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## Feedback: Letters to the Editor

### BST: A Protein, Not a Steroid

Editor:

Many kudos for your Association's publication of this most interesting magazine. I would like to point out, however, that in his great article, Dr. D. W. Bromley errs in saying that B.S.T. is a steroid. In fact, it is a protein. A steroid raises an entirely different series of food issues that must be faced by the general public.

*Dr. Raymond W. Wright, Jr.  
Chair, Department of Animal Sciences  
Washington State University, Pullman, WA*

### A Welcome Call for Caution

Editor:

Dan Bromley's article "Mad Cows, Drugged Cows, and Juggled Genes" (*CHOICES* 2:2001) is unique among the articles and reports on biotechnologies now being used in agriculture. Casting the issue in terms of purpose and necessity intrigues me.

"Mad Cows, Drugged Cows, and Juggled Genes" at once feeds and soothes the soul. Also, it affirms my belief that economics must have a soul too if it is to be useful to society. My class in family law and public policy is going to have a lecture on purpose and necessity in public policy.

Now I offer a wheeled response. My analogy: This paper is no Buick Park Avenue with fat-butt seats, a floating ride and loud turn signals for those of us with John Deere hearing. This is a 2002 Thunderbird: sporty and powerful, so beautiful in design and execution that queuing for it seems rational. I would paint this car a beautiful yellow, both because it pleases the eye and because yellow denotes caution. All the other vehicles carrying discussions of this topic are either red or green. Red ones are driven by fear (and some drivers are terribly erratic). Green ones tend to be driven by "fact" (and these drivers tend to be road hogs). (I just realized that I should have "greenies" driving the red cars; what to do?)

[Bromley's] discussion of purpose and necessity in science policy and public opinion gives me hope. Papers and news articles on BST, biotech, and consumer reaction divide into factual justification or rationalization of food technologies and fearful reaction to them. The fact papers are green, driven by CEOs and professors they've funded: "GO," they say, "let's get on with progress." Fear rides in red cars and these are driven by consumers. "STOP," they say, "Why are

you doing this to us? Have you never heard of consumer sovereignty?" Along comes Bromley in his beautiful yellow car: "CAUTION," he says, "we need honest conversations."

Thank you, Dan Bromley. What indeed is the purpose of these technologies beyond cornering markets and fattening profits? I am pro-technology, but we social scientists should consider people and culture first. Will these food technologies benefit mankind? Will spreading them give us a better world? These are legitimate questions. Thank you for championing the right of those who ask them.

Faithful servant or fearsome master: which will these food technologies be? Who should answer this question? Techies? "No worries," they say, "we won't do anything unsafe because we are people too." Politicians (and deans)? "We will protect you," they say, but their moral compasses point toward money. No, social scientists must promote rational discussions that involve all the interests, including consumers. Social scientists must help consumers understand the alternatives and articulate their choices.

Dan, you are on my short list of heroes, once for this great article and again for putting it in *CHOICES*, the most useful publication of the AAEEA. Thank you.

*Verne W. House  
Professor Emeritus, Agricultural & Applied Economics  
Clemson University, Clemson, SC, and Adjunct Professor,  
Health & Human Development  
Montana State University*

### Bromley Responds

Editor:

I am grateful to Ray Wright for an important lesson in chemistry. I know BST is a growth hormone, and now I seem to recall something about proteins and hormones — but beyond this faint recall, I have no defense. So much for my story about Olympic athletes and steroids. On the other hand, if there is too much milk, does it matter whether cows are receiving an injection of proteins or peanut butter if the purpose of the shooting up is to increase milk production. I think the issue remains intact.

And what can I — or anyone — say to Verne House? I come from Arizona, where praise like that induces one to watch one's back....

Allow me to offer a brief comment on Verne's statement that "economics must have a soul too if it is to be useful to society." I prefer that we think of this issue in

slightly different terms. I am less interested in getting economics a soul than I am in exposing the teleology of contemporary economics.

Many economists are drawn to the discipline by the false presumption that at last they have discovered a thought system that will light the way to abiding truth through rigorous and value-free "science." They imagine, because they were told it once or twice, that economics is value free — hence their affinity for something that they suppose produces essential truth. The teleological problem under discussion here transcends economics. It permeates most of what we call modern — and hence economics is both the source of that teleology, and the beneficial recipient of it. The teleology reduces to three words — "more is better." At a simple level we see it at work in the drive — by almost any means at our disposal — to augment the production of yet more stuff. Whether that stuff is milk from already hard-working cows, or something else, doesn't really matter. Stuff is fungible. All we can be sure of, as we embark on this millennium, is that the more stuff we can produce, the more of it there will be to consume. Down that road, or so we are told, lies happiness.

There are a few things that might help economics to "be useful to society" — as Verne puts it. I cannot think of a single thing that would do more good than to admit to the general public that we have misled them. We have tricked them into believing that stuff brings happiness — and more seriously, that you can never have too much stuff. If this is what Verne means by "soul," then we are in agreement.

*Dan Bromley*

*Anderson-Bascom Professor of Agricultural & Applied Economics  
University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI*

## **Tweeten: Clarification on Organics**

Editor:

In my rebuttal (*CHOICES*, First Quarter 2001) to critics (*CHOICES*, Third Quarter 2000) of my editorial "Coexisting with Alternative Agricultural Advocates" (*CHOICES*, 2:2000, p. 3), I stated, on what I thought was reliable authority, that organic foods had higher pathogen content on average than conventional foods. Upon further investigation, however, I find that neither the Center for Disease Control nor anyone else, to the best of my knowledge, has conducted a rigorous scientific test of the safety of organic versus conventional foods.

The basic point in my rebuttal remains unchanged: organic foods offer no health benefits over those of conventional foods, but do require more resources to produce, and, because of lower yields, require more land to be in crops. That leaves less land to be in grass, trees, and other more

soil-, wildlife-, and biodiversity-conserving uses. The interests of those who consume costly organic foods to preserve the environment are not well served by AAAs (Alternative Agricultural Advocates — ed.) who have falsely demonized conventional foods.

*Luther Tweeten*

*Professor Emeritus in the Department of Agricultural,  
Environmental, and Development Economics  
The Ohio State University, Columbus*

## **A Vote Against Referees**

Editor:

My master's degree in Food and Resource Economics has served me very well during 17 years in supply chain management at large agribusiness companies. Unfortunately, over the years I have scanned many issues of the AJAE (American Journal of Agricultural Economics — ed.) and other refereed journals without finding many articles relevant enough to thoroughly read. By the time authors do their literature review at the beginning, disclaim any significant results in the middle, and suggest further research at the end, the amount of information useful to me in many articles is often minimal. Active participation in the publications and activities of the National Association of Purchasing Managers and the National Association of Business Economists are more useful for me in agribusiness than the AAEA equivalents. *CHOICES*, on the other hand, provides many useful pieces.

I say this not to bash the AAEA, but rather to respond to the recent dialogue on the future of *CHOICES*. This is the only publication linked to my agricultural economics background where authors express opinions and support their arguments with more than a null hypothesis. I seriously question the drive to make *CHOICES* a refereed journal with page charges — the profession has enough of those already. Page charges will dash all hope for agribusiness participation. If the 1984 goals are no longer relevant, as Lyle Schertz recently suggested, then change the goals. I do not believe we should give up on outreach and dialogue. The task may be formidable, but together we can surely come up with a better future for *CHOICES* than providing another medium for tenure-track professors.

*Steve Smiley*

*Director, Strategic Procurement  
Hill's Pet Nutrition, Inc.*

*CHOICES welcomes letters to the editor. Write to: CHOICES  
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