



Monsanto

Overview

Monsanto is known for producing the dioxin-containing defoliant Agent Orange, which was used extensively in the Vietnam War; for forcing the evacuation of the community of Times Beach, Missouri, by contaminating it with dioxin; and for refusing to accept full responsibility for the PCB contamination of an Alabama town. Monsanto has also gained notoriety for suing a Canadian farmer who unintentionally grew genetically engineered (GE) Roundup Ready canola after pollen from GE seeds drifted into his fields and contaminated his crop. Monsanto's disregard for corporate social responsibility is summed up in a quote from Phil Angell, Monsanto's director of corporate communications, to the *New York Times*, October 25, 1998: "Monsanto should not have to vouchsafe the safety of biotech food. Our interest is in selling as much of it as possible. Assuring its safety is [the U.S. Food and Drug Administration]'s job."¹

Information and media manipulation

Monsanto funded and published numerous studies during the 1980s arguing that dioxin was harmless. Dr. Cate Jenkins of the EPA testified that "there are numerous...flaws in the Monsanto health studies. Each of these misrepresentations and falsifications served to negate any conclusions of adverse health effects from dioxins." In 1991, a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health study refuted Monsanto's claims, proving that dioxin exposure can lead to cancer.²

In 1991, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration stated that Monsanto's promotional materials on recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH) went "beyond the legitimate exchange of scientific information," ordering Monsanto to stop making unsubstantiated claims through advertisements and promotional videos. Monsanto also threatened to file lawsuits against any companies that advertised "no rBGH" on their food products.³

Canadian government officials, speaking on camera, have said that they believe Monsanto tried to bribe them with offers of US\$1 to \$2 million to gain approval for rBGH in Canada. Monsanto officials say the Canadians misunderstood their offer of "research" funds.⁴

Environmental contamination

Dioxin

Dioxin from a Monsanto plant contaminated the community of Times Beach, Missouri. In 1982, 2,000 people were permanently relocated by the state government and the U.S. EPA—11 years after the contamination was first discovered, and eight years after the cause was identified as dioxin. Mental dysfunc-

tions and immune system disorders have been found in children from the area.⁵

PCBs

PCB contamination from a Monsanto factory in Anniston, Alabama has produced widespread health and environmental consequences. The results of studies showing potential impacts of PCBs were disregarded by Monsanto, leading to multi-million dollar negligence settlements in recent years. After the first lawsuit was filed by a local church, Monsanto attempted to purchase the church building; eventually the Alabama Supreme Court forced the company to pay US\$2.5 million to the church's members.⁶

In February 2002, a jury found that the Anniston plant was responsible for polluting the community with PCBs, although the amount to be paid in damages has yet to be determined. The PCBs are believed to be responsible for causing multiple types of skin ailments, reproductive disorders, liver disease, cancers, cerebral palsy and other diseases. One of the findings against Solutia (Monsanto's chemical spinoff) is called a "tort of outrage." According to the defense attorney, "This is reserved for conduct that is so reprehensible that it shocks any civilized person." He said that this charge is very difficult to prove, and demonstrates a high level of liability on Solutia that is likely to result in a large damage claim.⁷

Company Profile

In 2000, Monsanto merged with Pharmacia & Upjohn to become one of the "life science" industry's largest companies, the Pharmacia Corporation. By the end of that year, however, Monsanto had become an independent subsidiary focusing solely on agricultural products—genetically engineered seeds, pesticides and recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH—a genetically engineered hormone designed to increase milk production when injected into dairy cows). Monsanto, a U.S.-based multinational corporation with over 14,700 employees worldwide, is now one of the largest pesticide companies in the world.¹

In 2000, Monsanto's total sales, including seeds, pesticides and rBGH, were US\$3.9 billion, more than 8% higher than the previous year.²

Notes

1 PANUPS, Top Seven Agrochemical Companies in 2000, May 23, 2001.

2 Agrow: World Crop Protection News, March 2, 2001.

Harassing farmers

Monsanto tracks down farmers who replant seed from Monsanto's genetically engineered crops. In the company's own words, "Monsanto is vigorously pursuing growers who pirate any brand or variety of its genetically engineered seed, such as Roundup Ready soybeans and cotton and Bollgard cotton." The company has hired full-time investigators to follow up on seed saving leads it receives. Monsanto has pursued over 500 cases in the U.S. in at least 20 states. Monsanto maintains that seed saving is illegal even if a farmer did not sign an invoice statement for the seed at time of purchase.⁸

A Canadian federal judge ruled that Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser had infringed the patent on Monsanto's Roundup Ready canola because the crop was found on his land. Even information that Monsanto divulged before the trial—that a neighbor had planted Monsanto's transgenic canola next to land that Schmeiser seeded the following year—made no difference. Once conventional seed that Schmeiser had been developing for 50 years was found to contain Roundup Ready genes, it became property of Monsanto. The judge ordered Schmeiser to pay all profits from his 1998 crop to Monsanto.⁹

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Notes

- 1 Pollan, M., "Playing God in the Garden," *New York Times*, October 25, 1998.
- 2 Testimony before EPA dioxin reassessment panel, December 1994, by L. C. Casten, Environmental Task Force Chair, Chicago Media Watch, <http://www.greens.org/s-r/078/07-47.html>; memorandum to the EPA from W. Sanjour (policy analyst), July 1994, <http://pwp.lincs.net/sanjour/monsanto.htm>; "Monsanto: A Checkered History," the Institute for Social Ecology, http://www.social-ecology.org/learn/library/tokar/monsanto_2.html; Fagin, D. and M. Lavelle., 1999, *Toxic Deception: How the Chemical Industry Manipulates Science, Bends the Law and Endangers your Health*, Common Courage Press, Monroe, Maine.
- 3 Fagin and Lavelle, op. cit., p. 190; "Monsanto: Greenpeace Corporate Criminal Report," <http://www.greenpeace.org/~usa/reports/biodiversity/corpcrim.html>.
- 4 "Milk, rBGH, and Cancer," *Rachel's Environment & Health Weekly* #593, April 9, 1998.
- 5 "Another accidental release of dioxin at Times Beach heats up the debate over the incinerator's safety," *Riverfront Times* (St. Louis), May 15, 1996, <http://lists.essential.org/1996/dioxin-l/msg00249.html>; "Monsanto: A Checkered History," the Institute for Social Ecology, http://www.social-ecology.org/learn/library/tokar/monsanto_2.html; "A Corporate Giant," *News in Review*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, <http://www.cbc.ca/insidecbc/newsinreview/mar99/milk/corp.htm>; "Times Beach Deleted From National Priorities List," EPA—OECA, Fall 2001, <http://es.epa.gov/oeca/osre/cleanupnews.html#times>.
- 6 "In Dirt, Water and Hogs, Town Got Its Fill of PCBs," *Washington Post*, January 1, 2002; "PCBs Drenched Ala. Town, But No One Was Ever Told," *Washington Post*, January 1, 2002; "Environmental Justice Case Study: The People of Anniston, Alabama v. Monsanto," <http://www.umich.edu/~snre492/Jones/anniston.htm#Problem>.
- 7 "Judge in PCB case presses for settlements," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, February 26, 2002. "Jury decides against Monsanto, Solutia in PCB case," *Reuters*, February 25, 2002.
- 8 "Monsanto Prosecutes U.S. Seed Violators," PANUPS, December 14, 1998.
- 9 "Monsanto engineers the road to serfdom," *Cropchoice*, May 29, 2001.

Monsanto's Notorious Pesticides

Roundup—Roundup (active ingredient glyphosate) is Monsanto's flagship weed killer (or herbicide), accounting for 67% of the company's total sales or about \$2.6 billion annually.¹ The amount of Roundup sold has grown by around 20% each year over the past five years.² Monsanto has expanded its capacity to produce Roundup nearly five-fold since 1992.³

While Monsanto maintains that Roundup is safe, many others disagree, including the New York State Attorney General. Based on its investigation, the Attorney General's office filed a lawsuit arguing that the company's advertising inaccurately portrayed Monsanto's glyphosate-containing products as safe and as not causing any harmful effects to people or the environment. As part of an out-of-court settlement, Monsanto agreed to discontinue use of terms such as "biodegradable" and "environmentally friendly" in all advertising of glyphosate-containing products in New York state and paid US\$50,000 toward the state's costs of pursuing the case.⁴

There are a number of environmental and human health problems associated with glyphosate. For example, in studies of people (mostly farmers) exposed to glyphosate, exposure is associated with an increased risk of miscarriages, premature birth and the cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.⁵

In one case, Monsanto paid a US\$225,000 fine for having mislabeled Roundup containers on 75 separate occasions. It was the largest settlement ever paid for violation of U.S. Worker Protection Standards. The labels had claimed that the restricted entry period after application of Roundup was four, rather than the actual 12 hours.⁶

Agent Orange (2,4,5-T and 2,4-D)—Monsanto was one of the primary producers of Agent Orange, a defoliant used by the U.S. in the Vietnam War. Monsanto resisted compensating U.S. veterans for health problems caused by exposure to Agent Orange until it was forced to pay by a judge in 1984. In Vietnam, the impacts of Agent Orange and dioxin, present as a contaminant in Agent Orange, are overwhelming. Some estimates have put the number of dioxin-related deformities of Vietnamese children at 500,000.⁷

Notes

- 1 *Agrow: World Crop Protection News*, March 2, 2001.
- 2 *Agrow: World Crop Protection News*, January 1, 2000.
- 3 Monsanto, "A Single Focus," 2000 Annual Report, <http://www.monsanto.com>.
- 4 "Monsanto Agrees to Change Ads and EPA Fines Northrup King," PANUPS, January 10, 1997; "Monsanto Strategies," *The Guardian* (UK), September 17, 1997.
- 5 Herbicide Factsheet: Glyphosate (Roundup), *Journal of Pesticide Reform*, Fall 1998, updated November 1998. (<http://www.pesticide.org>)
- 6 "EPA reaches settlement with Monsanto over labeling violations," EPA press release, March 24, 1998.
- 7 "A Corporate Giant," *News in Review*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, <http://www.cbc.ca/insidecbc/newsinreview/mar99/milk/corp.htm>; testimony before EPA dioxin reassessment panel, December 1994, by Liane C. Casten, Environmental Task Force Chair, Chicago Media Watch, <http://www.greens.org/s-r/078/07-47.html>; memorandum to the EPA from William Sanjour, July 1994, <http://pwp.lincs.net/sanjour/monsanto.htm>.

