

# From GM Potatoes to Glyphosate: Regulatory Delinquency and Toxic Agriculture

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*Food and environment campaigner **Dr Rosemary Mason** has just produced the report 'Shockingly high levels of weedkiller found in popular breakfast cereals marketed for British children'. In this 68-page document, she draws from new research in the UK that mirrors findings from the US about the dangerous levels of glyphosate found in food, especially products aimed at children (glyphosate is the active ingredient in Monsanto's weedicide Roundup). Readers can access this [report here](#) (which contains all relevant references).*

Mason begins by reporting on research that significant levels of weedkiller were found in 43 out of 45 popular breakfast cereals marketed to US children. Glyphosate was detected in an array of popular breakfast cereals, oats and snack bars.



Tests revealed glyphosate was present in all but two of the 45 oat-derived products that were sampled by the Environmental Working Group, a public health organisation. Nearly three in four of the products exceeded what the EWG classes safe for children to consume. Products with some of the highest levels of glyphosate include granola, oats and snack bars made by leading industry names Quaker, Kellogg's and General Mills, which makes Cheerios.

Back in April, internal emails obtained from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [showed](#) that scientists had found glyphosate on a wide range of commonly consumed food, to the point that they were finding it difficult to identify a food without the chemical on it. In response to these findings, however, The Guardian newspaper in the UK reported that there was no indication that the claims related to products sold outside the US.

In view of this statement by the Guardian, Mason was involved in sending samples of four oat-based breakfast cereals marketed for children in the UK to the Health Research Institute, Fairfield, Iowa, an accredited laboratory for glyphosate testing.

After testing the samples which were sent, Dr Fagan, the institute's director, said:

"The levels consumed in a single daily helping of any one of these cereals, even the one with the lowest level of contamination, is sufficient to put the person's glyphosate levels above the levels that cause fatty liver disease in rats (and likely in people)." (Access the [Certificate of Analysis here](#).)

Just as concerning were results for two 'organic' products from the US that were also tested at the time: granola had some glyphosate in and 'organic' rolled oats had even higher levels

of the chemical.



Mason argues that the fact such high levels of glyphosate have been found in cereals in Britain should ring alarm bells across Europe, especially as the distribution of glyphosate and aminomethylphosphonic acid in agricultural top soils of the European Union is widespread.

### **A question of power**

As in her previous documents, Mason describes how regulators in the EU and the UK relicensed Roundup for the benefit of the industry-backed Glyphosate Task Force. Even more alarming is that, on the back of Brexit, she notes that a US-UK trade deal could result in the introduction of Roundup ready GM crops in the UK. Indeed, high-level plans for cementing this deal are afoot.

Mason offers worrying data about the increasing use of biocides, especially glyphosate, as well as the subsequent destruction of the global environment due to their use. As usual, she produces a very data-rich report which draws on many sources, including official reports and peer-reviewed papers.

Of course, there is a strong focus on Monsanto. Aside from the use of glyphosate, she also documents the impact of the company's presence in Wales, where she lives, with regard to the dumping of toxic chemicals (PCBs) from its manufacturing site there between 1949 and 1979, the effects of which persist and still plague the population and the environment.

Mason asks:

“Monsanto has been bought up by Bayer, so the Monsanto name has disappeared but where are the Monsanto executives hiding?”

She is aware of course that such figures don't have to hide anywhere. The company 'got away with it' in Wales. And its recent crop of executives received huge 'golden handshakes' after the Bayer deal despite them having perpetuated a degenerative model of industrial agriculture. A model that has only secured legitimacy by virtue of the power of the global agritech lobby to lock in a bogus narrative of success, as outlined in the report 'From Uniformity to Diversity' by The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems.

As that report notes, locking farmers into corporate-dependent treadmills, state support of (export) commodity cropping via subsidies and the discounting of the massive health, environment and social costs of industrial agriculture ensures that model prevails and makes it appear successful. If you base your food regime on short-term thinking and a reductionist yield-output paradigm and define success within narrow confines, then the model is a sure-fire winner – for corporate growth (profit) if little else.

Without being able to externalise the health, social and environmental costs of its actions and products, this model would not be viable for the corporations involved. Widening the parameters to properly evaluate ‘success’ entails asking the industry questions that it finds very difficult to gloss over, not least what has been the cost of input-(biocide)dependent yields of commodities in terms of pollution, health, local food security and caloric production, nutrition per acre, water tables, soil quality and structure and new pests and disease pressures?

Why have African countries been turned from food exporters to food importers? Why is land in South America being used for Roundup Ready crops to feed the appetite for meat in rich countries, while peasant farmers who grew food for themselves and local communities have been displaced?

And what are the effects on once thriving rural communities; on birds, insects and biodiversity in general; on the climate as a result of chemical inputs and soil degradation; and what have been the effects of shifting towards globalised production chains, especially in terms of transportation and fossil fuel consumption?

The global food regime degrades public health and the environment, and it has narrowed the range of crops grown, resulting in increasingly monolithic, nutrient-deficient diets. Yet the powerful industry lobby calls for more deregulation and more techno-fixes like GMOs to ‘feed the world’. This is in spite of the fact that hunger and malnutrition are political: these phenomena are in large part the outcome of a global capitalist food regime that, with help from IMF/World Bank geopolitical lending strategies and WTO rules, has undermined food security for vast sections of the global population by creating a system that by its very nature drives inequality, injustice and creates food deficit areas.

Moving to a more sustainable model of agriculture based on localisation, food sovereignty and agroecology calls for a different world view. Proponents of industrial agriculture are resistant to this because it would harm what has become a highly profitable system based on the capture of political, research and media institutions.

And this is where we return to Rosemary Mason. If there is an overriding theme within her work over the years, it is corruption at high levels which facilitate much of the above. For instance, she notes the determination of the UK government, working hand in glove with global agribusiness, to ensure certain biocide products remain on the market and to help major corporations avoid any culpability for their health- and environment-damaging practices and chemicals.

Mason and various whistleblowers and writers have over the years described how these corporations have become institutionally embedded within high-profile public bodies and scientific research policy initiatives. Regulatory delinquency, institutionalised corruption and complete disregard for the health and well-being of the public is the order of the day.

## **GMOs and a post-Brexit deal with the US**

If the UK is about to introduce GM crops into its fields on the back of a post-Brexit deal with the Trump administration, then it should take heed of what the ex-director of J.R. Simplot and team leader at Monsanto **Dr Caius Rommens** says in his new book:

“The main problem about the current process for deregulation of GMO crops is that it is based on an evaluation of data provided by the developers of GMO crops. There is a conflict of interest. I propose that the safety of GMO crops is assessed by an independent group of scientists trained at identifying unintended effects.”

This former high-level Monsanto researcher of potatoes now acknowledges that genetic engineers had limited insight into the effects of their experiments. Genetic engineering passes off the inherent uncertainty, unintended consequences and imprecision of its endeavours as unquestionable certainty. And the USDA accepts industry information and reassurances.

After finding that most GMO varieties of potatoes that he was involved in developing were stunted, chlorotic, mutated or sterile, and many of them died quickly, Rommens renounced his genetic engineering career and wrote a book about his experiences, ‘Pandora’s Potatoes: The Worst GMOs’.

In an interview with GMWatch, Rommens is asked why regulators in the US, Canada and Japan, which have approved these potatoes, are ignoring these aspects.

Rommens responds:

“The standard tests needed to ensure regulatory approval are not set up to identify unintended effects. They are meant to confirm the safety of a GM crop, not to question their safety. None of the issues I address in my book were considered by the regulatory agencies.”

A damning indictment of regulatory delinquency based on ‘don’t look, don’t find’. GMOs have nonetheless become the mainstay of US agriculture. Now the industry is rubbing its hands in anticipation of Brexit, which would pry the UK from the EU and its precautionary principle-based regulation of GMOs.

The push to open up Britain to globalisation in the 1980s ushered in a free-for-all for global capital to determine the future direction of a deregulated UK. Three decades down the line, the consequences are clear for food, agriculture, democracy and public health. The worrying thing is that thanks to Brexit, it could be the case that even worse is yet to come!

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



## **Seeds of Destruction: Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation**

**Author Name: F. William Engdahl**

**ISBN Number: 978-0-937147-2-2**

**Year: 2007**

**Pages: 341 pages with complete index**

List Price: \$25.95

**Special Price: \$18.00**

This skilfully researched book focuses on how a small socio-political American elite seeks to establish control over the very basis of human survival: the provision of our daily bread. "Control the food and you control the people."

This is no ordinary book about the perils of GMO. Engdahl takes the reader inside the corridors of power, into the backrooms of the science labs, behind closed doors in the corporate boardrooms.

The author cogently reveals a diabolical world of profit-driven political intrigue, government corruption and coercion, where genetic manipulation and the patenting of life forms are used to gain worldwide control over food production. If the book often reads as a crime story, that should come as no surprise. For that is what it is.

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