

Synopsis of the Report:

“Poisons in our plate: Glyphosate and other poisons, from field to table”

The current industrial food system based on monocultures, widespread use of agrochemicals and genetically modified seeds - combined with the introduction of neo-liberal free trade policies and the liberalization of trade, poses a serious threat to our social, environmental and health costs. This agriculture model has been slowly poisoning millions of people while pushing small farmers off their land. Over the years, we have been allowing companies to consolidate their monopolies and gain control over our seeds, food and health.

Industrial agriculture was founded on the erroneous idea that cheap and abundant food was a necessary step to feed the growing population of the world. However, having degraded the greater part of our soil and polluted our water, threatened our biodiversity and played a key role in the current climate crisis, the industrialization of our food system has produced a relatively small portion of the global food production. It is a fact that [most of the world's population is made up of small farmers and that they produce most of the food we eat](#). Moreover, it is important to point out that the vast majority of industrialized crops, such as corn and soya are primarily used as animal feed or converted into biofuel.

In recent years, numerous studies have highlighted the very negative impacts of agrochemicals on the health of both citizens and the environment, as highlighted in [The Myths of Safe Pesticides](#)”, by Andre Leu – President of [IFOAM Organics International](#)-

The recent report [by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food](#), Hilal Elver, emphasizes shortcomings in the international regulatory framework for pesticide regulation. In particular, she explores the inadequacy of the current parameters with respect to the potential impact of toxic substances currently marketed and diffused in the environment. The report calls on the competent authorities to pay closer attention to the pressures of the agrochemical industry, in both the scientific and institutional fields and emphasises the need for greater transparency in the risk assessment procedures for both the health of humans and of the environment.

Andre Leu, President of IFOAM, in the “Myth of Safe Pesticides” states: *“Until the use of pesticides is regulated on the basis of current, published, peer reviewed science, there is no scientific basis on which to base the belief that the residue levels in our food and environment are safe”*.

The subject of the latest controversy is glyphosate, a basic component of widely used herbicides, particularly Monsanto’s RoundUp. In May 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) [classified glyphosate as “probably carcinogenic to humans \(Group 2A\)”](#). Subsequently, opposite assessments were made by the [European Food Safety Authority \(EFSA\)](#) and the United [States Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#).

In this scenario of conflicting opinions, and risk- denial , a major movement composed of independent members of the scientific community, legal experts, social organizations and journalists, denounced numerous cases of distortion of scientific data, as well as conflicts of interest between regulatory agents and the agrochemical industry. Various cases in Europe have denounced the institutional approach which provide studies by self- interested industries. A series of documents emerged following a court request that revealed a high level of collusion between Monsanto and the EPA aimed at undermining the investigation of the potential carcinogenicity of glyphosate for humans.

In October 2016 a coalition of international civil society movements set up a popular court in The Hague, the [Monsanto Tribunal](#), composed of 5 independent judges from around the world, to hear cases against Monsanto, the biggest US multinational agribusiness company. The Tribunal gave victims, doctors, academics and international lawyers the opportunity to denounce direct environmental and social damages caused by Monsanto, especially in relation to the impact that glyphosate based Round-Up had on health and the environment. The [Advisory Legal Opinion](#) of the Judges, issued on 18 April 2017, concluded that Monsanto’s actions negatively affect the right to a healthy environment, the right to food and the right to health, and confirmed the need to affirm the primacy of human and environmental rights within an international legal framework particularly with regard to the conduct of multinationals.

Some countries have attempted to ban the use of glyphosate for its suspected role in chronic kidney disease but have been stymied in the process through strong opposition of Monsanto

and agrochemical industry groups. Sri Lanka, having received a scientific report that revealed “that kidney disease was mainly caused by glyphosate,” [announced it was banning the herbicide. El Salvador’s Legislative Assembly approved a ban](#) on 53 agrichemicals including glyphosate last year. But because of intense pressure from industry activists, the ban in Sri Lanka was [put on hold](#) and El Salvador’s Legislative Assembly’s ban was not signed into law.

Additionally, in many developing countries an aggressive promotional campaign is underway by agrochemicals companies to convince farmers to buy their products which, in most cases, do not contain any information on the risks to health. On the contrary, evidence of acute and chronic poisoning effects is systematically denied by the manufacturers. This unethical promotional approach of the agrochemical industries goes unquestioned by governments or institutions charged with regulating the use of chemicals and protecting the health of the population.

Nonetheless, in Argentina and the US intense legal battles are under way , with doctors, lawyers and social movements denouncing both the correlation between the increase of diseases such as cancer and birth defects and the use of and exposure to glyphosate pesticides, and the collusion between agrochemical companies and institutions which support them.

These chemicals and poisons are concentrated in the hands of a few large multinational corporations: Bayer CropScience, Monsanto, BASF, Syngenta, ChemChina, Dow AgroSciences and DuPont. all of which originally produced chemical weapons for the war industry, such as Monsanto’s Agent Orange used by the US Army during the Vietnam War.

In the last decades these poison producing companies then turned to the agricultural market to keep multiplying their profits. Through aggressive mergers and acquisitions they are expanding their markets, and furthering their influence and pressure on governments and institutions to ensure that health and environmental regulations do not interfere with their profit making activities, thus increasingly leading to the erosion of our democratic principles.

As these corporations become fewer and bigger, they ill likely be further privileged through the current Free Trade negotiations, such as CETA (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Europe and Canada), recently signed by the European Union and Canada.

These new generation trade agreements are strongly influenced by corporate lobbying and include the controversial mechanism of private arbitration tribunals (ISDS or ICS for CETA), which allow corporations to sue governments and ask millions of dollars as compensation, should rules and regulations aimed at protecting citizens' health and the environment are approved, putting at risk their potential profits. In this scenario, all existing national and local laws protecting the environment and health are at risk.

The only possible response to the growing ecological degradation, poverty, health emergency and malnutrition is to move from the present linear and extractive economic and industrial agricultural paradigm based on a one-way extraction of resources and wealth from nature and society, to, instead, a regenerative ecological and nature-based circular approach, aimed at guiding decision makers not only regarding agriculture, but to apply it to all economic and social choices.

An agricultural model that respects the environment, Earth's resources and health, while taking care of the integrity of soil and biodiversity, working in harmony with natural processes, replaces the linear process of land and resource exploitation with a process of return, of giving back, that guarantees resilience, sustainability, justice and peace.

The road to agroecology was abandoned by research institutes and governments under the influence of giant chemical corporations, which today are now also the biotechnology and seed corporations. It is not a road less travelled when looked from the perspective that most people in the world are small farmers, that small farms produce most of the food we eat.

In 2010, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, [affirmed that](#) *"Small-scale farmers can double food production within 10 years in critical regions by using ecological methods"* and that *"To date, agroecological projects have shown an average crop yield increase of 80% in 57 developing countries, with an average increase of 116% for all African projects. Recent projects conducted in 20 African countries demonstrated a doubling of crop yields over a period of 3-10 years. Conventional farming relies on expensive inputs, fuels climate change and is not resilient to climatic shocks. It simply is not the best choice anymore today"*

The report "[Poisons in our Plate: Glyphosate and other poisons, from field to table](#)" denounces not only the current pressures for the marketing of glyphosate at the expense of human health and of the environment, but also alerts us to the fragility of a system of regulation that should protect consumers and citizens from the voracious appetites of multinationals, the aim of which is only and exclusively to increase profits for their short-term stockholders. Concerns about the environment and consumer health in the medium to long term are not within their vision. This is why government and supranational control bodies must be particularly vigilant. Yet this too often is not the case. On the contrary, we see huge investments in lobbying by multinationals who pay millions of dollars to specialized agencies to exert pressure on decision-makers. Corporate investments are also aimed at ensuring open access to control bodies, as well as scientific institutions, who, in theory, should be impartial.

For how long and to what extent will consumers and citizens endure a model that enriches a few individuals, both private and institutional, and which causes irreversible damage to their health and their environment?

Looking beyond the myths and the propaganda created by the multinationals, there is much knowledge, research and concrete cases to decisively say we do not need to use agro-toxic products to produce our food.

The alternatives to the 'diktat' of the 'Poison Cartel' exist and we will continue to identify, widely share and realize them in a transparent and participatory manner.

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