conclusions apply also in the case of Europe, where demand for organic products has grown and where farmer markets and short marketing circuits are also growing rapidly.

One example of the efforts made by the industry to control communication on food was illustrated in a recent interview on a French public radio (France Inter, La tête au carré) of Prof. Séralini who confirmed that he was experiencing difficulties to have an article published that shows that food safety tests are systematically biased as the food provided to control group mice are contaminated with pesticides and other toxic elements. This is not the first time that Séralini has been on the spotlight and he made clear in his interview that that pressure is exerted by some industrial companies on scientific reviews for them to publish articles coming from their researchers and refuse to publish or retract articles by independent scientists that present results detrimental to the industry [[read here](#)].

A study similar to that presented here conducted in Europe would certainly produce comparable results. It would be quite useful to conduct it!

Further readings:

- Hamerschlag, K., [Spinning Food - How food industry front groups and covert communications are shaping the story of food](#), Friends of the Earth, June 2015

Earlier article on [hungerexplained.org](#) related to the topic:

- [Food, Environment and Health](#), 2014
- [New developments regarding Prof. Séralini's article on Monsanto's GMO maize NK 603](#), 2013.