In Reply Mr Satin raises several points in response to my recent Invited Commentary about how food companies fund research for marketing purposes: (1) I give the impression that all industry-funded research is inherently tainted; (2) I ignore the industry’s triumph in fortifying foods with nutrients; (3) I fail to mention intellectual conflicts of interest; and (4) I should consider such issues before stereotyping.

First, my commentary was about research sponsored by food companies specifically to demonstrate the health benefits or lack of harm of a product, or to cast doubt on evidence to the contrary. It referred to a particularly egregious example—the sugar industry’s attempt to manipulate research results. Although some industry-funded research does produce results contrary to the sponsor’s interests, such instances are rare. Most ends up useful in some way to the sponsors’ commercial objectives; it is marketing research, not basic science.

The point by Mr Satin about nutrient fortification has merit, but most of the basic research on nutrients used in fortification was conducted by independent scientists. Mr Satin’s own Salt Institute credits independent scientists for promoting iodization its marketing potential and funded research on fluoridated toothpaste.

All scientists have intellectual biases—that is how science gets done and why science works best when researchers with different views of science repeat each other’s experiments. But the goals of scientists pursuing intellectual hypotheses differ markedly from those of companies seeking to sell food products. Questioning food industry funding raises sensitive issues, not least because its influence on researchers occurs unconsciously, is usually unintentional, and is difficult for recipients to recognize. Food companies are not public health agencies and should not be expected to be; their first priority is to provide profits to owners and shareholders. Funding research helps with that effort. My purpose in writing the Invited Commentary was to bring the contradictions of food industry research funding to the attention of readers.

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