

Monsanto Whistleblower Says Genetically Engineered Crops May Cause Disease

By Jeffrey M. Smith

Monsanto was quite happy to recruit young Kirk Azevedo to sell their genetically engineered cotton. Kirk had grown up on a California farm and had worked in several jobs monitoring and testing pesticides and herbicides. Kirk was bright, ambitious, handsome and idealistic—the perfect candidate to project the company’s “Save the world through genetic engineering” image.

It was that image, in fact, that convinced Kirk to take the job in 1996. “When I was contacted by the headhunter from Monsanto, I began to study the company, namely the work of their CEO, Robert Shapiro.” Kirk was thoroughly impressed with Shapiro’s promise of a golden future through genetically modified (GM) crops. “He described how we would reduce the in-process waste from manufacturing, turn our fields into factories and produce anything from lifesaving drugs to insect-resistant plants. It was fascinating to me.” Kirk thought, “Here we go. I can do something to help the world and make it a better place.”

He left his job and accepted a position at Monsanto, rising quickly to become the facilitator for GM cotton sales in California and Arizona. He would often repeat Shapiro’s vision to customers, researchers, even fellow employees. After about three months, he visited Monsanto’s St. Louis headquarters for the first time for new employee training. There too, he took the opportunity to let his colleagues know how enthusiastic he was about Monsanto’s technology that was going to reduce waste, decrease poverty and help the world. Soon after the meeting, however, his world was shaken.

“A vice president pulled me aside,” recalled Kirk. “He told me something like, ‘Wait a second. What Robert Shapiro says is one thing. But what we do is something else. We are here to make money. He is the front man who tells a story. We don’t even understand what he is saying.’”

Kirk felt let down. “I went in there with the idea of helping and healing and came out with ‘Oh, I guess it is just another profit-oriented company.’” He returned to California, still holding out hopes that the new technology could make a difference. But soon Kirk Azevedo experienced another shock, when he learned firsthand how Monsanto responds to potentially serious safety hazards in its GM products.

Ignoring Possible Toxins in GM Plants

In 1997, a few months after he was set straight by the Monsanto Vice President at headquarters, a company scientist told him that GM Roundup Ready cotton plants contained new, unintended proteins that had likely resulted from the gene insertion process. No safety studies had been conducted on the proteins, none were planned, and the cotton plants, which were part of field trials near his home, were being fed to cattle.

Azevedo “was afraid at that time that some of these proteins may be toxic.” Azevedo asked the PhD in charge of the test plot to destroy the cotton rather than feed it to cattle. He argued that until the protein had been evaluated, the cows’ milk or meat could be harmful. The scientist refused.

He approached everyone on his team at Monsanto to raise concerns about the unknown protein, but no one was interested. “Once they understood my perspective, I was somewhat ostracized,” he said. “Once I started questioning things, people wanted to keep their distance from me. I lost cooperation with other team members. Anything that interfered with advancing the commercialization of this technology was going to be pushed aside.”

Azevedo believed that Monsanto’s irresponsible practices might devastate the health of consumers. “These Monsanto scientists are very knowledgeable about traditional products, like chemicals, herbicides, and pesticides,” he said, “but they don’t understand the possible harmful outcomes of genetic engineering.”

He tried to blow the whistle. “I spoke to many Ag commissioners. I spoke to people at the University of California. I found no one who would ... even get the connection that proteins might be pathogenic, or that there might be untoward effects associated with these foreign proteins that we knew we were producing. They didn’t even want to talk about it really. You’d kind of see a blank stare.”

Azevedo decided to leave Monsanto. He said, “I’m not going to be part of this disaster.”

To learn more about the health dangers of GMOs, and what you can do to help end the genetic engineering of our food supply, visit www.ResponsibleTechnology.org.

To learn how to choose healthier non-GMO brands, visit www.NonGMOShoppingGuide.com.

International bestselling author and filmmaker Jeffrey Smith is the leading spokesperson on the health dangers of genetically modified (GM) foods. His first book, [*Seeds of Deception*](#), is the world’s bestselling and #1 rated book on the topic. His second, [*Genetic Roulette: The Documented Health Risks of Genetically Engineered Foods*](#), provides overwhelming evidence that GMOs are unsafe and should never have been introduced. Mr. Smith is the executive director of the [Institute for Responsible Technology](#), whose [Campaign for Healthier Eating in America](#) is designed to create the tipping point of consumer rejection of GMOs, forcing them out of our food supply.