

# Monsanto-Bayer Merger Hurts Farmers and Consumers

By: Jim Goodman and Tiffany Finck-Haynes

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The U.S. Department of Justice issued a stern warning in its lawsuit against the conditionally-approved mega-merger between Bayer and Monsanto in June. The anti-competitive price effects of the merger would, according to the DOJ, “likely result in hundreds of millions of dollars per year in harm, raising costs to farmers and consumers.” The Justice Department warned that the combining of Bayer and Monsanto would reduce competition for vegetable seeds, likely driving up prices. Further, farmers might see prices for GMO cotton, canola, corn and soybean seeds increase, as well as price increases for herbicide and seed treatments.

**After imposing some limited divestments on Monsanto,** the DOJ approved this merger, enabling Monsanto to hide its controversial name brand while giving Bayer anti-competitive control over seeds, pesticides, farmers and consumers worldwide.

**But the harm to consumers and farmers will still exist.** The DOJ is on the brink of essentially authorizing a monopoly. This is bad news for nearly everyone on the planet except Bayer and Monsanto executives and shareholders. Aside from a combined Bayer-Monsanto, only three other seed companies will be in the market manufacture and sell these products.

**Farmers overwhelmingly object to the merger.** Ninety-three percent of farmers expressed concern that the merger will harm independent farmers and farming communities. Farmers’ top three concerns were that Bayer/Monsanto “would use its dominance in one product to push sales of other products;” “control data about farm practices;” and that the



merger will create “increased pressure for chemically dependent farming.”

**Aside from the overwhelming number of farmers that have already voiced opposition to the merger,** the DOJ has received petitions from over 1 million Americans urging the agency to block the merger. This month, thousands of farmers and Americans resubmitted comments urging the agency to reverse its harmful conditional approval. Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller joined a letter with the state attorneys general from California, Massachusetts, Mississippi and Oregon submitted a letter opposing the merger.

**Bayer and Monsanto’s merger** comes at a moment when powerful companies push farmers into dependence on their products, locking farmers into long-term contracts. A consolidating food system means less choice for consumers. “This mega-merger will give the company a stranglehold on the vegetable seed, cottonseed, corn and soy seed markets, which will only increase prices and put farmers’ livelihoods at risk,” noted Ben Burkett, a Mississippi vegetable farmer and past board president of National Family Farm Coalition.

**For farmers, the merger will likely push up production costs.** Farmers’ concerns are backed up by

history, in which mega-mergers have diminished competition and options for both farmers and consumers while promoting more chemical-based farming — in turn harming our environment and health.

**As seed and GMO companies have consolidated over the past 20 years.** Much of that price increase comes from companies increasing fees for seeds as they genetically modify new traits into our food. The cost of these new technologies has exploded the price of seeds; between 32 and 74 percent of the price of seed for corn, soybeans, cotton and sugar beets in the United States and the European Union was estimated to reflect technology costs or the cost of seed treatments.

**Farmers’ net profits continues to shrink.** Reduced earnings have forced most farmers to take on second jobs; 82 percent of U.S. farm household income is expected to come from off-farm work this year, up from 53 percent in 1960. As the Trump administration moves to give another handout to corporate agriculture, family farmers will pay the price.

**Farmers aren’t fooled by claims that Monsanto divestments will make this merger beneficial and non-monopolistic.** Consumers and policymakers shouldn’t be fooled, either. On our farms, in our soil and on our supermarket shelves, the merger of Bayer and Monsanto means fewer options for a cleaner, healthier and more farmer-friendly food system. As the Department of Justice moves to make a final decision, they should stop this merger and save farmers and consumers from this new monopoly.

## BookReview:

# Land Justice: Re-imagining Land, Food and the Commons in the United States

by Patti Naylor, FFD board member and family farmer, Churdan, IA

During the few quiet spells that punctuated the weeks of exhilarating but exhausting summer work on our farm, I eagerly sought out space to indulge in a powerful new book by Food First. *Land Justice: Re-imagining Land, Food, and the Commons in the United States* was released in June 2017. Each writer in this anthology rewarded my time with deep thought-provoking narratives.

**Land justice is both a new concept and an ancient understanding.** This book entices us to think about land justice as a means of social change. My own connection to land is based on my life journey from childhood where I grew up on a medium-sized family farm in Iowa to explorations of cultures and traditions in other countries and back to life on an Iowa farm.

**This Iowa farmland that I now call home keeps me grounded to Mother Earth,** to her wonderful diversity and her natural beauty. Others have a very different relationship to land, all valid and necessary, as the writers in *Land Justice* makes clear. Readers of this book will find connections in each of the six sections as well as the three prefaces and conclusion.

**Each preface, with a focus on decolonizing our food, agricultural parity,** and, by the Women Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN)’s 2017 keynote speaker LaDonna Redmond, the history of contested land, pulls together the multiple aspects of this book just as the food movement itself is composed of pieces of a puzzle working toward the common goal of food sovereignty.

The first section, *Black Agrarianism*, begins with poetry and a quote from bell hooks that pays tribute to African ancestors and their place as farmers and people of the land. Ancestral knowledge, resistance, solidarity, and power are themes of this section.



**The Reader is left with a note of hope: “What is the role of land justice in social change?”**

**Rebuilding the Urban Commons** takes us to Oakland, California and Detroit, Michigan to understand the struggles of to overcome poverty and lack of healthy foods in the context of land-grabbing and public properties. *Lessons From and For Land Activism*, the final section, envision a world where land justice is a reality and recounts the work toward that goal.

**Left with a Note of Hope** Editors Eric Holt-Gimenez and Justine M. Williams leave each of us in the food movement with a call for agrarian reform, food sovereignty, and a more just and equitable agriculture system. The reader is left with a note of hope: “What is the role of land justice in social change? Ultimately, it may be to bring us together on that irreducible terrain of hope from which all other struggles for food, livelihoods, water, and environment emerge: the land.”

WFAN member, Angie Carter, begins the next section, *Gender and Land*. She relates how women landowners have a strong desire to care for the land in a way that will benefit future generations. *Feminism and healing* highlights another chapter with a focus on spirituality, artistry, and community self-determination as black women hold tight to the land. Section three, *Land Access, Social Privilege, and the Rise of Indigenous Leadership*, looks at alternative ways for small-scale producers and native peoples to find land on which to grow food.

**The next section, Cross-Border Implications,** dives into the farmworkers and farmers of Latin America, too often exploited and discriminated against. The impacts of commodity crop production and trade agreements have been enormous.