Hutcheon, Kate

From: agronomy <agronomy@mdpi.com>
Sent: Thursday, 21 November 2019 4:52 PM
To: Hutcheon, Kate
Cc: Agronomy Editorial Office
Subject: Re: Agronomy paper - Further Disruption of the TAS3 Pathway

Dear Kate

We wrote to the authors (Andrew L Eamens et al.) of the published paper, and received the following reply:

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1. Manuscript Figure 1A, 1C and 1D.
   I can confirm that the images presented in Figures 1A, 1C and 1D were generated by Kate during her PhD tenure under my supervision at the University of Newcastle. Kate had previously provided these images at my request for my use in an invited oral presentation at the 2016 ComBio Conference (Brisbane Convention Centre, Brisbane, QLD, Australia, October 3-7, 2016); a presentation in which Kate's work and contribution was duly acknowledged.
   The images have been taken from this presentation and have neither been "directly copied" nor "plagiarised" from Kate's thesis. Indeed all project work outlined either in our manuscript or in Kate's thesis was conducted in my laboratory, as part of a program of research that I developed, and which was funded by monies solely secured by me. I therefore fail to see how I have 'plagiarised' any of the work detailed in our manuscript.
2. Figures 2 and 1B.

   Kate claims that Figure 2 is copied and pasted directly from her thesis, albeit with minor reformatting, and that Figure 1B results from her work of n=1. Both claims are rejected on the basis that these two Figures stem from experimentation conducted by the co-authors, and not by Kate.

3. Differences in molecular data.

   I understand that Kate has supplied Agronomy with a link to an electronic copy of her thesis. Comparison of her thesis data with molecular data presented in our manuscript will reveal significant discrepancies. As an indicative sample, I note the material differences between Kate's thesis Figures 4.6, 4.7 and 4.9, on thesis pages 135, 139 and 149 respectively, to the molecular data presented in Figures 3 and 4 of our manuscript.

4. Figure 5.

The molecular assessments detailed in manuscript Figure 5 do not appear anywhere in Kate's thesis. On three occasions, we attempted to reproduce the molecular data detailed in Kate's thesis. However, in all three experimental attempts, we were unable to generate data that even closely resembled the data reported in Kate's thesis. Each attempt did, however, repeatedly generate highly reproducible data, specifically; the data that we report on in manuscript Figures 3 and 4. We have complete confidence in the robustness of our data.

5. Thesis results chapter text

Owing to the differences in 'Kate's' (thesis) and 'our' (manuscript Figures) sets of experimental data, it is implausible that the Results, Discussion, and Conclusion sections of our manuscript, which details highly distinct experimental findings, could be drawn from the text of Kate's thesis chapter 4. The Introduction and Methods sections of our manuscript are also distinct to those of Kate's thesis.

In summary, the authorship team spent a tremendous amount of time and resources performing the reported experimentation, analysing the data generated by our entirely independent experimental analyses, and on the authorship of the manuscript itself; a manuscript that reports on data that bears little resemblance to the experimental findings detailed in Kate's thesis results chapter. I trust that this addresses all of the claims put to us, and that this matter is now viewed as closed on the basis that the claims made are unsupported by evidence.

We feel sorry about this authorship dispute, but we would recommend that you may communicate with the authors now for a solution at the moment. In case of any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Kind regards,
Rachel Hu
Managing Editor
Agronomy Editorial Office

On 2019/11/20 11:40, Hutcheon, Kate wrote:

> Hello,
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> I apologise if this is not the correct contact email address to direct this issue to, however I have concerns regarding a paper which was recently published in *Agronomy*, a MDPI journal.
>
> A paper has been brought to my attention entitled "Further Disruption of the TAS3 Pathway via the Addition of the AGO7 Mutation to the DRB1, DRB2 or DRB4 Mutations Severely Impairs the Reproductive Competence of Arabidopsis thaliana", recently published in *Agronomy*.
>
> This paper uses significant sections of my original PhD thesis work without attribution, citation, or acknowledgement. For example:
>
> - The phenotype photographs in Figure 1 (A, C, and D) have all been copied directly from my thesis,

- The raw data presented in Figure 2 is the same as in my thesis, albeit with the format changed.

Creation and validation of the *drb2ago7* mutant line for my thesis took a considerable amount of time, which included assessing the floral/reproductive phenotype (e.g. silique length, number of seeds). The data supporting the reproductive phenotype described in this *Agronomy* paper was not collected by any of the named authors.

Given that the authors may not have cultivated a new set of plants for this study (based on the fact that they are reusing my images), I also have concerns that the data presented in Figure 1B (rosette leaf size) may have been collected from the single plants (n=1) displayed in Figure 1 and therefore may not be sufficiently robust.

I have contacted the authors directly regarding this issue, however I have not yet had a response.

While it appears that the University of Newcastle thesis repository is currently unavailable (https://nova.newcastle.edu.au/), here is a link to a final version of my thesis to indicate the photographs and figures which have been plagiarised without attribution or citation: https://drive.google.com/file/d/15_Y_QylN4LgT-ArXshwFLNR15_XG_5Na/view?usp=drivesdk

- Page 122 / Figure 4.1 – Rosette phenotype of *drb* and *ago* mutant lines **(*Agronomy* Figure 1A)**
- Page 124 / Figure 4.2 – Inflorescence stem phenotype of *drb* and *ago* single and double mutants **(*Agronomy* Figure 1D)**
- Page 132 / Figure 4.5 – Floral phenotype of *drb* and *ago7* mutants **(*Agronomy* Figure 1C)**
- Page 127 / Figure 4.3 – Silique length in DRB and AGO7 plants **(*Agronomy* Figure 2 – raw data is exactly the same, figure has been remade)**
- Page 129 / Figure 4.4 – Seed number in DRB and AGO7 plants **(*Agronomy* Figure 2 – raw data is exactly the same, figure has been remade)**

Could you please let me know if there is a process in place within MDPI for raising/escalating these concerns?

Kind regards,
Kate

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