

The Case against Toxic Herbicide Glyphosate: “We are being Silently Poisoned by thousands of Untested and Unmonitored Chemicals”

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#),
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On 13 April, the EU Parliament called on the European Commission to restrict certain permitted uses of the toxic herbicide glyphosate, best known in Monsanto’s ‘Roundup’ formulation.

Glyphosate was last year determined to be “probably carcinogenic” by the WHO, and the resolution calls for no approval for many uses now considered acceptable, including use in or close to public parks, playgrounds and gardens and use where integrated pest management systems are sufficient for necessary weed control. The resolution falls short of an outright ban called for by many and also calls for the renewal of the licence for glyphosate to be limited to just seven years instead of the 15 proposed by the Commission.

Nearly 700 MEPs voted on the seven-year licensing of glyphosate and the vote was passed by 374 votes in favor to 225 votes against.

The resolution also demands strict limits on ‘pre-harvest’ applications on crops, which refers to the practice of spraying crops up to two weeks before harvest to dessicate the plants and make harvesting easier. This use of glyphosate is believed to be a main source of residue exposure to humans, especially those found [in bread](#)

Among other things, the resolution calls for the Commission and European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to immediately disclose all scientific evidence for its recent positive classification of glyphosate and the Commission to test and monitor glyphosate residues in foods and drinks produced in the EU as well as in imported produce.

Moreover, it strongly criticised the Commission for accepting an incomplete dossier with regard to endocrine disruption and the toxic spiral by agro-biotech companies adding further resistances to plants.

This European Parliament vote to re-approve glyphosate for 7 years as opposed to the usual 15 years is non-binding on the Commission and EU member states. The EU member states will take the final vote in May.

Czech MEP Kateřina Konečná, GUE/NGL coordinator on the Parliament’s Committee on the Environment and Public Health, said:

“I am really disappointed by the outcome of today’s vote on our objection to the re-authorisation of the glyphosate herbicide. Our objection has been distorted. Some really bad amendments were tabled by right-wing groups in

order to weaken a ban on glyphosate in the resolution and, unfortunately, they were approved.”

(For a more detailed review of the developments described above, see [this piece](#) in The Ecologist.)

Limited ‘victory’

What transpired on 13 April represents a very limited ‘victory’. To understand why this is the case, readers are urged to consult the attached fully-referenced document at the end of this article. Campaigner Rosemary Mason put together the 18-page document in question, which was produced to accompany an open letter sent by Mason to British Medical Journal Editor-in-Chief Fiona Godlee.

The document shows that poisoning the public and the environment with a cocktail of pesticides, not least glyphosate, on a massive scale is nothing short of criminal. Powerful commercial interests have colluded with governments, regulatory bodies and decision makers to ensure this has continued for decades (see [this list](#) of reports on the Corporate Europe Observatory website that highlight how in Europe public institutions have been compromised over the regulation of chemicals, not least pesticides, due to serious and persistent conflicts of interest; also see [this report](#) on how the previous Commission served a corporate agenda).

Mason implies that the public are being hoodwinked by messages about health and that these messages serve agritech interests. In her letter to the BMJ, she notes a major conflict of interest was unaddressed.

A piece, ‘People lack awareness of link between alcohol and cancer’, was published in the BMJ by Anne Gulland reporting about a survey commissioned by Cancer Research UK (CRUK),

Dr Penny Buykx, a senior research fellow at The University of Sheffield and lead author of the report, is quoted as saying:

“We’ve shown that public awareness of the increased cancer risk from drinking alcohol remains worryingly low. People link drinking and liver cancer, but most still don’t realise that cancers including breast cancer, mouth and throat cancers and bowel cancer are also linked with alcohol, and that risks for some cancers go up even by drinking a small amount.”

Mason argues that the way health-related research is reported serves the interests of pesticide manufacturers because something other than pesticides can be blamed for the epidemic of cancers. Messages about lifestyle behaviour and individual responsibility for health are constantly being reinforced by politicians, the media and research studies.

According to Mason, since November 2010 Michael Pragnell has been the Chairman of Cancer Research UK (CRUK). She notes Pragnell was the founder of Syngenta and CEO of Syngenta AG based in Switzerland (from its public listing in 2000 to the end of 2007). He was also Chairman of CropLife International from 2002 to 2005.

Numerous studies and data sources are cited by Mason to highlight the deleterious health and environmental impacts of glyphosate. She implies that it is very convenient to lay the blame for poor health and disease elsewhere or at the door of things like alcohol consumption or individual behaviour.

Implying that poor health is the outcome of individual choice and lifestyle behaviour serves to divert the focus of attention away from commercial interests that profit from institutionalised health-damaging practices that affect the public. This dovetails with 'free-market' ideology whereby free will and choice prevail and illness, unemployment, poverty, etc, are the fault of the victim, rather than the consequences of a system structured (politically and economically) to serve the needs of powerful commercial interests and which, as in the case of exposure to glyphosate, the public has no control over.

Instead of holding these interests to account, we are left with messages that say follow a low carb diet, it's OK to drink sugary drinks because it a lack of exercise that causes obesity or drink a glass of red wine a day to keep the doctor away.

The Chief Medical Officer (England) and Cancer Research UK blame liver failure and liver cancers in the public on 'lifestyle choices' i.e. the consumption of alcohol. However, as Mason argues, Séralini's rats in France and dairy cows in Denmark also had liver pathologies. They cannot be blamed on 'lifestyle choices' but on glyphosate residues in food.

Mason states that since 2013 the Department of Health, Public Health England and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs have been made aware that independent scientists have shown that glyphosate is linked to most of the diseases and conditions associated with those in a Western diet, including: gastrointestinal disorders, obesity, depression, autism, infertility, cancer and Alzheimer's disease, celiac sprue and gluten intolerance. Celiac disease is a multifactorial disease associated with numerous nutritional deficiencies as well as reproductive issues and increased risk to thyroid disease, kidney failure and cancer.

In addition, problems with low manganese levels (shown in cows fed GM soya and maize) are associated with gut dysbiosis as well as neuropathologies such as autism, Alzheimer's disease, depression, anxiety syndrome, Parkinson's disease, and prion diseases.

Mason argues that Monsanto knew that glyphosate caused cancer in animals but manipulated the data. US Scientist Anthony Samsel is the first independent researcher to examine Monsanto's secret toxicology studies on glyphosate obtained under Freedom of Information from the US EPA. They reported a variety of cancers in animals.

If the EU Commission and the EFSA manage to renew the licence for glyphosate, the public's health will continue to deteriorate, while the agritech industry and drug companies will continue to profit.

[Rosemary Mason's paper on glyphosate can be read here](#)

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