

July 22, 2005

To:

Cynthia Fenneman  
President and CEO  
American Public Television

Donna Hardwick  
Director of Communications  
American Public Television

David Hosley, PhD  
President and General Manager  
KVIE, Inc.

James O'Donnell  
Director of Program Marketing  
KVIE, Inc.

cc:

Pat Mitchell  
President and CEO  
Public Broadcasting Service

Jacoba Atlas  
Senior VP and Co-Chief Program Executive  
Public Broadcasting Service

Dear Sirs/Madams:

The signers of this letter are deeply concerned about plans for American Public Television (APT), KVIE and PBS member stations to distribute and possibly air a new television series, called "America's Heartland," that is co-sponsored by Monsanto and will highlight, according to the promotional materials, that company's core business interests, including controversial genetically engineered crops. We have always supported public television's mission to provide the American public with non-biased news and information free of undue commercial influence. We feel these standards have been suspended in the case of this series, which seems to have been co-opted by large agricultural entities to promote their business interests and/or ideologies. They include: Monsanto, American Farm Bureau Federation, American Soybean Association, National Corn Growers Association, National Cotton Council, United Soybean Board and U.S. Grains Council.

The series' promotional materials, as well as the press releases issued by Monsanto and the Farm Bureau, strongly suggest that the content of this series will be used to promote the interests of industrial agriculture. For instance, both these press releases boldly states that "America's Heartland" is the result of a "strong partnership between Monsanto Company, the American Farm Bureau Federation, and other U.S. agriculture groups," and that the series is intended to raise "awareness of the agriculture industry, particularly among the nation's opinion leaders," leaving little doubt that business propaganda may take a prominent role.

Furthermore, KVIE, the series' producer, has already shown a strong bias in support of agricultural biotechnology, or genetic engineering, in its "California Heartland" segment called "Brave New Heartland" (episode #545), which was devoted almost entirely to a detailed presentation of the purported benefits of the technology. In this episode, the dialogue of KVIE's narrators was clearly designed to promote genetic engineering and downplay the controversies surrounding it, and the numerous pro-biotech guests were given considerably more time to promote their unchallenged opinions than was given the two opponents of biotechnology. To make matters worse, only one scientist (who was not identified as such in the segment) was invited to address the many health, environmental, social and economic concerns surrounding this technology. The program gives viewers the impression that public concerns about biotechnology are unfounded and based on a lack of scientific understanding. In fact, the National Academy of Sciences has acknowledged in several studies over the past five years that there can be substantial risks to human health and the environment from genetically engineered organisms.

Accordingly, we are asking that you pull "America's Heartland" from distribution until underwriters for the series can be found whose business interests are not directly linked to the subject matter of this series. Furthermore, we ask you to remove from "America's Heartland" any segment that discusses genetically engineered food or crops without also discussing in equal terms the many concerns the scientific, environmental and public health communities have about this technology.

APT is distributing this series, yet we fail to see how "America's Heartland" can pass APT's own tests for "determining the acceptability of proposed program funding arrangements," including: **Editorial Control Test** ("*Has the underwriter exercised editorial control? Could it?*"), **Perception Test** ("*Might the public perceive that the underwriter has exercised editorial control?*") or **Commercialism Test** ("*Might the public conclude the program is on public television principally because it promotes the underwriter's products, services or other business interests?*"). According to APT's tests, **"The most important factor to be considered is the character and directness of the perceived connection between the program funder and the subject matter of the program."** This connection could hardly be clearer or more direct for the sponsors of "America's Heartland." For instance, Monsanto's primary goal for the past nine years has been to promote the distribution of its genetically engineered seeds and the sale of its popular and profitable herbicides. Monsanto's sponsorship of a series on farming could reasonably be expected to promote these products and their acceptance by the viewing public, particularly when it comes to highly-controversial genetically engineered crops, which are proclaimed in the promotional materials for "America's Heartland" to be the "next American revolution."

We are particularly concerned about this last issue since Monsanto owns the technology used in over 90 percent of all genetically engineered crops that are grown in the U.S., which, in turn, produce 55 percent of Monsanto's revenue. The stakes for Monsanto in successfully promoting this new technology are extremely high, and the company has shown that it will go to great lengths to promote and sell its products. Whether the influence on "America's Heartland" is direct or indirect, it seems unlikely that a series on farming sponsored by Monsanto will rigorously present the many scientific concerns about genetically engineered organisms.

Monsanto has a track record of using aggressive and coercive tactics in influencing media coverage, and has been documented to have actually pressured media outlets to eliminate critical coverage of its products and practices. Monsanto's conduct relating to the production of a Fox TV investigative series on its recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH) is a striking and well-documented example. Fox TV journalists Jane Akre and Steve Wilson fought, and lost, a prolonged battle with Fox TV to air their story on rBGH after Monsanto's lawyers sent threatening letters to the outlet. By effectively squelching an important health-related news story, Monsanto demonstrated its disregard for freedom of the press.

In order to force acceptance of its genetically engineered products, Monsanto has gone so far as to bribe government officials where it can, as was the case recently in Indonesia (*see U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, Litigation Release No. 19023, January 6, 2005*). If Monsanto is willing to go to such lengths with government officials and news reporters, it seems that the decision-makers at APT, KVIE and PBS member stations should, at the very least, be wary of airing a series sponsored and produced by Monsanto.

The primary concerns about genetically engineered foods center on a multitude of serious environmental impacts, both projected and realized, as well as the absence of long-term human health impact studies. There is currently no independent science to support the claim that genetically engineered foods are safe.

Significantly, Monsanto has threatened hundreds of farmers with legal action and has taken many of them to court over their use of Monsanto seeds and alleged patent infringements. A recent Center for Food Safety report documents these cases and exposes Monsanto as an agriculture company with a pattern of suing American farmers, sometimes driving them into bankruptcy (*see "Monsanto vs. U.S. Farmers", Center for Food Safety, January 2005*).

Finally, a series on farming sponsored by Monsanto and the industrial agriculture business will likely continue the precedent established by KVIE by over-representing the benefits of all their products and preferred farming practices, while under-representing widely-held concerns and viable alternatives.

It is for these reasons that we are asking you to find underwriters for this program on America's farmers that do not have a vested interest in the practices, purchases and products of those farmers and to remove from "America's Heartland" any segment that discusses genetically engineered food or crops without also discussing the many concerns surrounding this technology.

Sincerely,

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Center for Food Safety

Brent Blackwelder  
President  
Friends of the Earth

U.S. PIRG

Jon Harvey  
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Mercy Investment  
Program (Monsanto shareholder)  
Sisters of Mercy Regional  
Community of Detroit (Monsanto  
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Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk-U.S. Prov.

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