

Monsanto: A Review of Their Criminal Acts

SourceWatch.org

Monsanto is a leading global provider of agricultural products and systems sold to farming concerns. Their leading products are the Roundup herbicide, DEKALB and Agrow seed products, and biotechnology traits. Products have also included Agent Orange, the now ubiquitous PCBs, DDT, recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone and Aspartame. The company's profits for fiscal year 2007 are \$1.06 billion. Monsanto has 17,500 employees [1].

History

The Monsanto company was created in 1901 by John Francis Queeny ([photo](#)). Named after his wife, Olga Mendez Monsanto, the name Monsanto has since, for many around the world, come to symbolize the greed, arrogance, scandal and hardball business practices of too many multinational corporations. A couple of historical factoids not generally known: Monsanto was heavily involved during WWII in the creation of the first nuclear bomb for the Manhattan Project via its facilities in Dayton Ohio and called the Dayton Project headed by Charlie Thomas, Director of Monsanto's Central Research Department (and later Monsanto President) [2] [3] and it operated a nuclear facility for the federal government in Miamisburg, also in Ohio, called the Mound Project until the 80s. Also "In 1967, Monsanto entered into a joint venture with IG Farben" "It is the German chemical firm that was the financial core of the Hitler regime, and was the main supplier of Zyklon-B to the German government during the extermination phase of the Holocaust" [4][5]; IG Farben was not dissolved until 2003 [6]. For a short Monsanto history see [7] and [8].

Monsanto was the creator of several attractions in Disney's Tomorrowland [9]. Often they revolved around the virtues of chemicals and plastics. Their "House of the Future" was constructed entirely of plastic, but biodegradable it was not. "After attracting a total of 20 million visitors from 1957 to 1967, Disney finally tore the house down, but discovered it would not go down without a fight. According to Monsanto Magazine, wrecking balls literally bounced off the glass-fiber, reinforced polyester material. Torches, jackhammers, chain saws and shovels did not work. Finally, choker cables were used to squeeze off parts of the house bit by bit to be trucked away" [10]. However another of their synthetic inventions, AstroTurf, survives.

Monsanto's global pollution legacy

In the Washington Post article (Jan 1, 2002) "Monsanto Hid Decades Of Pollution PCBs Drenched Ala. Town, But No One Was Ever Told" a grim story of Monsanto's treacherous behavior in Anniston Alabama was revealed. It is summed up in this chilling paragraph: "They also know that for nearly 40 years, while producing the now-banned industrial coolants known as PCBs at a local factory, Monsanto Co. routinely discharged toxic waste into a west Anniston creek and dumped millions of pounds of PCBs into oozing open-pit landfills. And thousands of pages of Monsanto documents -- many emblazoned with warnings such as "CONFIDENTIAL: Read and Destroy" -- show that for decades, the corporate giant concealed what it did and what it knew." [11] [12] For more see **Monsanto's Global Pollution Legacy**.

Monsanto, Agent Orange and dioxins

The following is excerpted from The Legacy of Agent Orange.

*Agent Orange was manufactured by Monsanto, Dow Chemicals (manufacturers of napalm), Uniroyal, Hercules, Diamond Shamrock, Thompson Chemical and TH Agriculture. Monsanto [was] the main supplier. The Agent Orange produced by Monsanto had dioxin levels many times higher than that produced by Dow Chemicals, the other major supplier of Agent Orange to Vietnam.... Monsanto's involvement with the production of dioxin contaminated 2,4,5-T dates back to the late 1940s. 'Almost immediately workers started getting sick with skin rashes, inexplicable pains in the limbs, joints and other parts of the body, weakness, irritability, nervousness and loss of libido,' to quote Peter Sills, author of a forthcoming book on dioxins. Internal Monsanto memos show that Monsanto knew of the problems but once again a cover-up was the order of the day.... Operation Hades, later changed to Operation Ranch Hand, sprayed 6 million acres of forest in Vietnam, 19 million gallons of defoliant. The intention was to turn Vietnam into desert, to cause such destruction that Vietnam would never recover.... The most gruesome legacy caused by spraying Vietnam with dioxin contaminated Agent Orange was that born by the Vietnamese themselves. In a locked room of Tu Du Obstetrical and Gynaecological Hospital in Saigon are rows of formaldehyde-filled jars containing deformed fetuses, a grotesque illustration of Man's inhumanity to Man. The level of poverty in Vietnam prevents the preservation of further examples. Many of the living have fared little better, limb deformities, cancers. Says this [CorpWatch](#) article, "The Vietnamese government estimates that three million Vietnamese were exposed to these chemicals during the war, and that at least 800,000 suffer serious health problems today as a result". For more see **Monsanto, Agent Orange and Dioxins***

The Roundup Ready controversy

(Note: In addition to the issues raised on this page, there are a host of other concerns with genetic modification. Furthermore, the issues and statistics in the fast-paced biotech world are ever in flux. The reader is encouraged to visit the other websites below for more and up-to-date info.)

Monsanto is considered the Mother of agricultural biotech (1). Their "Roundup Ready" crops have been genetically engineered to allow direct application of the Monsanto herbicide glyphosate allowing farmers to drench both their crops and crop land with the herbicide so as to be able to kill nearby weeds without killing the crops. "RR soybeans are heavily herbicide dependent" [13][14] says Charles M. Benbrook, an expert in the field [15]. For more see **Monsanto and the Roundup Ready Controversy**.

Terminator technology

Monsanto came under heavy public fire with the development of their "Terminator Technology", a.k.a. "suicide seeds", known technically as V-GURTs (varietal Genetic Use Restriction Technologies) in which the seeds resulting from the first year's planting would be sterile thereby forcing farmers around the world in the Roundup Ready System to buy their seed from them every year rather than saving their best seed for the next years planting, a traditional and economical practice [16]. Seed saving has had the benefit of allowing farmers to continually improve the quality of their crops through careful artificial selection.

Fears were also expressed that Monsanto's terminator genes could spread to wild plants. According to the UN Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, "*Cross-fertilising V-GURT containing crops may cause considerable effects in neighbouring crop stands and wild relatives.... The fact that in North America, where large stands of GMO varieties are now grown contamination of non-GMO varieties by GMO germplasm has been observed ... suggests that this scenario is a realistic probability*" [17]. For more see **Monsanto and Terminator Technology**.

The campaign to undermine organic agriculture

Monsanto partially funds the anti-organic Center for Global Food Issues, a project of the right-wing Hudson Institute. It is run by Dennis Avery [18][19] and his son Alex Avery. Here find the latest on Hudson's anti-environmental and pro-biotech spinmeister Michael Fumento, and his secretly taking money (at least \$60,000) from Monsanto. See also [20].

In 1998 Dennis wrote an article that began "'According to recent data compiled by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), people who eat organic and natural foods are eight times as likely as the rest of the population to be attacked by a deadly new strain of E. coli bacteria (O157:H7)'.

However, according to Robert Tauxe, M.D., chief of the food borne and diarrheal diseases branch of the CDC, there is no such data on organic food production in existence at their centers and he says Avery's claims are 'absolutely not true.'" [21]. Following in his father's steps Alex distorted a study from the Journal of Food Protection that showed that organic food does not contain more pathogens than conventionally grown, contrary to Avery's claims. For more see **Monsanto and the Campaign to Undermine Organics**.

Genetic pollution or 'How to succeed without really trying'

Organic farms are increasingly finding that via cross-pollination their pure food has been contaminated with GM DNA thus ruining their businesses [22] [23]. "In 2002, Ontario farmer Alex Nurnberg had tests conducted on his 100-ton harvest of organic corn. Twenty tons were found to be contaminated by GMOs, which Nurnberg believes were blown by the wind from the corn on a neighboring farm. 'I was not ready for it. I feel such a wrath about it,' says Nurnberg" [24]. For more see **Monsanto, Genetic Pollution and Monopolism**.

G.M. trees, grasses and wheat

Food crops are not the only area Monsanto and others have hoped to cash in on with their technology, also with frightening consequences, a range of genetically engineered "designer" trees and forests are also high on their list.

From trees modified to withstand Monsanto's Roundup to trees designed with a reduced lignin content (it's lignin that gives trees their strength and rigidity) to appeal to the paper making and construction industry to "terminator trees" which don't produce seeds. This has met with fierce resistance from activists and scientists alike, but again, to no avail [25] [26] [27] [28]. Already there has been a contamination issue with the GE papaya tree, the world's first commercially planted genetically engineered tree, which enraged local farmers in Hawaii [29]. For more see **Monsanto and GM Trees And Grasses**.

Monsanto made news when it decided to withdraw its GM wheat from the market due to worldwide opposition. [30] Environmental risks of GM wheat.

The Indian suicides

Farmers in India are finding that the "biotechnology revolution" is having a devastating effect on their crop lands and personal debt levels. "In 1998, the World Bank's structural adjustment policies forced India to open up its seed sector to global corporations like Cargill, Monsanto, and Syngenta. The global corporations changed the input economy overnight. Farm saved seeds were replaced by corporate seeds which needed fertilizers and pesticides and could not be saved" Says Vandana Shiva, leader of the movement to oust Monsanto from India. For more see [Monsanto in India](#).

Mexican maize mischief

Monsanto has employed the services of a firm called Bivings Group which used a phony e-mail campaign to persuade the prestigious science journal *Nature* to retract the Chapela and Quist paper finding that GM maize had escaped into Mexico - the first time in the publication's 133 year history that it had ever retracted a paper [31] [32] see also [Monsanto's World Wide Web of Deceit](#). The architect of the deception is thought by some to have been Monsanto's Jay Byrne who was also active in attempts to shut down web sites critical of Monsanto [33]. For more see [Monsanto's Mexican Maize Mischief](#)

Global bully

Monsanto has sued many a farmer when their GM crops have turned up on the farmer's fields even though the farmers say they never planted them (examples)[34] [35] [36]. For an alarming expose of Monsanto's legal battles with American farmers see the report [Monsanto vs. U.S. Farmers](#). For more see [Goliath and David: Monsanto's Legal Battles against Farmers](#).

Labeling issues, revolving doors, rBGH and bribery

An issue of growing concern is the Campaign to Label Genetically Engineered Foods [37]. Many have questioned why it is that while consumers in Europe have the right to know through labeling which foods contain GM ingredients and thus to make an informed choice consumers in the United States, *purportedly the bastion of freedom, democracy and the "free market" in the world* are denied this same right. Polls indicate that the great majority of Americans who are aware of the issue want labels [38]. Attempts to accomplish some kind of labeling have repeatedly been rebuffed due to tremendous opposition from biotech, which fear loss of sales if people know [39][40]. In 2002 Oregon tried and failed to pass just such a labeling initiative (Measure 27). The campaign cited big money and misinformation propagated by biotech as contributing to the defeat [41]. For more see [Labeling Issues, Revolving Doors, rBGH, Bribery and Monsanto](#).

Monsanto and animal testing

According to Monsanto "we run our products through stringent tests to verify their quality and safety.... In some cases, animal testing may be necessary" [42], though they add "all tests are conducted in a humane manner in accordance with all applicable laws". One such lab is the notorious [Huntingdon Life Sciences](#) [43] (HLS) "a true one-stop-shop to its customers" [44], "HLS will test

anything for anybody" says *Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty* (SHAC)[45]. They list Monsanto as among HLS's customers [46]. For more see **Monsanto and Animal Testing**.

Monsanto and the world food crisis

Monsanto, ever on the lookout for a new financial opportunity, especially one which, on the surface at least, appears to be benevolent found one in biofuels. The growing of corn, in Monsanto's case, genetically engineered corn, for the production of ethanol purportedly to reduce the use of fossil fuels [47][48][49][50]. Unfortunately though, as is often the case with Monsanto, this silver lining has a rather large and ominous cloud, and in the massive diversion of land once used to grow food to growing crops for the fueling of automobiles yet another crisis has ensued. For more see **Monsanto and the World Food Crisis**.

Monsanto and GM foods: health risks

Courtesy of Jeffrey M. Smith

Rhetoric from the United States government since the early 1990s proclaims that genetically modified (GM) foods are no different from their natural counterparts that have existed for centuries. But this is a political, not a scientific assertion. Numerous scientists at the FDA consistently described these newly introduced gene-spliced foods as cause for concern. In addition to their potential to produce hard-to-detect allergies and nutritional problems, the scientists said that "The possibility of unexpected, accidental changes in genetically engineered plants" might produce "unexpected high concentrations of plant toxicants."1 GM crops, they said, might have "Increased levels of known naturally occurring toxins, . . . appearance of new, not previously identified" toxins, and an increased tendency to gather "toxic substances from the environment" such as "pesticides or heavy metals." They recommended testing every GM food "before it enters the marketplace."2 But the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was under orders from the first Bush White House to promote the biotechnology industry, and the political appointee in charge of agency policy was the former attorney for biotech giant Monsanto—and later became their vice president. The FDA policy ignored the scientists' warnings and allowed GM food crops onto the market without any required safety studies. For more, see **Monsanto and GM Foods: Health Risks**

Monsanto and Fox: Partners in censorship

By all accounts, Jane Akre and Steve Wilson are tough, bulldog reporters--the sort of journalists you'd expect to make some enemies along the way.

That, according to Florida TV station WTVT, was why it hired the husband-and-wife team with much fanfare in November 1996 to head the station's "news investigative unit." Now, in the wake of their firing barely a year later, the Fox network affiliate is accusing them of theft for daring to independently publish the script of the story that they were never allowed to air. For more see **Monsanto and Fox: Partners in Censorship**.

Political contributions

Monsanto gave \$106,500 to federal candidates in the 05/06 election cycle through its political action committee (PAC) - 32% to Democrats, 68% to Republicans.^[1]

Lobbying

The company spent \$3,640,000 for lobbying in 2006. \$680,000 was to outside lobbying firms with the remainder being spent using in-house lobbyists.^[2]

Personnel

Key executives and 2006 pay:^[3]

- Hugh Grant, Chairman, Chief Executive Officer and President, \$3,050,000
- Terrell K. Crews, Chief Financial Officer and Executive Vice President, \$1,110,000
- Robert Fraley, Chief Technology Officer and Executive Vice President, \$1,170,000
- Carl M. Casale, Executive Vice President of North America Commercial, \$1,090,000
- Charles W. Burson, Counsel to the Chief Executive Officer and Special Assistant, \$945,000

Selected board members:^[4]

- Frank V. AtLee III, Retired President of the former American Cyanamid Company
- C. Steven McMillan, Retired Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of Sara Lee Corporation
- Robert J. Stevens, Chairman of the Board, President and Chief Executive Officer of Lockheed Martin Corporation

Notable quotes

"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 F.D.A.'s job" - Philip Angell, Monsanto's director of corporate communications. "Playing God in the Garden" New York Times Magazine, October 25, 1998.

"Ultimately, it is the food producer who is responsible for assuring safety" — FDA, "Statement of Policy: Foods Derived from New Plant Varieties" (GMO Policy), Federal Register, Vol. 57, No. 104 (1992), p. 229

"It is not foreseen that EFSA carry out such [safety] studies as the onus is on the applicant to demonstrate the safety of the GM product in question". [51]. Comments from the European Food Safety Authority

"What you are seeing is not just a consolidation of seed companies, it's really a consolidation of the entire food chain" - Robert Fraley, co-president of Monsanto's agricultural sector 1996, in the Farm Journal. Quoted in: Flint J. (1998) Agricultural industry giants moving towards genetic monopolism. Telepolis, Heise.

"People will have Roundup Ready soya whether they like it or not" - Ann Foster, spokesperson for Monsanto in Britain, as quoted in *The Nation* magazine from article "The Politics of Food" [52] by Maria Margaronis December 27, 1999 issue.

"It's important for countries around the world to adopt a uniform standard' of acceptable levels of contamination" - Biotechnology Industry Association's Lisa Dry [53]

"The hope of the industry is that over time the market is so flooded [with GMOs] that there's nothing you can do about it. You just sort of surrender" - Don Westfall, biotech industry consultant and vice-president of Promar International, in the Toronto Star, January 9 2001.

"The total acreage devoted to GM crops around the world is expanding. That may be what eventually brings the debate to an end. It's a hell of a thing to say that the way we win is don't give the consumer a choice, but that might be it" - Dale Adolphe, biotech booster and President of the Canadian Seed Growers Association and previous president of the Canola Council of Canada (Western Producer, 4/4/02).

"I recognized my two selves: a crusading idealist and a cold, granitic believer in the law of the jungle" - Edgar Monsanto Queeny, Monsanto chairman, 1943-63, "The Spirit of Enterprise", 1934.

"Genetically engineered food constitutes a massive experiment on the planet, with potentially devastating effects on human health and the global environment" - Adam Kapp, Columnist for the Penn State Digital Collegian, Nov. 7, 2002.

"Stark denials in the face of documented evidence to the contrary have been corporate policy at Monsanto and GE for decades" - Eric Francis author of *Conspiracy of Silence* [54]

"For years, these guys said PCBs were safe, too. But there's obviously a corporate culture of deceiving the public" - Mike Casey of the Environmental Working Group

"The thing I'm most proud of is the industry's impeccable environmental and safety record" - Robert Fraley, Monsanto's technology chief [55]

"That is what drives a lot of people crazy. The scope of the fraud, if you will--I know that's a harsh word--the scope of the fraud that's being sold to the American public about this technology is almost unprecedented" - Interview with Dr. Charles Benbrook on GMOs

"I'm not a religious person, but I think there's something just inherently wrong with this--that they can take different species and combine 'em the way they wanna combine 'em" - Phil Geertson, who runs a small seed business in Idaho [56].

"I have the feeling that science has transgressed a barrier that should have remained inviolate" - Dr Erwin Chargaff, biochemist and the father of molecular biology in his autobiography

"What I saw generically on the pro-biotech side was the attitude that the technology was good and that it was almost immoral to say that it wasn't good because it was going to solve the problems of the human race and feed the hungry and clothe the naked. And there was a lot of money that had been invested in this, and if you're against it, you're Luddites, you're stupid. There was rhetoric like that even here in this department. You felt like you were almost an alien, disloyal, by trying to present an open-minded view on some of the issues being raised. So I pretty much spouted the rhetoric that everybody else around here spouted; it was written into my speeches" - Dan Glickman, United States Secretary of Agriculture from 1995 until 2001 [57]

"Genetic Power's the most awesome force the planet's ever seen, but you wield it like a kid who's found his dad's gun.... and before you even knew what you had you patented it and packaged it and

slapped it on a plastic lunch box, and now you're selling it, you want to sell it" Ian Malcolm from Jurassic Park

<http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Monsanto>