What you think ...

The Fructose Debate

In *The Skeptic*, (30:1, page 14) Chris Forbes-Ewan writes an article titled “Sweet Reason”, in which his main target is the cheerleader David Gillespie, who is responsible for a book titled *Sweet Poison*.

Chris has been, at best, lazy in writing this article. He fails to address the root issues that the book discusses, which is the claim that fructose is ethanol without the buzz and that it is technically a toxin that short-circuits the body's appetite controls, is only metabolised in the liver where it is converted to triglycerides and is a very significant contributor to type II diabetes and obesity. Chris's space-filling attempts at humour fall flat and his boast of a infantile post on Gillespie's blog have no place in a journal such as *The Skeptic*.

Chris along the way plays the 'natural' card, as if there's some deity-driven purpose for fructose that makes it good for us because it's in honey and fruit and cane sugar. Is Chris aware that natural is not the same as good? Plants have a vested interest in encouraging animals to eat their fruit and deposit seeds far and wide, not to help those animals to live long and healthy lives, and bees have vastly different internals to mammals.

Perhaps if Chris had paid more attention in his article to the material presented by Robert Lustig, which he does at least mention briefly but entirely skips its content, where the science is well presented and deserves serious consideration, and addressed the issues that Lustig presents rather than ranting against the cheer squad's spelling mistakes, then the article may have been of some benefit to the readers of *The Skeptic*. Also the work of Gary Taubes (author of *Good Calories, Bad Calories*, turn to chapter 12 of that book for a summary) deserves attention. A competent nutritionalist would be expected to be aware of both these people's work and to not simply dismiss the issue with a hand wave and a quasi-legal parody.

Fructose is a controversial sugar with some serious issues surrounding its consumption in all but very small doses and it deserves serious attention and educated debate, not the defensive, poorly researched and self-interested article presented by Chris.

Carl Brewer
Vermont Vic

I was one of the people who spoke to Margaret Kitson after David Gillespie's presentation at Briskepticon [see Margaret Kitson's Forum piece, *The Skeptic*, 30:1, page 50]. I did refer to the presentation as "not appropriate", and hope that my comment did not distress her.

Gillespie's claim focused on a link between fructose and obesity. To be able to understand and evaluate this claim, one needs a fair degree of expertise in a particular biomedical field. I do not have that expertise, and so could not judge Gillespie's presentation. I could not tell if it was a massive scientific discovery or a piece of rubbish. From what I could gather, only a small handful of people in the hall had knowledge in the area, and they had little or no time to prepare a response to what they were hearing.

Since there were few experts there, it follows that most people in the audience could not benefit from the presentation. They could not learn from it, since it could be rubbish, and they could not critique it for lack of expertise. Like Peter Ellerton, I zoned out, and I got on with some reading quite early on.

What should Gillespie have done? The answer is obvious. He should have written up a paper and sent it to a relevant journal, where genuine experts could have examined it at length. Or he could have presented at an expert conference, where a roomful of specialists would have understood exactly what he was saying. I was astonished that he had not done this, since he claimed to be in touch with scientists, who could surely have given him guidance.

Please note that this viewpoint does not prejudge the quality of Gillespie's argument. My concern is that this was a wildly inappropriate forum for this particular idea and, quite literally, a waste of time.

Having said that, let me add that the rest of Briskepticon was both enlightening and great fun. Margaret worked hard, and it showed in the excellent quality of the organisation and presentations.

Martin Bridgstock
Nathan Qld

Santa's role

"Ho Ho Humbug" [*The Skeptic* 30:1, page 44] reminded me of living in a mining town in central Queensland. A twelve year old girl there was adamant that 'Santy' existed. My wife and I, as new parents, decided that our children would receive Christmas presents from us, from other family, from friends, but not from Santa Claus.

My two year old daughter was at a hardware store when Santa was there. The store owner, who we knew in other circles, was insistent about her meeting Santa. My daughter cried. Over the years, I realised this was not an unusual reaction of young children. Many find a large bearded man in a funny red suit scary*. Why should we force children to like Santa?

Have my children missed out for not having received presents from Santa over almost 20 years? They would probably say they have, but that has more to do with a parental belief that you can have “too much of a good thing”, and that children are better off appreciating well-chosen gifts than a multitude of cheap 'stocking fillers' that inevitably break by Boxing Day.

As a child, my brothers and I put out pillow slips to be filled on Christmas Eve. Did we believe Santa existed? Of