

Monsanto Vs. The World: Is it Too Late for Us to Win?

By [Melanie Segala](#)

Monsanto is the world's largest agricultural biotechnology company and producer of genetically modified (GM) seeds. Monsanto's GM crop seeds are altered to resist the damaging effects of their bestselling agricultural herbicide, Roundup, which earns the company a cool \$620 million per year and provides 40% of its operating profit.¹

Initially, farmers all over the world believed GM seeds were a high-tech boon to modern agriculture — using Roundup, they could kill thousands of threatening weeds while doing no harm to valuable crops. Little did they know of the problems that would ensue, starting with the purchase of the seeds.

Before farmers are sold the Roundup-resistant seeds, they are required to sign a technology agreement that allows the company to conduct property investigations and define “what rights a farmer does and does not have in planting, harvesting, and selling genetically engineered seed.”²

This may seem outrageous, but Monsanto has gotten away with it because their GM seeds are patented. And according to them, patent infringement also includes saving seeds from current healthy crops and replanting them in the future — a great way for Monsanto to force farmers to needlessly buy seed every year.

According to the Center for Food Safety (CFS),² the signed technology agreement has led Monsanto to aggressively pursue thousands of farmers that it believes have breached the agreement or infringed upon its GM seed patent. The farmer must then pay an out of court settlement to Monsanto or go to court. CFS says that Monsanto has collected \$15,253,602 from lawsuits that have found in its favor.²

Even farmers who have not purchased Monsanto's GM seeds nor signed any written agreement are in the line of fire. If pollen from a GM planted crop pollinates a non-GM field on another farm that results in viable plants, that farmer is liable under current laws for patent infringement — even if he did not want GM crops growing in his field.

So successful has Monsanto been in handsomely collecting from lawsuits and gaining control of the world's food supply that they're now ready to go after the really big fish. On April 14, 2009, the company filed a law suit against the German government for refusing to use its GM corn.³

Although Monsanto's GM corn (which was engineered to be toxic to the corn borer pest) has been permitted in Germany since 2005, agriculture minister Ilse Aigner stopped plans for 8,892 acres to be planted for the summer harvest. Ms. Aigner claimed she had "legitimate reasons" to believe the corn would be a hazard to the environment. EU law allows member countries to impose such a ban but Monsanto's suit says that once a plant has been approved, it cannot be banned unless new scientific evidence proves it to be a danger.³

France banned the GM corn seeds last year and Hungary and Austria also plan on doing so even though the European Food Safety Authority concluded they were no risk to humans or animals. But Ms. Aigner may be right in her concerns about the damaging effects of GM crops on the environment.

According to GeneWatch UK:⁴

- Other crops and wild plants may become contaminated with the foreign genes added to the GM crop.
- New 'super-weeds' may evolve which will be difficult or even impossible to eradicate.
- Pollution arising from the use of harmful chemicals may increase or decrease.
- Wildlife may be harmed by new toxins in the environment or changes in agricultural practices.

In the US Sunbelt in fact, Roundup-resistant super-weeds are threatening cotton and soybean crops.⁵ In 2007, 10,000 acres in Macon County, Georgia were overrun with super-weeds and abandoned. Farmers across the South are now left to figure out how to kill the herbicide-resistant weeds and not harm their crops.

Unbelievably, Monsanto is encouraging these farmers to mix the Roundup with older herbicides like 2,4-D which also happens to be an ingredient used in Agent Orange. Three Scandinavian countries have banned 2,4-D because of its links to cancer, cognitive impairment, and reproductive damage.⁵

We can only hope that Ms. Aigner and the German government stick to their guns and prove in a court of law that individuals and governments have the right to decide what they grow — and what they refuse to grow — without interference from Big Agra. A victory for the German government would be a victory for us all — one big step in breaking the stranglehold that large corporations are exerting on every aspect of our lives — even what we eat.