

2009 : November 2009 - Fast Moving Fronts : Maureen Storey Discusses Myths Concerning High Fructose Corn Syrup & Weight Gain

FAST MOVING FRONTS - 2009

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Maureen Storey talks with *ScienceWatch.com* and answers a few questions about this month's Fast Moving Front in the field of Agricultural Sciences.



Article: A critical examination of the evidence relating high fructose corn syrup and weight gain

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Note: "My comments are mine alone and may not necessarily reflect the views of the American Beverage Association or its members," Maureen Storey.

SW:

Why do you think your paper is highly cited? Does it describe a new discovery, methodology, or synthesis of knowledge?

Our paper was very timely and it addressed a controversy in the scientific community. We brought together a group of highly respected experts to consider the major arguments being put forward about high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) and its relationship with obesity and the evidence that supported or refuted the arguments in a clear and comprehensive manner.

The diagrammatic representation of the arguments may be a new approach to visualizing the logic stream.

Would you summarize the significance of your paper in layman's terms?

Our paper carefully examined several theories about HFCS, a common sweetener in the food supply that had been hypothesized to be a major cause of obesity. The careful analysis by the expert panel dispelled many of the urban myths that had grown out of proposed theories. Our paper and a few others were instrumental in forming the current consensus that HFCS and sucrose are metabolically equivalent; and I believe, there is now need for such an analysis on fructose.

How did you become involved in this research and were any particular problems encountered along the way?

My colleagues and I had been conducting secondary analyses of government data on food consumption for several years, and our academic group was known for convening

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workshops that examined controversial issues in food and nutrition policy. Our group, therefore, was approached to examine the issues surrounding HFCS by the sweetener industry.

"I hope that our research helps dispel the urban myths that have gained momentum about high-fructose corn syrup."

Where do you see your research leading in the future?

Although I am no longer in academia, I think it is important to continue conducting research and supporting research of others on diet, physical activity, health, and wellness. The food industry has the responsibility to conduct research that helps in the understanding of the "who, what, where, why, and how" of people's food and beverage choices.

In my opinion, it is critical that scientists—whether in academia or industry—engage in the enterprise of science that includes presentation and peer-reviewed publication of research. Only through an honest discourse of scientific questioning, research, and debate will we harness the complexities of our food supply and provide people with good-tasting, affordable foods and beverages that provide choices for people at every stage of life.

Do you foresee any social or political implications for your research?

That's a tough, but important question. At a minimum, I hope that our research helps dispel the urban myths that have gained momentum about HFCS. Politically, I see a more troubling picture for the scientific enterprise as a whole, and one that reaches far beyond the controversy about HFCS. What I mean by that is the facile dismissal or scarlet-letter-branding of research that is conducted or supported, in part or in whole, by industry.

Though such dismissal or branding is often conducted under the banner of such good sounding phrases like "integrity in science," as Dr. Kenneth Rothman, the founding editor of *Epidemiology* has pointed out, such "J'accuse-like" innuendo is simply a thinly veiled *ad hominem* attack carrying an implicit and unfounded presumption of inferiority or dishonesty in industry-supported research that borders on a modern form of McCarthyism. Such statements are antithetical to the essence of science and ones that we as scientists in academia and industry or society, in general, can ill afford.

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