

THE VORTEX

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture formally approved two new types of genetically engineered potatoes, both of which were developed by Simplot, stories on pages 4,7,9,10,&11

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*CalACS November Section Meeting
Criminalistics – A Look Back and a Look Ahead
Speaker, John DeHaan, Ph.D.*

Date: Wednesday, November 14, 2018

Time: 6:00 – 6:50 pm Social Hour with light refreshments, 7:00 – 8:00 pm Presentation

Place: USDA, 800 Buchanan Street, Albany.

Cost: \$10.00 (\$5.00 for students) for light refreshments. No cost for presentation only.



Abstract:

Our speaker will be John DeHaan, Ph.D, who has been a criminalist for over 48 years, serving in law enforcement agency crime labs for 29 years and as an independent forensic scientist in his own consultancy for the last 20. Although he has conducted many firearms, toolmark, shoe impression, and solid-dosage drug exams, he considers himself a “trace evidence” person, having done thousands of cases involving chemical analysis, microscopy, and elemental analysis of “traces” of transfer evidence in both criminal and civil cases. Trace evidence has been described as: “everything that doesn’t bleed, shoot, or get you high.” Trace evidence is becoming an endangered species in forensic labs today, being largely supplanted by DNA evidence today, although it can offer evidence of sequence and circumstance that cannot be established from biological evidence alone.

John will illustrate the various issues and processes through case examples rang-

ing from burglaries to murders, fires and explosions. (His primary specialties over the last 30 years have been fires and explosions – often involving death and injuries.) He has testified as an expert witness in major cases across the US and Canada, and overseas and will share some of the experiences where testimony has been severely challenged by opposing lawyers and other experts. He has published extensive research in some arcane reaches of forensic science such as how does a fire consume a human body, how does a cadaver move during combustion, and what volatile traces are produced by such fires. All of these can be critical issues in the reconstruction of fatal fires and determination of causes of both the fire and the death. John has also taken part in the reconstruction of famous historical fire cases such as the Great Chicago Fire (1871), Jack London’s Wolf House fire (1916), and debunking so-called spontaneous human combustion fire death cases. He has been involved in well known criminal cases such as the Mormon Church Bomber (1986), Billi Jo Smallwood (2007), Richard Long (Australia-2000), and Paul Moore (2012).

More recently he has been a key witness in exoneration (or post-conviction) appeals such as the Kristine Bunch, Richard LaPointe, and William Amor arson-murder cases, and, the Avery (Making of a Murderer) case.

His pledge, in each case, is to follow the best science and the best practices to their defensible result, no matter which “side” that result falls. It is only by avoiding any pre-judgement and rejecting biased methods or inconclusive results that justice can prevail.



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Chair's Message



It is voting time. Please vote and remember to support the sciences.

After two exciting performances of the "NoBelles" theater production in October our ACS California Section has again

organized diverse events for November.

We will have a booth at the Bay Area Science Discovery Day event at AT&T Park on Saturday, Nov. 3. If you would like to volunteer and help the general public doing hands-on activities, please contact Alex Madonik, alexmadonik@sonic.net.

Our November section meeting will feature Dr. John DeHaan, an internationally recognized forensic science expert. His talk will be on: "Criminalistics – A Look Back and a Look Ahead". The event will take place at the USDA in Albany, CA, on Wednesday, November 14 (see also the announcement in this VORTEX edition).

Our CalACS executive committee will convene at the Lafayette Library on Tuesday, November 6. If you want to learn more about the issues we are discussing there and would like to visit the meeting, please contact Julie Mason at our office at calacs.org or call her at 510-351-9922.

We hope to see you at an event.

Margareta Séquin



Gifts & Donations

A gift of \$25 to our High School Chemistry Teachers programs helps support the teacher and school with Chemistry supplies and equipment. Call or email and find out how your valued contribution can be used. Donations to the California Section are tax deductible.

Lou Rigali, LR101898@aol.com

USDA Approves 2 New Varieties of GMO Potatoes

By Jason Best, Eco Watch

The U.S. Department of Agriculture formally approved two new types of genetically engineered potatoes, both of which were developed by Simplot, the Idaho-based spud giant. (A third GMO variety was previously approved by the department). Now, pending what amounts to a fairly cursory review by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the company expects all three GMO strains to be available to farmers for planting next spring.

It's hardly an exaggeration to say that over the past two decades, the agriculture industry in the U.S. has wholeheartedly embraced GMO crops with gusto. Almost all of the soy and corn grown in the U.S.—upwards of 90 percent for both crops—is genetically modified. Same goes for canola. More than half of sugar beets are also grown from GMO seeds.

The same cannot be said for potatoes. Indeed, field tests of an early GMO potato variety sparked one of the first protests against the technology back in the late 1980s and the industry remained largely GMO-free. It was just last year that the potato industry began planting a GMO variety on a commercial scale, a cultivar also developed by Simplot and named White Russet.

The three new varieties—Ranger Rus-

set, Atlantic and Russet Burbank—all follow that first generation in that they are designed to minimize bruising and black spots, as well as reduce the amount of a chemical that is potentially carcinogenic that develops when potatoes are cooked at high temperatures. The trio of 2.0 cultivars have also been engineered to resist the pathogen that causes late blight, the disease that led to the great Irish potato famine in the mid-19th century and for “enhanced cold storage,” a trait that may be of particular interest to potato chip makers, according to The Associated Press.

“We obviously are very proud of these,” a Simplot spokesperson told the AP. The company says it only used genes from other potatoes to create its GMO varieties, such as a gene from an Argentine potato that yields a natural defense to blight.

As agro-tech companies have done since the dawn of the GMO revolution, Simplot is touting a promise that its GMO spuds will allow farmers to dramatically reduce the amount of chemical pesticides they're forced to spray—in this case, by up to 45 percent. Maybe so. But there are signs that public skepticism against such claims is growing ever more widespread, like the fact that the damning results of a New York Times investigation published last weekend under the not-so-subtle headline *Doubts About the Promised Bounty of Genetically Modified Crops* shot to the top of the newspaper's list of most-emailed articles.



J.R. Simplot Company Statement On Caius Rommens' Book

Oct 16, 2018: Caius Rommens, the former director of research at Simplot Plant Sciences, a division of the J.R. Simplot Company, has self-published a defamatory book about Simplot's Innate[®] branded biotech potato program. The book is filled with false and misleading statements and speculation about the development and safety of our bioengineered potato varieties.

The J.R. Simplot Company is a privately held food and agribusiness company. We have a deep respect for the environment, and a commitment to help feed the world's growing population by finding better ways to grow safe and abundant food. We process and serve a range of high quality foods

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Erythritol, et al. (Part 3)

Bill Motzer

In Part 1 (September 2018 Vortex), I reviewed some of the sucrose (sugar) substitutes known as sugar alcohols or polyols. In Part 2, I discussed some of its chemical characteristics and in this final article on this subject, I will review potential toxicity.

Toxicity

Erythritol is not considered toxic to animals or humans, but at least one study indicates insect toxicity. A 1999 study published in *Food and Chemical Toxicology* comprehensively reviewed erythritol's potential toxicological effects from animal and human consumption, including reviews of numerous toxicity and metabolic effects in rats, mice, and dogs. Additionally, long-term feeding studies determined potential carcinogenic and teratogenic effects, including those on the fetus. Oral studies, in which erythritol was administered over one or two generations, determined potential reproductive effects, and studies in both bacterial and mammalian systems determined mutagenic potential.

Most animal safety studies involved feeding erythritol mixed into foods at concentrations ranging to 20 percent. Results showed almost complete absorption, with very little if any systematic metabolic change: most erythritol remained unchanged and was excreted in the urine. Such animal safety studies demonstrated that erythritol was well tolerated with no toxicological effects.

Human clinical studies involved mostly short-duration single- and repeat-dosages. Upon oral ingestion, erythritol is rapidly absorbed by the gastrointestinal tract and, as animal studies indicated, excreted in urine without undergoing significant metabolic changes. At high oral doses, approximately 90 percent of the administered dose was excreted with only minimal amounts appearing in feces. Human and animal data comparisons also showed considerable degrees of similarity in erythritol

metabolism thus supporting animal use in evaluating erythritol safety for human consumption. The conclusion was that there was no evidence of erythritol toxicity in mammals.

A 2014 study in the journal *PLOS One*, on effects of commonly used nonnutritive sweeteners on the longevity of fruit flies *Drosophila melanogaster*, discovered that erythritol, the main component of the sweetener Truvia, was toxic when ingested in comparison to similar nutritive sugar concentrations such as sucrose and corn syrup and other non-nutritive sweeteners. Fruit fly longevity decreased with increasing erythritol concentrations. The study suggested that erythritol could be potentially used as a novel, human-safe insecticide. However, some insect species seasonally exposed to freezing produce erythritol and other polyols as tissue cryoprotectants. And erythritol is not the only sweetener toxic to insects: mannose (a sugar monomer of the aldohexose series of carbohydrates) is toxic to honey bees, but not toxic to *Drosophila melanogaster*. The study's conclusion was that further research was required to determine if erythritol is toxic to other insect species.

Possible Side Effects and Allergic Reactions

A 2007 study published in the *British Medical Journal* indicated that intestinal gas and bloating may occur with as little as 5 grams (g) consumption of certain sugar alcohols. Osmotic diarrhea can occur with ingestion of 20 to 50 g, but some sensitive individuals may experience diarrhea from as little as 10 g. Sugar-free chewing gums may contain 1 to 2 g of sugar alcohol per piece. Chewing several pieces of gum throughout the day may cause digestive upset, depending on the amount of sugar alcohol in the gum and a person's sensitivity to the ingredient. Generally, in regular use, there are no known such side effects for single low-dose erythritol consumption. However, doses over 50 g (1.8 oz) can cause significant increases in nausea and stomach rumbling. Rarely, erythritol can

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cause an allergic hive reaction (urticaria). Children and persons with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) may be more at risk to such erythritol side effects.

Because erythritol is not as sweet as sugar it may be combined in foods and beverages with other artificial sweeteners such aspartame and sucralose. Some of these artificial sweeteners have had reported side effects including anxiety, depression, short-term memory loss, fibromyalgia, weight gain, and fatigue (see November 2010 Vortex:

Splenda in the Water and Sucralose).

Recommendations

If one experiences gastrointestinal upset or diarrhea and believes it's due to sugar alcohol consumption, consult your physician. One may need to eliminate these products or reduce the amount consumed. Check the container's nutritional label to determine if the product contains a sugar alcohol: it may show a specific ingredient, such as sorbitol or xylitol, or it may simply list the ingredient as a sugar alcohol.



International Year Of The Periodic Table! Can You Help?

United Nation declared 2019 as the International Year of the Periodic Table (IYPT2019). The opening will be in Paris in January, 2019 but there will be worldwide celebration just as in 2011 which was the International Year of Chemistry (IYC11). The International Activities Committee working with the Hungarian Chemical Society and the ACS Hungarian International Chemical Science Chapter accepted our proposal to develop a series of posters to show in layman language how each element contributes to our everyday life. It would be similar to the Technology Milestones in Chemistry (TMC) posters shown on (www.chemistryinyourlife.org) which were used for the IYC11 celebration showing the benefit of chemistry in transportation, communication, medicine and agriculture.

The time is short but the posters in Power Point format both in English and French will be ready for display in Paris at the opening in January. The text, approximately 12-14 typewritten pages for translation, should be available by mid October. The final translation would be needed not later than March 2019. This is where your help is needed.

We are working on securing the translation of the posters to various languages as it was done for TMC. Presently we already received commitment for translation of the text in the posters as soon as they are available at the opening for Arabic, Catalan, Greek, Hindi, Korean, Russian, Swahili, Spanish, Turkish and Ukranian. Probably we will have translation to French and German, but we have not received yet final commitments.

We would like to appeal to members of the California Section for help with other languages. We have a very diverse membership, I am sure we can find translations to many other languages. If you are interested in helping please send an e-mail at atilapvlath@yahoo.com

(Simplot, continues from page 4

to customers around the world. We are also an innovative leader in the global potato industry. Two decades ago, for example, we were among the first commercial enterprises to use biotechnology to introduce traits into potatoes that are beneficial to farmers and consumers.

Simplot hired Mr. Rommens in 2000 to design and lead that biotechnology program. We learned more than a decade later however that Mr. Rommens had made false statements about how he created Innate^R potatoes. He subsequently resigned in January 2013. Details about this, for which he took full responsibility, can be found online in a retraction published in *Plant Physiology*. Mr. Rommens also acknowledged a “serious mistake”, in a December 2012 letter of apology to an independent and renowned scientist who had questioned Mr. Rommens’s work. Mr. Rommens now attempts to paint these unacceptable activities as “minor” that he uncovered before deciding to quit, but this is not the case.

Simplot deleted his scientific misrepresentations from consideration in the regulatory approval process as the flaws in Mr. Rommens’ work were inexcusable. Simplot then expended substantial resources to ensure the integrity of its potato varieties and to inform the regulatory and scientific communities of what we had discovered. Importantly, Simplot did not use any of Mr. Rommens’ faulty work or misleading conclusions to ultimately gain regulatory approval for the Innate^R potatoes. After rigorous regulatory review, our Innate-branded varieties received regulatory clearance from the United States Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Food and Drug Administration to whom Simplot voluntarily applied for safety review. Numerous international regulatory agencies also approved our varieties.

Specifically, Innate^R potatoes were extensively tested in more than 200 separate research trials in all major potato growing regions in the U.S. and Canada and thoroughly reviewed by trained regulatory

scientists and validated by multiple years of field trials by independent growers and research universities. All of our regulatory data is a matter of public record which was scrutinized during the comment periods. Our analyses were supported by 17 major potato research institutions across the world with regulatory approval in the U.S., Canada, Japan, Mexico, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand. Innate^R potatoes were (and are) tested to ensure they do not have a negative environmental impact, have no new allergens, and have the same safety and nutritional profile as unmodified potatoes. The potatoes have a positive impact on sustainability and on the reduction of food waste. You can learn more about these positive sustainability benefits, the science behind Innate^R technology and review our FAQs at www.innatepotatoes.com.

Since his 2013 resignation, Mr. Rommens has not been part of the Innate^R program and Simplot has not given him access to the scientific and agronomic research data generated for regulatory purposes. He is therefore in no position to comment on the Innate^R program as it exists today. Nonetheless, Mr. Rommens has self-published a 77-page “booklet” filled with false and irresponsible claims. His book follows his attempt in March 2017 to provide Simplot with a 30-page “reassessment” of the Innate^R potatoes for a fee, with the implicit warning that, if Simplot did not take him up on his offer, he would give the “reassessment” to anyone who might be interested, thus damaging Simplot’s interests. We made clear to Mr. Rommens that we were interested in any information or insights that pertained to the safety or integrity of the Innate^R potatoes, but we declined to pay him for an exclusive preview. Simplot heard nothing more until we learned last week about the publication of his book.

In it, Mr. Rommens makes numerous false statements about Simplot and the Innate^R potato. Among the more egregious are the following:

He stated that conventional potatoes will “soon be contaminated with GMO stock”

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Posters Describing The Benefits Of All The Elements On Everyday Life.

Why Are They Created?

The United Nation designated 2019 as the International Year of the Periodic Table (IYPT2019). It will be officially opened on January 29, 2019 in Paris by IUPAC with an exposition containing various topics related to IYPT2019. These posters which will be part of the celebration, will be displayed both in English and French, but translations will be obtained in many other languages to be used by the corresponding chemical societies for the celebration of IYPT2019. This is the second time the United Nation recognizes the importance of chemistry. In 2011 the year was officially designated as the International Year of Chemistry (IYC11)

How Are They Created?

Dr. Arwyn Smalley, a visiting American Fulbright professor in Hungary is giving a course of two semesters on Communication and together with her students will create a series of posters in English describing in layman language what benefits of each elements provide to our everyday life. The text for each element will be not more than one paragraph with 100-200 words. The total text to be translated is estimated to be around 10 -12 typewritten pages, the exact length is not known at this time. The posters will be created in colorful Power Point format in which the English text can be easily replaced by the corresponding translation while retaining the original colorful artistic background. It is estimated that there will be approximately 20 posters. They will be similar to the posters created for the celebration of IYC11 describing also in layman language the benefits of chemistry in Transportation, Communication, Medicine and Food. The posters in 32 languages can be seen on the internet ready to be downloaded (www.chemistryinyourlife.org)

Timetable.

Dr. Smalley's effort will be concentrated

first on creating the one paragraph for each element not later than the second part of October 2018 to provide enough time for the organizations/individuals enough time for the translations and then the colorful poster background will be created. The English and French posters should be ready for the January 29 opening of IYPT2019 in Paris. Hopefully the other translations will be also ready around that time, but the date is not crucial allowing the corresponding chemical societies to carry out their celebration.

The Official Organization Responsible For The Process.

Various units of the American Chemical Society (International Activities Committee, Hungarian International Chemical Sciences Chapter and the California Section) with Hungarian Chemical Society and the Szeged University in Hungary will work together to make the arrangements for the success of the project.

Credits.

While the front page of the posters will give credits to the ACS for originating the project and to Dr. Smalley's group for creating the posters in English, the front page will also list the organization and the translator who converted the English text to the corresponding language and adding appropriate logo for the organization if wanted.

Use And Availability Of The Posters.

Any chemical society which arranges the translation will have full use for the celebration of IYPT2019 as desired while giving credit to the American Chemical Society and giving permission to place the translation on a special webpage created for this purpose from where it can be downloaded to be used for scientific non-commercial purposes. The webpage will be maintained beyond 2019.

Attila Pavlath

Dr Caius Rommens replies to Simplot on GMO potato controversy

Published: 22 October 2018 GM Watch

GMO potato firm Simplot accuses Dr Rommens of making “defamatory” statements; Dr Rommens says it’s up to the public and scientists to find out the truth.

GMO potato firm J.R. Simplot has published a statement responding to Dr Caius Rommens’s book, *Pandora’s Potatoes*, in which he renounced his GMO work and described the potential health and agronomic risks of the GMO potatoes he developed while working for the firm. Some of these potatoes, including the supposedly bruise-resistant *Innate*[®], have been commercialized in the USA (they’re approved in Canada but are not yet being sold there, according to research by CBAN).

In its statement, Simplot calls Dr Rommens’s book “defamatory” and says it is “filled with false and misleading statements and speculation about the development and safety of our bioengineered potato varieties”. The statement focuses on smearing Dr Rommens’s reputation. It makes much of a mistake in his work that he has acknowledged and which led to his retraction of a scientific paper on which he was lead author. Simplot characterizes this mistake as “flaws” in his work that were “inexcusable”.

Simplot did not, however, properly address the technical and scientific points raised by Dr Rommens in his book. Below, Dr Rommens replies to J.R. Simplot.

All I have done is write a book about the hidden issues of the GM potatoes that I had created in the past. In my book, I never criticized the J.R. Simplot company but accepted all the blame myself. I blamed myself not for what I had done intentionally, but for failing to see what I had done unintentionally.

The Simplot agbiotech team read the book and has evidently decided to try to make it – and me – look bad, while at the same time ignoring the scientific and technical issues it raised. Instead of taking the new, important insights as constructive feedback and an opportunity to address existing and potential problems with its GMO potatoes, it

has trashed the book as being filled with “defamatory” statements.

This approach will not advance scientific knowledge but on the contrary seems calculated to shut down scientific discussion and investigation, as well as public debate, through a veiled legal threat. The more constructive way forward is for public scientists who are not beholden to agbiotech corporations to study the issues I mentioned.

It would be wonderful to determine the levels of a variety of toxins that could accumulate in GM potatoes that may contain hidden bruises and symptomless infections, to determine the effect of symptomless infections on the spread of plant diseases, to (again) confirm the yield drag caused by potato transformation, and to address all the other issues described in the book, and more. Statisticians would be useful as well to examine whether the statistics used in regulatory petitions are misleading. I will support such public research efforts in any way I can.

The major part of Simplot’s statement appears intended to depict me as a rogue scientist. No more am I the man who created an independent biotech effort supported by more than sixty patents, and who created the GM crops that are now commercialized, but I am described as someone who, over the course of twelve years leading the effort, made one mistake. Simplot places much emphasis on this mistake (a sequence error in a small fragment, which helps to transfer DNA from bacteria to plants but is not transferred itself), but it affected neither the patents generated on the GMO potatoes nor the potatoes themselves.

When I left Simplot, not yet sure how to come to terms with my past work, I requested that my name would not be tarnished. We had a handshake agreement on that. The way that Simplot now depicts me is false and inaccurate and clearly repre-

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(Rommens, continued from page 9)

sents an attempt to tarnish my name.

The last part of Simplot's statement is an attempt to address the technical and scientific issues I brought up in my book. However, what Simplot calls the "most egregious" of my "numerous false statements about Simplot and the Innate® potato" is not even in the book. It does not contain any statement that GM potatoes will contaminate normal potatoes, even though I believe they will and have since publicly said as much. The company declares that it currently grows its small acreage of GM potatoes as a closed-loop system. But there is no mention about the future. Indeed, I cannot believe that any agbiotech firm would commit to forever maintain an expensive, closed-loop system, especially if GM crops turn into important commodities.

In the statement, the Simplot team attempts to hide behind the meaning of words. When I express my concern about toxins, the team responds that it vigorously tested for toxins and found no issues. But the team knows quite well that the toxins I am concerned about are different from the one or two toxins that were tested by the company, such as acrylamide. Indeed, my book describes toxins that the company has never mentioned in its publications, such as alpha-aminoadipate, chaconine-malonyl, tyramine, a variety of pathogen-produced toxins, and so on.

And then there is the trait stability. Studying the company's own data, I must conclude that two traits no longer work, that

(Simplot, continued from page 7)

This is false. Innate[®] potatoes are never mixed with common potato varieties. We maintain a closed loop stewardship program to keep Innate[®] potatoes within their intended market segments.

He claims consumers of Innate[®] potatoes may experience serious adverse health effects: that would "send them to the emergency room." This is not true. We vigorously tested Innate[®] potatoes for toxins in field

there is evidence for reversion of a third trait, and that a fourth trait appears to be declining in efficiency. Furthermore, a fifth trait, a disease-resistance gene (VNT), is known to be unstable: disease-resistance genes can be broken by evolving pathogens at any time.

The team also didn't like me talking about the illegal acquisition of VNT. But according to Article 15 of The Convention on Biological Diversity, this gene belongs to Argentina. The team licensed the gene, but a licensed gene that was acquired illegally is still acquired illegally, just like a stolen painting is still stolen after it is (legally) purchased.

According to the team, I stated that the company "designed" GM potatoes to taste like cardboard and to conceal infections and bruises and undermine the health of consumers. This is untrue. I never criticized the company about anything. I only criticized one person, and that is me. And I criticized myself not for what I did but for what I failed to see. The fact of the matter is that I designed GM potatoes without realizing that the unintended effects of my modifications caused a decline in the sensory profile of fries, the concealment of bruises and infections in tubers, and the potential accumulation of toxins.

I have laid out my view of what needs to be done to answer the questions raised in my book. These questions will not be answered through veiled legal threats and attempts to 'shoot the messenger'. It is now up to the public and the independent scientific community to continue to address them.



trials and found them to be no different than conventional potatoes. No consumer has been sickened.

He also states our traits are "unstable." This is false. Our traits are stable over many generations and in multiple varieties.

He claims Innate[®] potatoes "contain an illegally acquired exotic gene." This is false. We have not en-

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BUSINESS DIRECTORY

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Robertson Microlit

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SEARCHING FOR THAT SPECIAL JOB?

There are many companies and organizations searching for chemical and biochemical personnel to fill important jobs in their organizations.

- Companies for laboratory and management positions
- Universities & Colleges for teaching positions and laboratory personnel
- Hospitals for technical and research personnel

There are several web sites that may help you search for these open positions.

- www.mboservices.net
- <http://www.calacs.org/page.asp?id=22>

(Simplot, continued from page 10)

gaged in biopiracy. We legally obtained the potato gene in question via a license.

Mr. Rommens stated we designed our Innate^R potatoes to taste like “cardboard” and to “conceal” infections and bruises and undermine the health of consumers. This is not true. Our motivation was to use innovative technologies to bring new and improved high quality potatoes to farmers and consumers.

We are a global food company and have

been in business for nearly a hundred years. Our commitment to health and safety is paramount. We care deeply about consumers, farmers and our products and we hold the Company to the highest standards. We will defend our reputation and the Innate^R program. Any claims that maliciously undermine the core values of our organization - Passion for People, Spirit of Innovation, and Respect for Resources - or which bring our industry and emerging technologies into disrepute will be taken seriously.



CALIFORNIA SECTION
AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY

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