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# GMO's:

**A SPOONFUL OF  
SUGAR HELPS  
THE MEDICINE  
GO DOWN**



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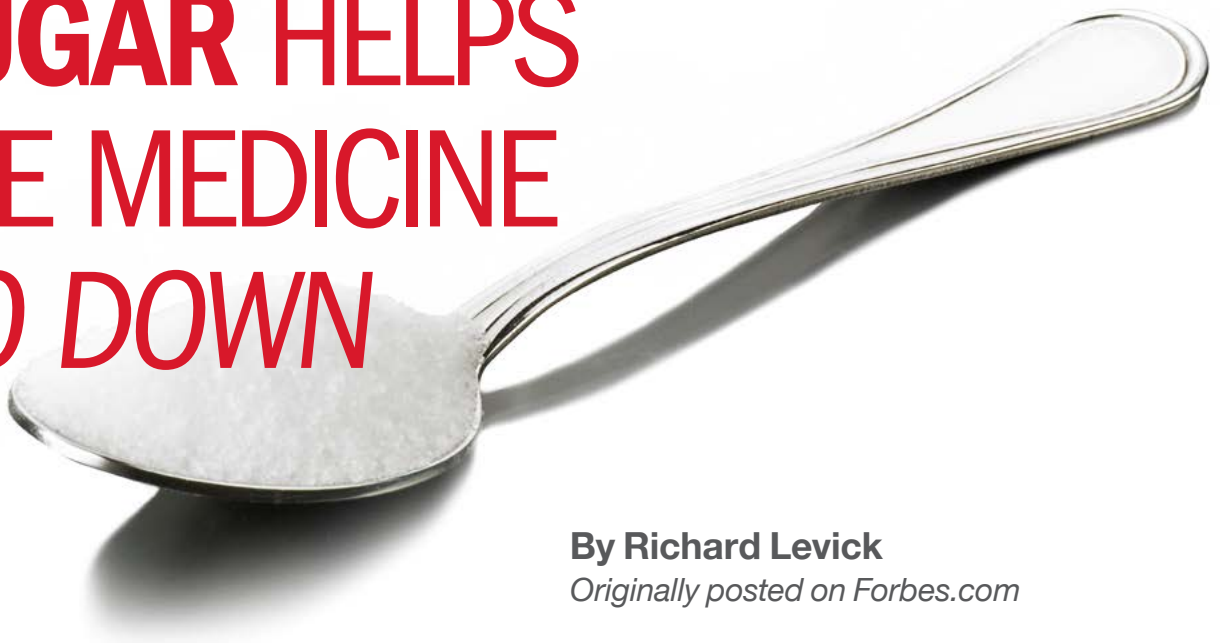
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# GMO's:

## A SPOONFUL OF SUGAR HELPS THE MEDICINE GO DOWN



By Richard Levick

*Originally posted on Forbes.com*

If social media existed around 8,000 B.C., I have a feeling our food supply would look a lot different than it does today. Cereal grains would be far less abundant. Strawberries would be the size of M&Ms. Almonds would either be too bitter or too poisonous to eat. Ears of corn would be about an inch long. We would be snacking on cabbage and lettuce heads not much bigger than Brussels sprouts.

Why? Because crop domestication – or the earliest instances of genetically modified food – took root in prehistoric latrines. Don't believe me? Read Jared Diamond's

Pulitzer Prize winning chronicle of human development *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. Naturally occurring mutations made certain fruits and vegetables more attractive to early hunter/gathers. Those fruits and vegetables contained seeds that required digestion to germinate. When they were eaten and evacuated, those seeds gave rise to crops containing the preferred mutation. Those crops were harvested and replanted, ensuring that the mutation would eventually become the norm. The cycle was off and running.

Imagine the Twitter firestorm that would have engulfed those early farmers:

- 🐦 **“@CroMagnon – Are you really going feed your kids foods that grew in our toilets? #I’llSticktoGathering”**
- 🐦 **“@Neanderthal – Did you know those peas you’re eating passed through my bowls? #Yuck”**
- 🐦 **“@HomoErectus – Who cares if these developments in food production are the key to human settlement and development? #I’dRatherWander”**

Ten thousand years ago, fear might have spread virally across the continents and forever changed the course of human history. Why? Because emotion has always trumped science, and never more so than when it comes to the new definition of genetically modified foods (GMOs).

At a time when 59% of Americans (at a minimum) now turn to the Internet for nutritional advice, the top ten GMO opposition groups maintain more than one million Twitter followers, two million Facebook likes, and 80,000 YouTube subscribers. According to a recent Nielsen poll conducted

for the Wall Street Journal, they have swayed public opinion to the point that 61 percent of consumers have now heard of GMOs and almost half say they try to avoid eating them. Their top concern? It “doesn’t sound like something I should eat.”

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**PERCENT**  
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The shift in public opinion is also having an impact on public policy. Grassroots activists are pushing for mandatory labeling of GMO foods with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and in several states across the country. Vermont passed the first such law back in May. It goes into effect in 2016.

All of this is happening despite the fact that every crop we eat has been through millennia of human-induced genetic modification; that we’ve been eating foods that meet the modern definition of “GMO” for more than 20 years; that not a single accredited study in the United States has ever found them to be unsafe; and that they impart numerous benefits, such as resistance to disease and insects and a far more abundant and affordable food supply.

Now, because of mounting public pressure, major food companies including General Mills, Unilever, and Ben & Jerry’s offer non-GMO brands. The Wall Street Journal also reports



that the “Non-GMO” label is now among the fastest-growing trends in the food industry, with sales of such items up 28 percent in 2013. Some anti-GMO crusaders count such moves as major victories. But not so fast...

This isn't a tactical retreat by the food industry; it's a smart shift in strategy that respects the ways in which anxiety overcomes logic in consumer behavior. GMOs aren't going anywhere; but until the public has had time to digest (pun intended) what they are, what they are not, and what they mean to the future of food production on planet Earth, food companies are now willing to meet the public halfway. They are respecting emotional reactions to GMOs and, to rehash the headline above, providing a spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down.

This is evident in the fact that the uptick in “Non-GMO” product availability has been accompanied by a corresponding increase in awareness efforts on the part of the food industry – especially on the critical digital front. Just one example is the content rich website established by the Grocery Manufacturers Association, [www.factsaboutgmos.org](http://www.factsaboutgmos.org). Another is the industry website [www.gmoanswers.com](http://www.gmoanswers.com), which opens with an olive branch: “Skeptical about GMOs? We understand.”

Both sites, and others that are popping up on the Web, base their arguments on science, but they make emotional appeals as well with vivid imagery and video, benefits-based messaging, and personal stories about the ways in which GMOs are saving lives in developing regions. But most important, they recognize that many people harbor legitimate and understandable fears about genetically modified food.

The combination of greater “Non-GMO” product availability and intensified awareness campaigns is a smart approach that I believe will aid in the acceptance of GMOs. It respects consumers enough to meet them on their own terms and let them take their time in making an informed decision.

Food companies and their trade associations have intelligently come to accept a trait of human behavior that has been around since the dawn of human history. Where emotion is entrenched, logic takes time to take hold. By not denying that fact, and thinking like consumers, those companies are taking the GMO debate to the next stage and demonstrating a level of respect of which even Mary Poppins could be proud.



*Richard Levick, Esq., is Chairman and CEO of LEVICK, a global strategic communications firm.*









# CAMPUS SEXUAL ASSAULT:

## Can Congress Compel Colleges To Act?

By Richard Levick

*Originally posted on Forbes.com*



Lo and behold, a faint pulse of leadership can occasionally still be detected on Capitol Hill. In late July, for example, a bipartisan team of legislators introduced two separate measures, the Campus Accountability and Safety Act (CASA) and the Survivor Outreach and Support Campus Act (SOS Campus Act), that would compel colleges and universities to grapple more effectively with the issue of on-campus sexual assaults.

Such assaults are depicted as an epidemic and the oft-cited metric – that one in five of women in college are victimized by attempted or completed assaults – seems to confirm that depiction. My quibble is that “epidemic” implies an outbreak. In fact, the grim reality of sexual assault has loomed prominently on campus for many, many decades.

In any event, CASA has teeth, enough so to encourage supporters and consternate detractors. Among other provisions, it mandates new transparency standards,

including an annual anonymous survey of students’ experiences. The federal government would develop the survey language and the results would be published online. The idea seems additionally commendable because it would provide essential data on non-reported incidents.

Penalties for non-compliance include 1% of the institution’s operating budget and \$150,000 per month if the completed surveys are not up to snuff. As the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) would keep the money, many worry about incentivizing governmental overreach.

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In light of such brewing controversy, passage of the legislation is therefore by no means guaranteed, especially as opponents argue powerful constitutional and due process concerns. They also argue that the financial penalties denude educational funds and further increase upward pressure on tuition.

However powerful these arguments, with mounting public outrage, colleges and universities are well-advised to realistically weigh their options. Consider the alternatives. “Previously, the main financial penalty would have been a cut-off of federal funding – a sanction too severe to be realistically utilized by the federal government because the consequences would be far too damaging to



colleges and students,” advises Shanlon Wu, a former federal prosecutor and now partner at Wu, Grohovsky & Whipple, PLLC, which focuses on representing college students in disciplinary proceedings and criminal cases.

## Previously, the main financial penalty would have been a cut-off of federal funding

Realistically too, the “mounting public outrage” driving Congress has been fed by the schools’ past failure to adequately address the problem. The “one in five” number is horrifying enough. Also consider a recently expanded DOE list of 76 institutions under investigation for possible Title IX violations. The names include Princeton, Florida State, University of Michigan, Berkeley, and so forth. One month after the report, when the Obama administration proposed changes to the law governing the crimes colleges must report, the academic community responded hostilely.

If educational institutions now face unprecedented federal involvement in their own business, it’s largely because they haven’t apparently learned much from past mistakes. Leaders take charge of their own story and spearhead solutions to their own problems, in this case by drawing on the full resources of the larger community.

That, however, would have required admitting there were problems. Schools naturally worried that any discussion of real or potential sexual assaults on their own campuses might scare down enrollment. In turn, such self-interested timidity created incentives to under-report.

Now the situation is reversed. Now, in order to reassure enrollees, they must communicate their willingness to help solve a problem they can no longer pretend doesn’t exist. Whether CASA and SOS pass or not, parents and students aren’t likely to be as easily comforted as they might have been in the past. Expect keener eyes on college websites and brochures. Expect tougher questions during orientations and campus tours.

The good news for the schools is that CASA and SOS offer them a very specific opportunity, beyond surveys and fact-finding, to show leadership through compliance; namely, the training mandate that observers like Shanlon Wu cite as perhaps the greatest asset of the proposed legislation.

“Current training is typically being given by organizations lacking specific experience,” says Wu. “The law would likely force





colleges and universities to consider using new specialized training provided by trainers experienced in sexual assault investigations, such as former sex offense prosecutors and sex offense detectives.”

To reinforce the presumed benefits of such expert resources, Wu, for one, envisions more, not less, law-making in the aftermath of CASA and SOS. “Federal and state lawmakers can craft legislation to require proper training for campus sexual assault investigators so that no student victimized by a sexual assault or accused of a sexual assault will find their fate in the hands of untrained amateurs,” he says. Thus armed, schools would have the critical strategic messages their marketplace needs to hear: that they’re taking cues from former prosecutors and detectives, the best trainers in the business; that they’re continuing to seek input from the DOE and DOJ; that they’re spending real money to protect students.

**The law would likely force colleges and universities to consider using new specialized training provided by trainers experienced in sexual offense prosecutors and sex offense detectives**

The corollary message to government is likewise critical. It’s the same message of unstinted collaboration that all businesses need to send to regulators if they hope to earn some official goodwill when problems do occur. In that context, colleges and universities may have something

to learn from beleaguered financial institutions and product manufactures.

There is, finally, an additional reassurance that compliance with the spirit of the proposed new laws provides. If history proves anything, it proves that cycles of injustice swing both ways. Turn a blind eye to sexual assault today; tomorrow, we rush to judgment as collective overreaction engulfs the lives and reputations of the falsely accused.

Neither victims nor suspects deserve amateurs. ■

*Richard Levick, Esq., is Chairman and CEO of LEVICK, a global strategic communications firm.*





# POLICE MILITARIZATION:

## *The Problem is Optics, Not the Equipment*

By Ernest Delbuono  
*Originally posted on Forbes.com*

**P**olice militarization has emerged as a dominant theme in the coverage of civil unrest in Ferguson, Missouri. That's for good reason – though not the reason many might think.

Just about every televised report on the Ferguson Police Department's response to protests sparked by Michael Brown's shooting featured images of police that look more like Navy Seals than peace officers. There were M16-style rifles, camouflage uniforms, armored personnel vehicles, and the like. Each was deployed far more aggressively than the situation called for. The result was visuals that can only be described as menacing – the last thing Ferguson police need as they combat criticism of racial profiling and heavy-handed tactics.

The optics have also led many pundits and politicians to question why an ex-urban police department needs such an arsenal. But the



problem isn't that Ferguson police – and other police departments across the country – have access to technologically advanced military-style equipment; the problem is the ways in which it was deployed. This is a question of one police department's judgment; not over-preparedness.

First, consider that police militarization is nothing new. American law enforcement has always availed itself of the most effective tools available. Bonnie and Clyde were killed with a Browning Automatic Rifle. Prohibition agents were armed with Thompson submachine guns. The public hails police officers as heroes when militaristic equipment is used appropriately to eliminate a threat to public safety. It's a different story when it is used for crowd control; but that doesn't mean we want our police officers taking a knives to gunfights as standard operating procedure.

Some might see the above analogy as a stretch, but consider next that these same weapons are widely available to the public. If someone with criminal intent can walk into gun store and walk out with an AR-15, the police need to be equipped to handle any situation that might ensue. That means maintaining an advantage in firepower – and having access to top-of-the-line protective gear, such as helmets, Kevlar vests, and other equipment. Do we want the average cop on the beat walking down the street looking like a commando? No. But we certainly want them as protected as possible when risking life and limb to keep us safe.

Finally, think back to the days following the Boston Marathon bombing and the killing and capture of the culprits. How would have the public reacted if the Tsarnaev brothers' killing spree had continued because the police were ill-equipped to deal with it? Sadly, we live in a world where the potential for similar attacks exists in every corner of America. Surely

it is better for our police to have militaristic equipment and not need it than it would be to need it and not have it when innocent lives are on the line.

The failures in Ferguson raise serious concerns about the Ferguson Police Department's reasoning and decision making. You don't arm yourself for Fallujah when dealing with community protests (unless a clear threat of violence exists) – and you certainly don't do it after one of your officers shoots an unarmed man under questionable circumstances.

That said, however, our police need to be prepared to deal with every contingency they may face. To rob them of the equipment they need would be to overreact to one department's mistakes – and to put innocent lives at risk the next time a serious threat to public safety arises.

*Ernest DelBuono is a Senior Vice President at LEVICK and Chair of the firm's Crisis Practice. He is also a contributing author to LEVICK Daily.*



# Stefan Hankin

## ON ONLINE HARRASSMENT



In this LEVICK Daily video interview, Stefan Hankin, the Founder and President of Lincoln Park Strategies, examines an upcoming U.S. Supreme Court decision regarding online harassment and how it will impact the bounds of acceptable behavior on the Web.



# Leslie Wolf-Creutzfeldt

## ON CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS IN THE DODD-FRANK ERA



In this LEVICK Daily video interview, LEVICK Senior Vice President Leslie Wolf-Creutzfeldt outlines the ways in which Dodd-Frank has impacted public companies' investor, client, consumer, and public outreach efforts. While there are various concerns with the creative and impressive ways in which companies can now articulate their stories – Regulation FD compliance being chief among them – there is no question that they have been empowered to take their messaging to the next level.

# Chip Babcock

## ON CELEBRITY TRIALS



In this LEVICK Daily video interview, Chip Babcock, a Partner in the law firm of Jackson Walker L.L.P., discusses the unique challenges and opportunities that present themselves when defending celebrity clients in litigation.



**THE URGENCY  
OF NOW.**