

Post-Brexit Farming, Glyphosate and GMOs in the UK

An Open Letter to Hon Michael Gove Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

By [Rosemary Mason](#) and [Colin Todhunter](#)

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#)

The following is an edited and abridged version of an open letter recently sent by Dr Rosemary Mason to Michael Gove, the British Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The full version containing relevant citations and additional data and information may be accessed [here](#).

You can also find on the site linked to all of Rosemary Mason's previous work outlining the devastating impact of glyphosate and modern farming practices which remain in place due to the well-documented subversion of science and the corruption of governments and regulatory bodies by industry interests.

It seems likely that a post-Brexit trade deal with the US could mean more of the same and lead to the introduction of GM crops in the UK alongside the lowering of standards for the use of biocides in agriculture. [Sainsbury Laboratory already has plans for a new open air field trial of GM potatoes](#) on farms in Suffolk and Cambridge.

Colin Todhunter

Below, Dr Mason lays out her concerns to Mr Gove.

Dear Michael Gove,

I am surprised to learn that from the huge number of scientists employed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and Rothamsted Research (research institute involved in developing and testing GM crops) that not one of them has read the new book by Caius Rommens, former team leader at Monsanto. He helped create GM potatoes and has retracted his research as he explains in the book 'Pandora's Potatoes: The Worst GMOs'.

Professor Jonathan Jones, group leader for the Sainsbury Laboratory has worked for Monsanto in the past, so he has massive conflicts of interest.

It all shows an ignorance beyond belief!

In an interview with Sustainable Pulse, Caius Rommens has revealed the hidden dangers of the GMO potatoes he created:

“During my 26 years as a genetic engineer, I created hundreds of thousands of different GM potatoes at a direct cost of about \$50 million. I started my work at universities in Amsterdam and Berkeley, continued at Monsanto, and then worked for many years at J. R. Simplot Company, which is one of the largest potato processors in the world. I had my potatoes tested in greenhouses or the field, but I rarely left the laboratory to visit the farms or experimental stations. Indeed, I believed that my theoretical knowledge about potatoes was sufficient to improve potatoes. This was one of my biggest mistakes.”

When asked why he decided to reveal information about the failings of GM potatoes after spending many years creating them, he responded that looking back he believes he and his colleagues were all brainwashed:

“We all brainwashed ourselves. We believed that the essence of life was a dead molecule, DNA, and that we could improve life by changing this molecule in the lab. 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.”

Rommens states that he and the other scientists he knew were supposed to understand DNA and to make valuable modifications, but the fact of the matter was that they 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. We focused on short-term benefits (in the laboratory) without considering the long-term deficits (in the field). It was the same kind of thinking that produced DDT, PCBs, Agent Orange, recombinant bovine growth hormone, and so on. I believe that it is important for people to understand how little genetic engineers know, how biased they are, and how wrong they can be.”

He adds that it is amazing that the USDA and FDA approved the GM potatoes by only evaluating the company’s own data. He asks: how can the regulatory agencies assume there is no bias?

“I was biased and all genetic engineers are biased. It is not just an emotional bias. We need the GM crops to be approved. There is a tremendous amount of pressure to succeed, to justify our existence by developing modifications that create hundreds of millions of dollars in value. We test our GM crops to confirm their safety, not to question their safety. The regulatory petitions for deregulation are full with meaningless data but hardly include any attempts to reveal the unintended effects. For instance, the petitions describe the insertion site of the transgene, but they don’t mention the numerous random mutations that occurred during the tissue culture manipulations. And the petitions provide data on compounds that are safe and don’t matter, such as the regular amino acids and sugars, but hardly give any measurements on the levels of potential toxins or allergens.”

Caius Rommens concludes that 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.

Future of British agriculture

Defra is quoted as saying that after Brexit:

“The most promising crops suitable for introducing to England would be Roundup Ready GA21 glyphosate tolerant crops, which synergises well with herbicides already widely used in the UK...”

Campaigner Georgina Downs has written about the long-awaited Agriculture Bill that has been introduced before Parliament. She says that this is the UK Government’s plan on what UK farming will look like post Brexit:

“There is no reference to the protection of human health or public health in the Agriculture Bill as regards to farmers, the main users of pesticides... The widespread use of pesticides and other toxic chemicals in our existing farming system appears to be the Government’s ‘elephant in the room’ because of DEFRA’s reluctance to mention it – let alone focus on it. Therefore, there is no recognition or even any specific reference in the Agriculture Bill – or Mr Gove’s statements – to the continued risks associated with the continued use of pesticides and other agrochemicals on crop fields across the UK.”

Mr Gove, your predecessor George Eustice was interviewed by Arthur Neslen on 30/05/2016 about Brexit and stated:

“The [birds and habitats directives](#) would go. But the directives’ framework is so rigid that it is spirit-crushing.”

On pesticides, he said

“The EU’s [precautionary principle](#) needed to be reformed in favour of a US-style risk-based approach, allowing faster authorisation.”

More than 1,700 tonnes of glyphosate were sprayed on crops last year, up a third on 2012, according to Defra. The total area sprayed with the weedkiller grew by almost 500,000 hectares to 2.1 million hectares, an area the size of Wales.

The Soil Association, has [called](#) on supermarkets to take bread containing glyphosate residue off shelves. It said the maximum residue level for glyphosate in wheat of 10 mg per kg had been set well before the finding that the herbicide was probably carcinogenic.

In a recent court case, evidence was laid out showing that Monsanto worked closely with the Environmental Protection Agency to [block a toxicity review](#) of glyphosate by a separate government agency. A current trial and two previous trials have all included evidence that Monsanto engaged in ghostwriting certain scientific papers that concluded glyphosate products were safe; and that Monsanto [spent millions of dollars](#) on projects aimed at countering the conclusions of the international cancer scientists who classified glyphosate as a probable carcinogen.

Monsanto (now Bayer) faces cascading scientific evidence [linking glyphosate](#) to a

constellation of other injuries that have become prevalent since its introduction, including obesity, depression, Alzheimer's, ADHD, autism, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, kidney disease, and inflammatory bowel disease, brain, breast and prostate cancer, miscarriage, birth defects and declining sperm counts. Strong evidence now links glyphosate to various other conditions too.

Researchers peg glyphosate as a potent endocrine disruptor, which interferes with sexual development in children. The chemical compound is certainly a chelator that removes important minerals from the body, including iron, magnesium, zinc, selenium and molybdenum. Roundup [disrupts the microbiome](#) destroying beneficial bacteria in the human gut and triggering brain inflammation and other ill effects.

The UN expert on toxins Baskut Tuncak wrote in the Guardian on 06/11/2017 that it's time to put children's health before pesticides. He said that children are growing up exposed to a toxic cocktail of weedkillers, insecticides, and fungicides. It's on their food and in their water, and it's even doused over their parks and playgrounds:

"Many governments insist that our standards of protection from these pesticides are strong enough. But as a scientist and a lawyer who specialises in chemicals and their potential impact on people's fundamental rights, I beg to differ. Last month it was revealed that in recommending that glyphosate – the world's most widely-used pesticide – was safe, the [EU's food safety watchdog copied and pasted pages of a report directly from Monsanto](#), the pesticide's manufacturer. Revelations like these are simply shocking.

"The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most ratified international human rights treaty in the world (only the US is not a party), makes it clear that states have an explicit obligation to protect children from exposure to toxic chemicals, from contaminated food and polluted water, and to ensure that every child can realise their right to the highest attainable standard of health. These and many other rights of the child are abused by the current pesticide regime. These chemicals are everywhere and they are invisible."

Tuncak argues that the only way to protect citizens, especially those disproportionately at risk from exposure, is for governments to regulate them effectively, in large part by adhering to the highest standards of scientific integrity. He states:

"Paediatricians have referred to childhood exposure to pesticides as creating a "silent pandemic" of disease and disability. Exposure in pregnancy and childhood is linked to birth defects, diabetes, and cancer. Because a child's developing body is more sensitive to exposure than adults and takes in more of everything – relative to their size, children eat, breathe, and drink much more than adults – they are particularly vulnerable to these toxic chemicals."

According to Tuncak, increasing evidence shows that even at "low" doses of childhood exposure, irreversible health impacts can result. But most victims cannot prove the cause of their disability or disease, limiting our ability to hold those responsible to account. He concludes:

"In light of revelations such as the copy-and-paste scandal, a careful re-examination of the performance of states is required. The overwhelming reliance of regulators on industry-funded studies, the exclusion of independent

science from assessments, and the confidentiality of studies relied upon by authorities must change.”

Finally, based on a three-year UN-backed study from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, there are grim implications for the future of humanity. The authors conclude that the rapid decline of the natural world is a crisis even bigger than climate change.

Industrial farming is to blame for much of the destruction and extinction of nature.

We need agriculture systems that regenerate ecosystems not degenerate them.

Rosemary Mason

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