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Monsanto Bids to Take Over Syngenta—A Move to Assure a Pesticide-Saturated Future?

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Monsanto recently made a bid to take over European agrichemical giant Syngenta, the world's largest pesticide producer. The $45 billion bid was rejected, but there's still a chance for a merger between these two chemical technology giants.

Monsanto is reportedly considering raising the offer, and as noted by Mother Jones,1 "combined, the two companies would form a singular agribusiness behemoth, a company that controls a third of both the globe's seed and pesticides markets."

As reported by Bloomberg,2 the possibility of Monsanto taking over Syngenta raises a number of concerns; a top one being loss of crop diversity.

> "…[A] larger company would eventually mean fewer varieties of seeds available to farmers, say opponents such as [science policy analyst at the Center for Food Safety, Bill] Freese.
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> Another is that the combined company could spur increased use of herbicides by combining Syngenta's stable of weed killers with Monsanto's marketing heft and crop development expertise.
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> 'Two really big seed companies becoming one big seed company means even less choice for farmers,' said Patty Lovera, assistant director of Food and Water Watch, a policy group in Washington.
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> 'From a public health and environmental perspective this is a complete disaster,' said Bill Freese… 'The more I look at this, the more it worries me and the more it needs to be opposed.'"

What's in a Name?

According to one analyst, the takeover might boost Monsanto's reputation, as Syngenta has been "less publicly enthusiastic" about genetically engineered (GE) crops.

Personally, I don't foresee Monsanto ever being able to shed its toxic reputation, no matter how it tries to rebrand itself. It recently tried to do just that by declaring itself "sustainable agriculture company."

But actions speak louder than mere words, and there's nothing sustainable about Monsanto's business. Taking on the Syngenta name would do nothing to change the

obnoxious dichotomy between Monsanto's words and deeds.

In fact, Mother Jones astutely notes that by trying to acquire Syngenta, Monsanto contradicts "years of rhetoric about how its ultimate goal with biotech is to wean farmers off agrichemicals."

It's quite clear Monsanto has no desire or plans to help farmers reduce the use of crop chemicals. On the contrary, it has and continues to push for the increased use of its flagship product, Roundup.

Roundup Also Being Used to Harvest Non-GMO Crops

Not only has Monsanto created a line of GE Roundup-ready seeds, it also promotes the use of Roundup on conventional crops, pre-harvest, as described in its Pre-Harvest Staging Guide.3

Applying herbicide directly before harvesting helps dry the crop, boosts the release of seed, and is said to promote long-term control of certain weeds.

The practice is known as desiccation, and according to researchers Samsel and Seneff,4 the desiccation of conventionally grown wheat appears to be linked to the rapid and concurrent rise in celiac disease.

Applying glyphosate, which was recently classified as a Class 2A probable human carcinogen, on crops directly before harvest is one of the dumbest things we could do to our foods, yet Monsanto wholeheartedly supports and promotes it.

Speaking of reputation, Syngenta is hardly a poster child for sustainability and right action either. Not only is it the main supplier of the "gender-bending" herbicide atrazine in the US, it also makes neonicotinoids—a class of insecticide linked to the mass die-offs of bees and other pollinators

Both of these chemicals have come under increasing scrutiny as researchers have learned more about their environmental and human health impacts, and both are banned in Europe while still widely in use in the US.

Suppressing Science for the Chemical Industry?

As scrutiny into the effects of chemicals has intensified, so has strong-arm tactics by the industry, which has successfully infiltrated the very agencies charged with their oversight.

An open letter5 signed by more than 25 farmworker, environmental, and food safety organizations was sent to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) on May 5, demanding the agency investigate reports of retaliation and suppression of research relating to the dangers of neonicotinoids and glyphosate.6

> "It is imperative that the USDA maintains scientific integrity and does not allow for harassment, censorship, or suppression of findings that counter the interests of industry," the letter states.
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> In March, the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) filed a citizen petition requesting that the US Department of Agriculture adopt new policies that would further job protection for government scientists who

> question the health and safety of agricultural chemicals.
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> The petition urges for the agency to adopt policies that would specifically prevent the 'political suppression or alteration of studies and lay out clear procedures for investigating allegations and of scientific misconduct.'
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> PEER has found that more than 10 USDA scientists have faced consequences or investigations when their work called into question the health and safety of agricultural chemicals.
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> These scientists documented clear actions that violated their scientific integrity, including USDA officials retracting studies, watering down findings, removing scientists' names from authorship, and delaying approvals for publication of research papers."

Many Elementary School Children at Risk of Elevated Pesticide Exposure

Monsanto's marketing materials still proclaim its GE crops reduce the need for pesticides, but usage has steadily and significantly risen since the advent of GE seeds. The rapid emergence of resistant superweeds have led the industry to invent crop seeds resistant to even more toxic herbicides, such as 2,4-D and dicamba.

According to Dr. Medardo Ávila-Vázquez,7 a pediatrician and neonatologist at the Faculty of Medical Sciences at the National University of Córdoba, glyphosate use in connection to GMO seeds is having a notably deleterious effect on the health of the local people, particularly children.

In light of the approval of these next-generation pesticides, it would behoove us to take notice to such warnings, because our kids are also becoming increasingly exposed. As reported by Global Research,8 children attending hundreds of elementary schools across the US are in harm's way as toxic weed killers are doused on nearby GE fields in ever greater amounts:

"A new EWG interactive map shows the amounts of glyphosate sprayed in each US county and tallies the 3,247 elementary schools that are located within 1,000 feet of a corn or soybean field and the 487 schools that are within 200 feet. Click on any county on the map to see how much GMO corn and soy acreage has increased there as well as the number of nearby elementary schools."

You will see that several states are outlined. This is where the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has approved the use of Dow AgroSciences' Enlist Duo. This new herbicide, which is a mix of glyphosate and 2,4-D, will be used on a new generation of GE corn and soybeans engineered to withstand both of these toxins. Many of these states are already heavily sprayed with Roundup, and with the introduction of Enlist Duo, children who go to school near these farm fields may be exposed to greater risks than ever before.

The Organic Effect

While environmental exposure is certainly a concern, most people are exposed to pesticides via their diet. Claimed to be the largest of its kind, a study9 published in the *Environmental Health Perspectives* looked at the diets of nearly 4,500 people living in six US cities, assessing exposure levels to organophosphates (OPs), which are among the most commonly

used pesticides on American farms.

Participants' organophosphate levels were estimated using USDA data10 on the average levels of pesticide residue found in the fruits and vegetables that each individual reported eating. To verify the accuracy of their estimates, they compared their calculated pesticide exposures to the actual levels of pesticide metabolites (breakdown products) excreted in the urine of a subset of 720 participants.

Not surprisingly, those who ate conventionally grown produce were found to have high concentrations of OP metabolites, whereas those who ate organic produce had significantly lower levels. Those who "often or always" ate organic had about 65 percent lower levels of pesticide residues compared to those who ate the least amount of organic produce. According to lead author Cynthia Curl: *"The study suggests that by eating organically grown versions of those foods highest in pesticide residues, we can make a measurable difference."*

The "organic effect" was also recently demonstrated by a Swedish family that agreed to eat nothing but organic food for two weeks. 11 Pesticide levels were measured before and after the switch, and after a fortnight of eating an all-organic diet, the family members' toxic load had diminished to virtually nothing. While many organic foods have been shown to contain higher levels of nutrients,12,13,14 one of the major benefits you reap from eating organic is what you *don't* get from your diet—all those toxic chemicals!

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A Stanford University meta-analysis15 published in 2012 found that people who eat an organic diet not only tend to have lower levels of toxic pesticides in their system, organic meats were also far less likely to contain multi-drug resistant bacteria, which is yet another major health threat.

Many still insist we don't know what the health ramifications are from eating pesticide-tainted foods, but common sense will tell you the effect is not going to do your health any favors. Many pesticides also do have well-established health effects. Organophosphate (OP) pesticides, for example, have been linked to reduced IQ and attention deficits in children.16,17 Symptoms of exposure include weakness, headache, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting.

Long-term exposure has been linked to neurological effects, such as18 confusion, anxiety, and depression. According to data19from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 75 percent of the US population has detectable levels of OPs in their urine, and unless you're a farmer, or live near a farm, your diet is one of the most likely routes of exposure. Considering depression affects one in 10 Americans, who's to say OP pesticide exposure isn't part of the problem?

Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce

To protect your health, your best bet is to buy only organic fruits and vegetables. That said, not all conventionally grown fruits and vegetables are subjected to the same amount of

pesticide load. One way to save some money while still lowering your risk is by focusing on purchasing certain organic items, while "settling" for others that are conventionally grown. To do this, I recommend familiarizing yourself with the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) annual Shoppers' Guide to Pesticides in Produce.20

Of the fruits and vegetables tested by the EWG for the 2015 guide, the following "dirty dozen" had the *highest* pesticide load, making them the most important to buy or grow organically. Also remember that swapping your regular meat sources to organic, grass-fed/pasture-raised versions of beef and poultry may be even more important than buying organic fruits and vegetables. The same goes for dairy products and animal by-products such as eggs.

Apples	Peaches	Nectarines
Strawberries	Grapes	Celery
Spinach	Sweet bell peppers	Cucumbers
Cherry tomatoes	Imported snap peas	Potatoes

In contrast, the following foods were found to have the *lowest* residual pesticide load, making them the safest bet among conventionally grown vegetables. Note that a small amount of sweet corn and most Hawaiian papaya, although low in pesticides, are genetically engineered (GE). If you're unsure of whether the sweet corn or papaya is GE, I'd recommend opting for organic varieties. To review the ranking of all foods tested, please see the EWG's 2015 Shoppers' Guide to Pesticides in Produce.21

Avocado	Sweet corn	Pineapple
Cabbage	Frozen sweet peas	Onions
Asparagus	Mangoes	Papayas (non-GMO. Most Hawaiian papaya is GMO)
Kiwi	Eggplant	Grapefruit
Cantaloupe	Cauliflower	Sweet potatoes

Where to Find Healthy Food

One of the most compelling reasons to eat organic is to *avoid toxins*. Organic foods do tend to have a better nutritional profile, but *even if they do not*, the absence of drugs, pesticides, hormones, and antibiotics is more than enough of a reason to make the switch to protect your health. For a step-by-step guide to making healthier diet choices, please see my freely available optimized nutrition plan, starting with the beginner plan.

While many food stores carry organic foods these days, your best bet is to source it from a local grower, as much of the organic food sold in grocery stores is imported. Not only has this food traveled a long distance, adding to the carbon footprint, but some countries may have more lax organic standards than others.

Buying local food also supports local farmers and promotes the establishment of a more sustainable local food system. If you reside in the US, the following organizations can help you locate farm-fresh foods in the vicinity of where you live. Even better would be to grow it yourself. The nation's health would radically improve if we could reestablish World War II Victory gardens.

Weston Price Foundation22 — has local chapters in most states, and many of them are connected with buying clubs in which you can easily purchase organic foods, including grass fed raw dairy products like milk and butter.

Local Harvest — This Web site will help you find farmers' markets, family farms, and other sources of sustainably grown food in your area where you can buy produce, grass-fed meats, and many other goodies.

Farmers' Markets — A national listing of farmers' markets.

Eat Well Guide: Wholesome Food from Healthy Animals — The Eat Well Guide is a free online directory of sustainably raised meat, poultry, dairy, and eggs from farms, stores, restaurants, inns, and hotels, and online outlets in the United States and Canada.

Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) — CISA is dedicated to sustaining agriculture and promoting the products of small farms.

FoodRoutes — The FoodRoutes "Find Good Food" map can help you connect with local farmers to find the freshest, tastiest food possible. On their interactive map, you can find a listing for local farmers, CSAs, and markets near you.

What Are GMOs?

GMOs are a product of genetic engineering, meaning their genetic makeup has been altered to induce a variety of "unique" traits to crops, such as making them drought-resistant or giving them "more nutrients." GMO proponents claim that genetic engineering is "safe and beneficial," and that it advances the agricultural industry. They also say that GMOs help ensure the global food supply and sustainability. But is there any truth to these claims? I believe not. For years, I've stated the belief that GMOs pose one of the greatest threats to life on the planet. Genetic engineering is NOT the safe and beneficial technology that it is touted to be.

Help Support GMO Labeling

The Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA)—Monsanto's Evil Twin—is pulling out all the stops to keep you in the dark about what's in your food. For nearly two decades, Monsanto and corporate agribusiness have exercised near-dictatorial control over American agriculture. For example, Monsanto has made many claims that glyphosate in Roundup is harmless to animals and humans. However, recently the World Health Organization (WHO) had their research team test glyphosate and have labeled it a probable carcinogen.

Public opinion around the biotech industry's contamination of our food supply and destruction of our environment has reached the tipping point. We're fighting back. That's why I was the first to push for GMO labeling. I donated a significant sum to the first ballot initiative in California in 2012, which inspired others to donate to the campaign as well. We technically "lost the vote, but we are winning the war, as these labeling initiatives have raised a considerable amount of public awareness.

The insanity has gone far enough, which is why I encourage you to boycott every single product owned by members of the GMA, including natural and organic brands. More than 80 percent of our support comes from individual consumers like you, who understand that real change comes from the grassroots.

Recently, Rep. Mike Pompeo (R-Kan) has reintroduced a bill (HR 1599) that would preempt states' rights to enact GMO labeling laws. This bill would create a federal government program to oversee guidelines for voluntary labeling of products that do not contain GMOs. It would specifically prohibit Congress or individual states from requiring mandatory labeling

of GMO foods or ingredients. It would also allow food manufacturers to use the word "natural" on products that contain GMOs. TAKE ACTION NOW! Your local representatives need to hear from you! Please contact them today by CLICKING HERE.

Thankfully, we have organizations like the Organic Consumers Association (OCA) to fight back against these junk food manufacturers, pesticide producers, and corporate giants.

Internet Resources Where You Can Learn More

- Non-GMO Shopping Guide
- GMA Boycott List
- GMA Traitor Brands

Non-GMO Food Resources by Country

- Australia
- Canada
- New Zealand
- United Kingdom
- United States

Together, Let's Help OCA Get The Funding They Deserve

Let's Help OCA get the funding it deserves. I have found very few organizations who are as effective and efficient as OCA. It's a public interest organization dedicated to promoting health justice and sustainability. A central focus of the OCA is building a healthy, equitable, and sustainable system of food production and consumption.

Please make a donation to help OCA fight for GMO labeling.

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