

Monsanto Trial Exposes Risks of Roundup Herbicide. Thousands of Cancer Patients Suing Monsanto

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*“This case is way bigger than me. I hope it gets the attention that it needs.” — **Dewayne Johnson**, former school groundskeeper awarded \$289 million in damages from Monsanto*

As a Saskatchewan resident for many years, I often heard the phrase “Roundup Ready.” It was coined as if it were a harmless jingle for soda pop. The ad still rings in my ears.

All farmers know of Roundup, the most effective weed killer. Most urbanites do as well. The way the corporate giant Monsanto has marketed, promoted, and created an artificial need for Roundup is a true story of profiteering and avarice. Now, finally, even some courts are accepting that it likely kills much more than just weeds and that Monsanto has acted to cover up concerns about the safety of Roundup.

A few years ago, **Dewayne Johnson**, a courageous man and one who is also dying of cancer, launched a lawsuit against Monsanto. In early August, Johnson had his day in court — and won. He showed that David can still take down Goliath — something that some of us had begun to wonder about given all the nasty stories of corporate greed, seed manipulation and cover-ups we have come to know.

But some days there are heroes. **And Dewayne Johnson and the thousands of cancer patients now suing Monsanto are modern-day heroes.** The [46-year-old father of two](#) was composed in court as the San Francisco jury sided with him, noting that exposure to Roundup was a substantial factor in his getting cancer, and ordering [Monsanto to pay Johnson \\$289 million in damages](#). Monsanto states it will appeal, but the appeal will cost the transnational corporation \$25 million a year in interest should their appeal not be successful. Reason to pause, perhaps, for a bit of reflection.

Meanwhile, Bayer, the German company that bought Monsanto a few years ago, saw its stock plunge by billions following the court decision.

For years many have been concerned that Roundup causes cancer. Many have also been concerned about the marketing of genetically modified (GM) seed, specifically modified to only grow if used with glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup.

Monsanto’s determination to link the growth of crops to the use of its herbicide is Orwellian. The traits most often “modified” in GM crops are those related to tolerance for herbicides, linking plant growth to its use. There is lots of money to be lost if glyphosate, the active ingredient, becomes widely considered a carcinogen and is eventually banned. The

European Union was seriously considering banning the chemical, but in November 2017 it bowed to concerns from member countries, Germany in particular, which is home to Monsanto's parent company's headquarters.

Dewayne Johnson's lawsuit was expedited because his cancer is terminal and it was believed that because of his health he might die before having his day in court. Johnson was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma two and a half years into a job as the integrative pest manager for a California school district. A large part of his job was to spray these products in bulk 30 times a year.

Johnson was not told that Roundup could cause cancer. On the job there were a few accidents with the sprayer used to spread the herbicide and Johnson was doused with the liquid at least twice.

Monsanto maintains, even after this ruling, that Roundup is safe. Meanwhile, the top scientists with the World Health Organization in 2015 classified glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen.

This court case is about much more than one man and his family. Roundup is one of the most popular herbicides in the world and its use is ubiquitous. Glyphosate, the key ingredient in Roundup, is the most widely sold herbicide in Canada and Roundup the most widely used weed killer in the world. So much so, that its residues are hard to avoid. U.S. scientists have even recorded traces of glyphosate in rainfall. In April of 2017, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency found residues of glyphosate in [30 per cent of the more than 3,200](#) food products it tested, including grains and common cereals. It found 1.3 per cent contained residues above the allowable limits.

In early July, before this court ruling, the state of California moved to [list glyphosate as cancer-causing](#), a first step toward requiring Monsanto to change its labelling.

Like Dewayne Johnson, there are [thousands more people](#) suing or expected to sue Monsanto in the United States. The impact of this jury decision on Monsanto could eventually lead to billions more in damages.

But this court case has also brought to light how Monsanto has tried to manipulate the results of scientific evidence in its favour to show that Roundup is safe for use. The San Francisco trial brought to light that Monsanto manipulated information and published ghostwritten documents as independent, credible, scientific reports.

In Canada, the [Canadian Biotechnology Action Network](#) (CBAN), a coalition of groups, is at the forefront of tracking stories related to glyphosate and other pesticides, GM crops, and seed issues. CBAN notes that the amount of herbicides sold in Canada has risen by 130 per cent since 1994. CBAN writes in a recent release:

"The widespread cultivation of GM glyphosate-tolerant crops, in particular, has driven up the use of glyphosate-based herbicides. Glyphosate is the top pesticide ingredient sold in Canada, followed by 2,4-D and glufosinate ammonium. Glyphosate use in Canada tripled between 2005 and 2011, climbing from 30.2 million litres to 89.7 million in Western Canada, and from 3.8 million litres to 12.3 million in Eastern Canada.

This increased use of glyphosate has resulted in the emergence and spread of glyphosate-resistant weeds. In response, biotechnology companies have genetically engineered crops to be tolerant to the older herbicides 2,4-D and dicamba. These GM crops will further increase the herbicide load in the environment and lead to even more herbicide-resistant weeds.”

For now, Bayer’s Monsanto will likely do its best to fight for the survival of Roundup — given the many billions to be made on the sale of the herbicide and Roundup Ready seed, and the billions that could be lost in lawsuits. But even once it decides to cut its losses and move on, the use of herbicides linked to GM crops will still be a major issue. And like the tobacco industry, the chemical industry will have to be pursued publicly, long and hard, for all to see.

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