

**An Open Letter Regarding An  
Internet Smear of FDA Official Michael Taylor (2/16/2012)**

We the undersigned are writing to offer another perspective on Michael Taylor, the deputy commissioner for foods at the Food and Drug Administration, and the subject of a petition that SignOn.org, which is sponsored by MoveOn.org, is circulating on the Internet. The petition attacks Taylor based on his former employment at the controversial agricultural biotechnology company Monsanto. The undersigned have diverse views regarding genetically engineered foods, but we are unanimous in our belief that Taylor is a valued deputy commissioner, and we regret that a factually untrue Internet smear campaign has attracted so much support.

Several of us have been representing consumer interests on food safety and nutrition issues for most of our careers. All of us have known Michael Taylor for many years, including when he occupied previous high-level positions in the federal government, taught at George Washington University School of Public Health, and even when he worked at Monsanto.

We acknowledge that Monsanto symbolizes a lot of things that many people (including some of us) don't like about modern, industrial agriculture. But Mr. Taylor's résumé is not reducible to his work at that company. It is far more relevant that in the Clinton Administration he headed the Food Safety and Inspection Service at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, where he stood up to the meat industry and fought for strict controls that help keep *E. coli* and other pathogens out of meat and poultry. Since joining the Obama Administration, Taylor has been working extraordinarily hard to transform the FDA from a reactive agency that chases down foodborne-illness outbreaks after people fall ill, to a proactive public-health-based agency focused on preventing foods from becoming contaminated in the first place. We are confident that his leadership, formerly at USDA and now at FDA, has and will continue to reduce the number of Americans sickened, hospitalized, and killed by foodborne pathogens.

Also, the attack on Taylor includes statements about genetically engineered foods that are simply without any basis in fact. The petition states that since the introduction of GE foods, the "diagnosis of multiple chronic illnesses in the U.S. has skyrocketed," and that the industry's products "may also be contributors to colon, breast, lymphatic, and prostate cancers." Reasonable people can disagree about Monsanto's corporate policies (often bad), or the quality of government oversight of GE foods (inadequate), or the appropriateness of genetically engineering food crops in the first place. But all of us agree that there is no foundation for the outlandish statements made in the petition.

Undermining MoveOn's credibility is that the petition's author, Frederick Ravid, self-identifies as the "the 21st generation descendent from father-to-son of the famous 12th century Kaballistic [sic] Master Rabbi Abraham ben David, of Posquierres, known as the RaVaD." Ravid's web site claims that President Barack Obama is the reincarnation of a Civil War-era Senator, Lyman Trumbull. It also indicates his belief that various events, such as the earthquake in Haiti or the founding of the League of Nations, are linked to solar eclipses. We mean no disrespect for Mr. Ravid's religious beliefs, but we do question his respect for science.

We are disturbed that SignOn.org/MoveOn.org and other organizations have spread Mr. Ravid's uninformed statements so far and wide, seemingly without any apparent concern about their veracity or of its author's bona fides. Frankly, the petition represents the baldest sort of character assassination and plays right into the hands of those who are bent on convincing the public that *all* government officials are corrupt.

Michael Taylor has been an important part of an impressive food safety team that has accomplished an enormous amount in a short time. While the Administration has not accomplished everything we food safety advocates would like to see done, Mike Taylor, along with President Obama, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack, Under Secretary for Food Safety Elisabeth Hagen, and FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg, have made great progress on food safety in a rather short period of time. They deserve the chance to keep on doing it, despite the conspiracy mongering to which Mr. Taylor is now being subjected.

We urge MoveOn to inactivate the petition, send an email to everyone who has signed the petition correcting its factual misstatements and offering instructions for people to unsign, and apologize to Mr. Taylor.

Sincerely,

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