

A History of Monsanto

(Townsend Letter for Doctors and Patients-January 2000)

In an April 12, 1999 Business Week special report on genetically-engineered crops, Monsanto Chairman Robert B. Shapiro was quoted as saying " What's going on offers the promise of curing disease and growing more and better food on land in a more sustainable way. We're talking about three of the largest industries in the world - agriculture, food and health - that now operate as separate businesses. But there are a set of changes that will lead to their integration." Monsanto is actively pursuing this integration. According to Business Week, Monsanto has spent \$8 billion acquiring large seed companies during the last few years. In June 1998, Monsanto merged with American Home Products, one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the US. Despite Monsanto's up-beat and altruistic public relations campaign (see its website: www.monsanto.com) , Monsanto has a long history of unleashing products that have proven harmful, even devastating, to people and the environment

Founded in 1901, Monsanto Chemical Company has manufactured industrial chemicals (e.g. sulphuric acid), plastics and synthetics, pesticides and saccharin, a carcinogenic artificial sweetener. It has also produced or granted production licenses for most of the world's polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's). These oily, insulating fluids cause brain damage in mammalian fetuses and other birth defects, immune system disorders and cancers. The public became aware of PCB's in 1968, when PCB-contaminated rice made 1,300 people in Kyush, Japan sick; and serious birth defects appeared in Babies whose mothers had eaten it. Monsanto had known since the late 1930's that PCB's damaged health because of the effect on its workers

Monsanto's herbicide 2,4,5,-T contained a highly toxic chemical byproduct, the dioxin TCDD. This herbicide was one of two used in Agent Orange, a defoliant used by the US military in Vietnam. Although Monsanto was not the only company that produced Agent Orange, its products contained the highest levels of dioxin

In a footnote to his article, Brian Toker explains:" Monsanto's share of Agent Orange production was 29.5% compared with DOW's market share of 28.6%, however some batches of Agent Orange contained more than 47 times more dioxin than DOW's. " Because of this the judge in a lawsuit brought by Vietnam veterans ordered Monsanto to pay 45.5% of the 1984 settlement, leaving the remaining 54.5% to be paid by Dow and other manufacturers. Other Monsanto products including Lysol, have also been contaminated with dioxin

When Monsanto began making 2,3,5-T in the late 1940's, its workers developed skin rashes, joint and limb pain, weakness, irritability, nervousness and loss of libido. Cancers, liver disorders and as obstetricians in Vietnam are aware, horrible fetal deformities have also been strongly linked to the contaminated herbicide. Dr. Cate Jenkins, a chemist for the EPA's Regulatory development Branch, urged the EPA to investigate the company in her November 1990 report "Criminal Investigation of Monsanto Corporation - Cover up of Dioxin Contamination in Products - Falsification of Dioxin Health Studies". Hugh Warwick writes:" The Chemical Giant Lobbied hard, the investigation lasted over two years, and ended up being spun onto the whistle blower, Dr. Jenkins. While the criminal investigation was quietly dropped the campaign of harassment against Dr. Jenkins was only stopped by the Secretary of Labor

Aspartame, also known as nutrasweet and Equal, is produced by Monsanto's subsidiary GD Searle Pharmaceuticals. Although Monsanto denies the Chemical's toxicity, consumers have complained of headaches, blurred vision, numbness hearing loss, muscle spasms and epileptic type seizures since the 1980's. More recently a 1996 study in the : Journal of Neuropathology and Experimental Neurology reported a correlation between the introduction and a noticeable increase in brain cancers

Monsanto's recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH) sold under the name Posilac, makes cows produce more milk than is normal. According to a study by Mark Kastel of the Wisconsin's Farmer's Union, Wisconsin Farmers reported numerous spontaneous deaths, an increase in uterine infections, severe metabolic difficulties and calving problems in cows who received the drug. The long term effect of rBGH on human children who are drinking milk from these cows is unknown at this time

At the time of Posilac's FDA approval, Margaret Miller was deputy director of the FDA's Office of New animal drugs and Suzanne Sechen was the FDA's lead reviewer of scientific data on rBGH. Margaret Miller had worked for Monsanto on rBGH safety studies as a research scientist

Suzanne Sechen has worked on Monsanto-funded rBGH studies during her graduate studies at Cornell University. The GOA found no conflict of interest in this during a 1994 investigation. Michael R. Taylor, who wrote the rBGH labelling guidelines that requires labelled non-rBGH products to say that "there is no difference between rBGH and the naturally occurring hormone," was a Monsanto lawyer for 7 years before joining the FDA

Now Monsanto's interest in agriculture has expanded to genetically modifying seed. Monsanto is now selling Roundup-Ready soybean , canola and corn seed, which produce plants that can stand high doses of Monsanto's herbicide Roundup. Recently Monsanto has acquired several seed companies including Holden Foundation Seeds, Asgrow, Agronomics, DeKalbGenetics, Delta and Pine Land and Semences Agrocères SA. In effect it is cornering the grain market. Its genetic-engineered, herbicide resistant seed could become the only choice for farmers. In addition Monsanto's merger with American Home Products creates the largest manufacturer of pesticides and herbicides in the world. If Monsanto could dodge regulations and muscle its way into the market, before this new merger gives both companies even more power

I thought the US had laws against monopolies. How can any one company gain so much control over our food supply? What can a person do when companies like Monsanto gain the support of government? Don't buy their products and don't buy their stock. Don't buy anything that contains Aspartame, NutraSweet or Equal. Your health can only improve and that's one less nickel in their bank account. Bypass the Roundup at your garden supply store and buy organic at the grocery. Ask the grocer if the dairy that supplies their milk uses rBGH and buy organic milk. Take a look at the website: www.ethicalinvesting.com

<http://www.lightparty.com/Health/HistoryOfMonsanto.html>