The High Price for Telling the Truth
(And why you need to do it anyway)

Kevin M. Folta, Professor
Horticultural Sciences Department

@kevinfolta
Research Programs

Funding and Reimbursement: www.kevinfolta.com/transparency
Slides: www.slideshare.net/kevinfolta

Strawberry genomics

Light and plant traits in controlled environments

Novel small molecule growth regulators
Why I do what I do.

The Land Grant Mission.

Commitment to basic science discovery and student/postdoc education.
Outreach

Communicating the Science of Science Communication

- Modules for schools - Citrus greening disease, crop domestication, plants and light
- Modules for extension agents – how to teach about citrus disease, talking about biotechnology
- Science communication training for faculty
- Editing and helping grad students find a voice in scientific writing, promoting their work
- >300 speaking, writing, communications events over the last several years
- Social media presence, blog
2013-2015

Answered ~70 questions about food and farming, technology

Answering questions nightly by email, etc.
2013

Organized “bootcamps” to train scientists about speaking to the public

Dozens of articles debunking claims on blogs, etc.
Creating Change

2016 Borlaug Award in Agricultural Communications

Podcast guest on Joe Rogan Experience, Skeptics Guide to the Universe, Talk Nerdy with Cara Santa Maria, Dr. Drew Pinsky, many others.

Writing for Genetic Literacy Project, The Conversation, Real Clear Science, Personal Blog (3M views)

Gaining trust in social media—professional Facebook page and Twitter were gaining in popularity.

Started podcast in 2015, very popular and now at over 1M downloads.

Training the Trainers (30-50 dates per year)
Started the “Talking Biotech” program and Bio-Talk-Knowledgey
  - visit universities for 4-hour workshops
  - Conference of invited speakers at UF

Donations to the University of Florida Foundation

Dozens of donations, including $25,000
  From the Monsanto Company
Trust
Trust Equation

TRUST = Competence + Reliability + Intimacy

Self Motivation
How the public perceives scientists and farmers
How the public perceives scientists and farmers

How the public perceives groups active in opposition to the scientific consensus
How the public perceives scientists and farmers

How the public perceives groups active in opposition to the scientific consensus

How those that want to erode our trust portray scientists and farmers
January 28, 2015

Sandra L. Mitchell
University of Florida
Office of the General Counsel
123 Tipton Hall
P.O. Box 113125
Gainesville, FL 32611-125

RE: Florida Sunshine Law Request Regarding Professor Kevin M. Folta

Dear Ms. Mitchell:

This is a request under the Florida Sunshine Law seeking expedited processing for the production of documents. I request a complete and thorough search of all filing systems and locations for all records maintained by the University of Florida pertaining to Professor Kevin M. Folta, professor of horticulture at the University of Florida.

This FOIA request seeks all correspondence (letters, email) to or from Professor Folta to or from any staff or employees of any of the following organizations:

- Monsanto
- Syngenta
- Bayer or Bayer CropScience
- BASF
- DuPont or Pioneer
- Dow or Dow AgroSciences
- Ketchum
- GMO Answers
- Biotechnology Industry Organization
- Council for Biotechnology Information
- Grocery Manufacturers Association
- Fleischman Hillard
- Winner & Mandabach

The time period covered by this request is from January 1, 2013 to the present.

I request that you disclose these documents and materials as they become available to you, without waiting until all the documents have been assembled.

If documents are denied in whole or in part, please specify which exemption(s) is (are) claimed for each passage or whole document denied. Give the number of pages in each document and the total number of pages pertaining to this request and the dates of documents withheld. I request that excised material be “blacked out” rather than “whited out” or cut out and that the remaining non-
March 24, 2016

Sandra L. Mitchell
University of Florida
OFFICE of the General Counsel
121 Tigert Hall
P.O. Box 11325
Gainesville, FL 32611-3125

RE: Florida Sunshine Law Request Regarding Professor Kevin M. Folta

Dear Ms. Mitchell:

This is a public request under the Florida Sunshine Law seeking the production of documents. I request a complete and thorough search of all filing systems and locations for records maintained by the University of Florida pertaining to Professor Kevin M. Folta, professor of horticulture at the University of Florida.

This public records request seeks all email correspondence—including attachments—to or from Dr. Gary or Dr. Folta to any staff or employees of any of the following organizations:

- Monsanto
- Syngenta
- Bayer or Bayer CropScience
- BASF
- DuPont or Pioneer
- Dow or Dow AgroSciences
- Monsanto
- Biotechnology Industry Organization
- Council for Biotechnology Information
- Genetic Literacy Project
- Grocery Manufacturers Association
- Fieldius Hillard
- Ogilvy & Mather
- Winner & Mandelbach
- American Council on Science and Health
- Cornell Alliance for Science

We also request any email correspondence— including email attachments—to or from or Dr. Folta to any staff or employees of any of the following people:

- Jon Entine (jone@joenteine.com)
- Nina Federoff
- Bruce Chmey
- Henry Miller
- Joy Byrnes
- Sarah Schemanski
Compliance
And that investigation, which began in February, has just started to yield documents. These include roughly 4,600 pages of e-mails and other records from Kevin Folta, a plant scientist at the University of Florida in Gainesville and a well-known advocate of GM organisms. The records, which the university gave to US Right to Know last month, do not suggest scientific misconduct or wrongdoing by Folta. But they do reveal his close ties to the agriculture giant Monsanto, of St Louis, Missouri, and other biotechnology-industry interests.
Thacker and Seife, 2015

PLoS Blogs

Post Removed by PLOS – The Fight Over Transparency: Round Two

Posted August 13, 2015 by publiclibraryofscience in Debate, Funding, Policy, Research

Statement from PLOS:

PLoS Blogs is, and will continue to be, a forum that allows scientists to debate controversial topics. However, given additional information for further inquiry and analysis, PLOS has determined that the Biologue post that had occupied this page, “The Fight over Transparency: Round Two,” was not consistent with at least the spirit and intent of our community guidelines. PLOS has therefore decided to remove the post, while leaving the comments on it intact. We believe that this topic is important and that it should continue to be discussed and debated, including on PLOS blogs and in PLOS research articles.

We sincerely apologize for any distress that the content of this post caused any individual. Comments
Solution: Give funds back

Donated to a campus food charity
Collateral Damage

Non-UF students names given to hostile activists

Postdocs applying for positions—information turned over

Unopened correspondences

Junk mail included

Everyone on cc: lists gets exposed and is subject to harassment
"Nobody tells me what to say, and nobody tells me what to think."

KEVIN FOLTA
An aggressive biotech proponent with financial ties to Monsanto
Monsanto and its industry partners have also passed out an undisclosed amount in special grants to scientists like Kevin Folta, the chairman of the horticultural sciences department at the University of Florida, to help with “biotechnology outreach” and to travel around the country to defend genetically modified foods.

Dr. Folta, the emails show, soon became part of an inner circle of industry consultants, lobbyists and executives who devised strategy on how to block state efforts to mandate G.M.O. labeling and, most recently, on how to get Congress to pass legislation that would pre-empt any state from taking such a step.
Phone threats

Hacking

Impersonation  Started attacking wife online

Doxxing  Office broken into 6/2016
Coordinated Defamation

Documents reveal Canadian teenager target of GMO lobby

By Allison Vuchnich
Senior Network Correspondent, Global News

WATCH ABOVE: Documents reveal a Canadian teenager and her activism on the issue of GMO labelling were the subject of emails strategizing how her message
in Vuchnich reports.

https://youtu.be/U8ipcEfXpuM
Food Babe gets 50,000 + pages from her multiple requests

Lots of ‘copy cat’ FOIA
Statement on Kevin Folta and Conflicts of Interest

by Biofortified Board — 29 August 2018

269 Comments

Professor Kevin Folta of the University of Florida (UF) is a well-known science communicator in the subject of agricultural biotechnology. He is a plant scientist who has researched how plants react to light, and he started blogging about a variety of topics in 2008. Over time, Kevin gained popularity as a speaker on biotechnology. He launched a podcast called Talking Biotech in 2015. In 2016, the Council on Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST) selected Kevin to receive a Borlaug CAST Communication Fellowship.
Anatomy of Media Abuse by NGOs

Industry funds NGO

NGO uses public records laws to gather emails, documents

NGO filters, cherry picks and omits

Hands story to eager journalist

Journalist writes NGO’s story

NGO reports on the journalist’s findings

NGO allies amplify the legitimised message
Lawsuit vs. the New York Times/ Eric Lipton

October / November 2015 – Wrote to Public Editor

Opened discussions for Legal Remedies

Sept 2017 Filed Lawsuit for Defamation and Libel with Malice
Lawsuit vs. the New York Times/ Eric Lipton

February 28, 2019 -- Summary Judgment

What we learned in discovery:

"In today's world of 'fake news' and near-constant attacks on the traditional media, this Court is especially sensitive to upholding the legal protections that enable the press to act effectively in its essential task of policing the government," wrote Judge Mark Walker of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida.

The article had to add other people

At the same time, the judge acknowledged that Folta may not have advocated for the biotech industry mainly because of the money it provided to him, as the story suggested.
We must have the courage to tell the truth.
"There is a path to truth and sincerity that you must guard and defend"

-- Teruyuki Okazaki

"It is our mission to stand up for the truth that science gives us."

Dr. Jack Payne
“Don’t tell me it can’t be done, tell me what needs to be done and help me do it.” - Dr. Norman Borlaug

Thank you.

www.talkingbiotechpodcast.com
iTunes, Stitcher, Player FM

All funding, reimbursement:
www.kevinfolta.com/transparency
All slides:
www.slideshare.net/kevinfolta

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