

# Boris Johnson, GMOs and Glyphosate: Irresponsible, Negligent and Criminal?

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*In his first speech to parliament as British Prime Minister, **Boris Johnson** said:*

“Let’s start now to liberate the UK’s extraordinary bioscience sector from anti-genetic modification rules and let’s develop the blight-resistant crops that will feed the world.”

Johnson reads from a well-rehearsed script. **The ‘GM will feed the world mantra’ is pure industry spin.** There is already enough food being produced to feed the global population yet around [830 million](#) are classed as hungry. Feeding the world effectively, sustainably and equitably involves addressing the in-built injustices of the global food system.

The never-ending push to force GM on the public under the guise of saving humanity is a diversion that leaves intact the root causes of world hunger and undernutrition: neoliberal deregulation and privatisation policies, unfair WTO rules, poverty, land rights issues, World Bank/IMF geopolitical lending strategies and the transformation of food secure regions into food deficit ones, etc.

Even in regions where productivity in agriculture lags behind or concerns exist about climate change, numerous [high-level reports](#) have recommended that (non-GMO) agroecological practices should be encouraged to enhance biodiversity and deal with food and climate crises.

However, pro-Brexiteer Conservative politicians talk of the essential need for Britain and the world to adopt GM is little more than an attempt to justify a post-Brexit trade deal with Washington that will effectively incorporate the UK into the US’s regulatory food regime. The type of ‘liberation’ Johnson really means is the UK adopting unassessed GM crops and food and a gutting of food safety and environmental standards.

It is no secret that various Conservative-led administrations have wanted to break free from the EU regulatory framework on GM for some time. Back in 2014, [Genewatch exposed](#) collusion between the government and transnational corporations to force GM into Britain above the heads of the public. This is despite numerous surveys over the years showing that most of the British public remain sceptical of GM, do not see a need for it or reject the technology outright.

## **Rosemary Mason writes to Jonathan Jones**

It would be reasonable to ask why GMOs are even on the market in the first place given that, in his book ‘Altered Genes, Twisted Truths’ (2015), US lawyer Steven Druker set out in

detail how GM could well be based on the greatest scientific fraud of our age. This is something environmentalist **Dr Rosemary Mason** points out in a [recent open letter](#) to Dr Jonathan Jones, Head of the Sainsbury Laboratory in the UK, and his colleague, fellow US-based plant scientist Jeffrey Dangl.

In April, Jones received the go-ahead from the British government to carry out field tests on GM potatoes in fields in Suffolk and Cambridge. He was given permission to proceed despite Druker's findings and Caius Rommens, former GMO potato scientist with Monsanto, raising serious concerns about genetic engineering.

In a new report by Mason, which she has sent with her letter to Jones, Rommens is quoted as saying:

“We also assumed that theoretical knowledge was all we needed to succeed, and that a single genetic change would always have one intentional effect only. We were supposed to understand DNA and to make valuable modifications, but the fact of the matter was that we knew as little about DNA as the average American knows about the Sanskrit version of the Bhagavad Gita. We just knew enough to be dangerous, especially when combined with our bias and narrowmindedness.”

If that was the state of knowledge (or lack of it) at Monsanto, then what of glyphosate-based Roundup, the company's weedicide widely used in conjunction with GM crops? We already know from the 'Monsanto Papers' that ghost writing, cover-ups and duplicity seemed to be the order of the day as the company sought at all costs to protect its multi-billion-dollar money-spinner from being taken off the market.

If genetically engineered 'Roundup ready' crops - are introduced to fields in Britain, the use of glyphosate could accelerate even further. In her various reports over the years, Mason has shown the massive increase in the use of the weedicide in farming and the correlation with a huge spike in various diseases and conditions in the UK.

Mason wants to make it clear to Jones that when plant physiologists like him say that that glyphosate/Roundup only affects plants, fungi and bacteria and doesn't affect humans, they are wrong.

She says to Jones:

“You claimed, together with Monsanto and global pesticide regulators, that Roundup only affects plants, fungi and bacteria because they had the shikimate pathway which is absent in humans and animals. But humans and animals have trillions of bacteria in their gut: the gut microbiome, the collective genome of organisms inhabiting our body.”

Mason states that obesity is associated with low diversity of bacteria in the microbiome and glyphosate destroys most of the beneficial bacteria and leaves the toxic bacteria behind. In effect, she argues, Roundup (and other biocides) are a major cause of gross obesity, neuropsychiatric disorders and other chronic diseases including cancers, which are all on the rise.

Her report refers to numerous studies, including a paper in Nature to argue that obesity is associated with low bacterial richness in the gut (Chatelier, E.L. et al. Richness of human gut microbiome correlates with metabolic markers: Nature, 2013). Mason also draws attention to a multi-author study (Wang, Y. et al, The Gut-Microglia Connection: Implications for Central Nervous System Diseases: Frontiers in Immunology, 2018) which postulates the microbiome has relevance for both gastrointestinal and brain disorders, including autism spectrum disorders, Parkinson's disease and even demyelinating disorders of the central nervous system.

She adds:

“Glyphosate disrupts the shikimate pathway within these gut bacteria, without which we cannot survive. Glyphosate is a strong chelator of essential minerals, such as cobalt, zinc, manganese, calcium, molybdenum and sulphate... Two key problems caused by glyphosate residues in our diet are nutritional deficiencies, especially minerals and essential amino-acids, and systemic toxicity.”

Mason refers to Dr Don Huber, an expert on glyphosate and a senior US plant scientist, who explains that Roundup, as a mineral chelator, probably causes cancer. Some years ago, Huber wrote to the US Secretary of Agriculture about a pathogen new to science that could significantly impact the health of plants, animals and probably human beings. He argued it is widespread, very serious and is in much higher concentrations in Roundup Ready soybeans and corn – suggesting a link with Roundup.

Rosemary Mason's 20-plus page report is wide ranging in scope and refers to various published peer-reviewed papers to support her arguments (it can be read in full on the [academia.edu](https://www.academia.edu) site). Aside from the effects of (the widespread prevalence of) glyphosate and other agrochemicals on human health – especially and disturbingly the exposure and impacts on children and child development – she discusses the environmental costs, including pesticide run off into seas and oceans, the ongoing destruction of the Great Barrier Reef, algae blooms and the fungicidal action of Roundup which is destroying the means by which trees communicate and look after each other.

In relation to sanctioning the continued use of glyphosate in Europe, Mason notes that it was totally unacceptable, possibly negligent or even criminal, for the European Union to have allowed a group of plant scientists on the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (PAFF) – whose knowledge of human physiology was so lacking that they did not recognise that glyphosate has effects on humans – to make decisions that affect human health.

PAFF's role was pivotal in the decision to re-licence the use of glyphosate in the EU in 2017. Although a list of its members is not made public, as a phytopharmaceuticals committee involved in the authorisation of pesticides, Mason presumes plant physiologists were amply represented and held sway.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that in the UK between May 2010 and the end of 2013, the Department of Health had 130 meetings with representatives of the agrochemicals/GM sector.

If Mason's letter to Jones tells us anything, it is that the British public need to think long and

hard about whose interests are really being served when Boris Johnson and others in high office extol the 'virtues' of GM agriculture and its associated chemical inputs.

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**Colin Todhunter** is a frequent contributor to *Global Research* and *Asia-Pacific Research*.

Featured image: Roundup's active ingredient, glyphosate, is the most heavily-used agricultural chemical in history. (Photo: Mike Mozart/Flickr/cc)

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