

[Monsanto Planting Seeds in the White House?](#)

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Apparently, President Obama is considering appointing Michael Taylor to head the new Food Safety Working Group. Who's Michael Taylor? From *Food Politics* ([care of Jill Richardson](#)):

Mr. Taylor is a lawyer who began his revolving door adventures as counsel to FDA. He then moved to King & Spalding, a private-sector law firm representing Monsanto, a leading agricultural biotechnology company. In 1991 he returned to the FDA as Deputy Commissioner for Policy, where he was part of the team that issued the agency's decidedly industry-friendly policy on food biotechnology and that approved the use of Monsanto's genetically engineered growth hormone in dairy cows.

His questionable role in these decisions led to an investigation by the federal General Accounting Office, which eventually exonerated him of all conflict-of-interest charges. In 1994, Mr. Taylor moved to USDA to become administrator of its Food Safety and Inspection Service... After another stint in private legal practice with King & Spalding, Mr. Taylor again joined Monsanto as Vice President for Public Policy in 1998.

The man has moved in and out of roles at the federal government and Monsanto so many times he probably has whiplash.

So what's the big deal? (I'm not going to opine on Monsanto here, other than to say that I know quite a few people who think Monsanto is the most evil corporation in the world, and that's even after this AIG debacle.) Well, two things:

The first is that I find it puzzling, to put it lightly, that Obama would choose this guy to help ensure food safety. Here's what Taylor recently said:

FDA is in "bad shape" and the FSIS meat and poultry inspection system is "obsolete," Taylor said. "We're spending a lot of government money to do inspections that could be done by someone else," he said. "We need to **complete the transformation of FSIS as a food safety agency, away from inspection** to a science-based public health agency."

Yes, because it's been proven just how effective is lack of rigorous monitoring and regulation on the part of the government. We need more of less. [Taylor was also responsible](#) for writing the [rBGH](#) labeling guidelines for the FDA. The guidelines specifically prohibited dairies from stating that their products contained or were free of rBGH. Sounds safe to me.

Second, the appointment of Michael Taylor to the Food Safety Working Group would really belie Obama's pledge not to appoint lobbyists to positions within his administration. And

this [would not be the first time](#). Am I shocked? No. But this is not merely a matter of a politician going back on a pledge or dancing around the edges.

The AIG/bank bailout fiasco shows just how crippled the Obama Administration can be by conflicts of interest. Secretary Geithner has failed miserably at asserting the federal government's authority over the corporations to which we've handed out hundreds of billions of dollars. The banks aren't lending, and AIG and Citigroup are using our [tax dollars to provide private benefits](#) to some of the who got us into this mess.

As [Josh Marshall eloquently states](#), the real issue behind the AIG bonus debacle isn't the money.

There's no end of puffed up outrage and opportunistic posturing over the on-going revelation of the AIG bonus scandal. But some line has been crossed. And it's worth thinking really clearly about just what that line is. **What is so damaging about this isn't the money -- which is almost trivially small compared to the many hundreds of billions we've already committed. The problem is what appears to be the president's mortifying impotence in the face of bankers and financiers who created the problem.**

Appointing people who have close ties to--and, in many cases, have actually worked for--the industries they are responsible for regulating, is a losing proposition. Whether or not Geithner and other Obama appointees are intending to serve private corporate interests over those of the nation, their close relationships and possible conflicts of interest certainly don't help.