

Last Days for Monsanto's Snake Oil? Round-Up Gets its Comeuppance

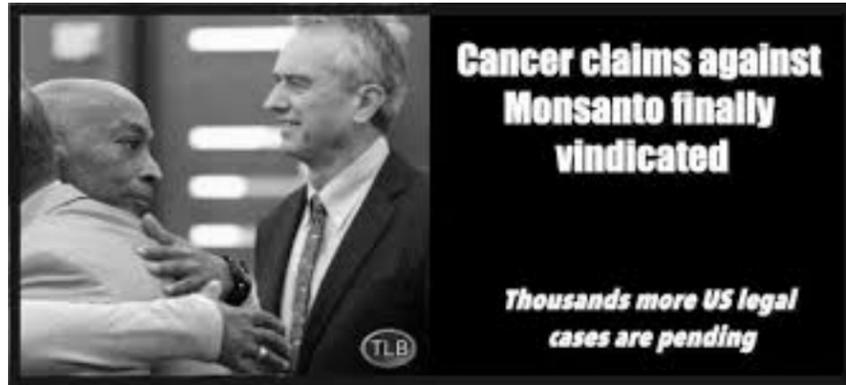
By: John E. Peck, executive director, Family Farm Defenders

Martin Luther King Jr. once famously said: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." Once could perhaps say the same about truth in the battle for scientific knowledge.

On Fri. Aug. 10th a San Francisco, CA jury awarded DeWayne Johnson \$289 million in a criminal complaint against Monsanto, affirming widespread evidence that its flagship herbicide, Round-Up, causes cancer. Johnson's lawyers successfully argued that Monsanto was liable for its product that led him to contract non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. His case was expedited since Johnson - age 46 - is not expected to live much longer. For years he was directed to spray Round-Up from a 50 gallon tank on school grounds, often with the wind blowing it directly into his face - once the hose broke dousing his entire body. He had read the label many times - which includes no cancer warning - and had even contacted Monsanto directly when he developed a skin rash but was told everything was fine.

The company has vowed to appeal - except now it's Bayer that will have to do so, as it recently received the green light from the U.S. Dept. of Justice to buy up Monsanto and create one of the largest biotech/agrochemical giants in the world. The merger might not be as good for Bayer as it had hoped: it's stock plummeted 14 percent in response to the verdict, and with 4,000+ similar court cases pending, this verdict sets a costly precedent - not just in the U.S. but around the world.

Last fall veteran investigative reporter, Carey Gillam, published her long awaited expose: Whitewash: The



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Story of a Weed Killer, Cancer, and the Corruption of Science", that carefully lays out the scientific evidence of adverse human health and broader environmental impacts stemming from use of Monsanto's Round-Up. More importantly perhaps, her books also reveals the corporation's ruthless campaign to target, discredit, and silence any critics of its most popular (and profitable) herbicide. Gillam was attacked herself by Monsanto over the course of her 20+ years of reporting on the subject while at Reuters, and is now research director at U.S. Right to Know.

In testimony before the European Parliament on Oct 11th, 2017 (<https://usrtk.org/pesticides/carey-gillams-presentation-to-european-parliament-bearing-on-the-monsanto-papers-glyphosate/>) Gillam outlined many of the insidious tactics deployed by Monsanto: ghostwriting research papers to support Round-Up; launching campaigns to punish scientists who did not support the herbicide as "safe"; strong arming officials to limit regulation while sacking others that raised concerns; creating "astro turf" organizations to promote Round-Up and related GMO crops; and even providing the EPA with "Talking Points" to use against other

regulatory agencies. The clear message is that given such systematic corruption of science, media, and government it is not surprising that we get the "best" rules for an obvious poison that private interests can buy. Public good does not figure into the equation.

The EPA has argued since the 1970s that glyphosate - the main ingredient in Round-Up - is perfectly "safe" if used as directed - this finding relying heavily on Monsanto's own sponsored research that can not be verified due to various "proprietary restrictions." But the EPA's benign assessment is not widely shared among other regulatory authorities - for instance, in March 2015 the International Agency for Research on Cancer at the World Health Organization ruled that glyphosate is "a probable human carcinogen" based on its own review of independent studies.

And, at UW-Madison, Prof. Warren Porter's extensive toxicology research has long pointed to serious sublethal synergistic impacts of glyphosate in combination with other agrochemicals like atrazine in drinking water on fetal development, childhood learning, and adult reproduction.

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Of course, the harm done by Round-Up is not limited to humans. According to the National Pesticide Information Center, the toxic half life of glyphosate in the environment can be up to 197 days. Field runoff tainted with Round-Up has been shown to have a lethal impact on freshwater invertebrates, amphibians, and fish. Studies in Argentina have even shown birth defects in chickens exposed to glyphosate. Back in 2011, Purdue Univ. plant pathologist, Don Huber, sent a private letter to USDA Sec. Tom Vilsack, later leaked to the public, warning that Round-Up use was leading to new pathogens that could be responsible for miscarriages in livestock among other deleterious consequences. (https://www.organicconsumers.org/sites/default/files/artman2/uploads/1/May2011_Huber.pdf)

Other scientists have noted increased fungal disease as well as nutrient deficiencies in fields with GMO crops resistant to Round-Up - notably soybeans that can suffer from Sudden Death Syndrome (SDS). And, as many predicted, ubiquitous spraying has now led to the emergence of "superweeds" resistant to Round-Up across 70+ million acres of U.S. cropland, forcing the biotech giants to develop new GMO crops that are resistant to both glyphosate and other even more toxic herbicides like dicamba and 2,4-D (a major component of Agent Orange which so many soldiers and civilians were exposed to with lethal effect during the Vietnam War).

The Center for Food is currently challenging EPA approval of this next generation of GMO crops - specifically, Dow's Enlist Duo varieties (resistant to glyphosate and 2,4-D) and Monsanto's Xtendimix varieties (resistant to glyphosate and dicamba), with Family Farm Defenders and the National Family Farm Coalition among the plaintiffs. Both herbicides are notorious for their propensity to form vapor clouds that can drift widely and



damage neighboring crops. Millions of acres of soybeans, as well as vegetable and fruit crops, trees, and shrubs were damaged by such drift across the country last year. Jim Goodman, longtime organic dairy/beef farmer, NFFC president, and board member of FFD, noted that "The combination of 2,4-D and glyphosate in Enlist Duo is a recipe for disaster. It may control Roundup-resistant weeds, but only for a while, and at what cost to the health of farm workers, consumers and the environment?" As these cases wend their way through the courts, some states are taking action on their own - both Missouri and Arkansas banned the use of dicamba in July 2017 after hundreds of soybean farmers reported crop losses of 30-50% from toxic drift.

And in other good news, on Aug. 29th Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ) introduced a bill to limit mergers - such as that between Bayer and Monsanto (https://www.booker.senate.gov/?p=pres_release&id=844). Rep. Mark Pocan (WI) - a longtime friend of

Family Farm Defenders - will be introducing a companion bill in the House. The bill would put an 18-month moratorium on large agribusiness, food and beverage manufacturing, and grocery retail consolidation, and study the impact of such mergers. In the past two years, mega mergers and corporate takeovers have enabled just three conglomerates to control 66% of the crop seed and 70% of the agrochemical market.

Meanwhile, net farm income for US farmers has fallen by more than half in just the last five years. Over 80 family farm, consumer, and environmental groups have expressed their support for the legislation. This bill is modeled on a similar measure introduced back in 1999 by Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-MN), another great champion of family farmers before his untimely death in a plane crash in 2002. While the full toll from decades of Monsanto's carefree toxic peddling has yet to be determined, we may finally see the last nails being hammered into the coffin for Round-Up.