

The story of Arpad Pusztai Part I of III

By mark phillips

The story of arpad pusztai (AR-pad POOZ-ty) is interesting on many levels. In the end, understanding arpad's story will help us make better public health decisions.

In 1995 the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Dept. (SOAEFD) commissioned a 3 year multi-centered project, "Genetic engineering of crop plants for resistance to insect and nematode pests: effects of transgene expression on animal nutrition and the environment."

The contract was awarded to the Rowett Research Institute (RRI) and the research team headed by Dr. Arpad Pusztai. Dr. Pusztai had nearly 50 years experience in biology and genetics with 20 years experience in plant physiology. He authored or edited 12 scientific books and published close to 300 primary peer-reviewed papers and was considered a world renown expert in animal nutritional studies

Dr. Pusztai generated potatoes that expressed the snowdrop (or GNA) lectin because his 7 years of experience with this particular lectin showed that it was quite safe, even in doses 1000 times that used in his experiments.

Dr. Pusztai was anything but an anti-GE scientist. In fact, he and RRI had an agreement with Axis Genetics regarding the commercialization of the GNA-GM potato should it ever come to market.

Dr. Pusztai fed some rats regular potatoes, others genetically engineered potatoes expressing the GNA lectin and still others regular potatoes with the GNA lectin added.

Only the rats eating the genetically engineered potatoes suffered serious adverse health effects. These included lesions in the intestinal tract, reduced organ weights and reductions in their immune response.

Dr. Pusztai concluded that some part of the process used to create the GE potato was the likely cause.

Dr. Pusztai knew that the results he found would not likely be detected in other GE foods given the approval process in place for the UK.

He also knew that it would take 2-3 years before he could get his results published in a peer reviewed journal.

Fearing that the public was at risk, he commented on his research on a TV program, including his belief that GE foods could not be assumed to be safe.

At this point, the story gets very interesting.

Within days he was fired from his job at RRI.