

'Seedy Business': New Report Digs Beneath Agrichemical Industry's High-Cost PR Machine

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What exactly is the agrichemical industry hiding with its high-cost public relations and lobbying efforts to convince the U.S. public that genetically modified organisms and pesticides are safe?

According to a just-released study by the newly-formed nonprofit organization [U.S. Right to Know](#), the answer is: A great deal.

Entitled [*Seedy Business: What Big Food is hiding with its slick PR campaign on GMOs*](#), and authored by Gary Ruskin, the study aims to expose the "sleazy tactics" of corporations like Monsanto and Dow Chemical.

"Since 2012, the agrichemical and food industries have mounted a complex, multifaceted public relations, advertising, lobbying and political campaign in the United States, costing more than \$100 million, to defend genetically engineered food and crops and the pesticides that accompany them," states the report. "The purpose of this campaign is to deceive the public, to deflect efforts to win the right to know what is in our food via labeling that is already required in 64 countries, and ultimately, to extend their profit stream for as long as possible."

In fact, according to Ruskin's calculations, the industry spent more than \$103 million since 2012 on defeating state initiatives to mandate GMO labeling in California, Colorado,

Oregon, and Washington, with Monsanto alone spending over \$22 million.

“The tremendous amount of money spent speaks to depth of public unease about GMOs,” Ruskin told *Common Dreams*.

The biotechnology industry—whose tactics include attacking scientists and journalists—switches its message depending on the regulatory environment, notes the report. For example, St. Louis-based Monsanto backs GMO labeling in the UK, where such labeling is mandatory, but strongly opposes it in the U.S. “Half of the Big Six agrichemical firms can’t even grow their GMOs in their own home countries,” states the report, due to health and environmental concerns in European countries.

Industry PR firms such as Ketchum—whose clients include tobacco corporations and the Russian government—have had considerable success in manipulating public opinion about GMOs. However, beneath the spin are a number of red flags about the environmental and human health impacts of agrichemical products.

According to the report, “big agrichemical companies have a well-documented record of hiding the truth about the health risks of their products and operations,” from the cancer-causing danger of polychlorinated biphenyls produced by Monsanto to the tragic human impacts of the chemical weapon Agent Orange, which was primarily manufactured by Dow Chemical and Monsanto.

Despite this track record, U.S. oversight of the industry is inadequate, according to the study, thanks largely to the anti-regulatory structures put in place by former Vice President Dan Quayle. The Food and Drug Administration, in fact, does not directly test whether GMOs are safe.

“This report presents a new argument for why the FDA regulatory process doesn’t work,” Ruskin told *Common Dreams*. “The FDA trusts agrichemical companies and the science they

pay for, but the industry has repeatedly hidden health risks from the public so there is no reason to trust them.”

According to Ruskin, this is analogous to the pharmaceutical industry, where positive results get published over negative ones. “What we know is that agrichemical companies have repeatedly hidden health risks, repeatedly suppressed scientific results adverse to the industry,” Ruskin continued. “There is no registry of studies, no way to know. There are are no epidemiological studies on the health impacts of GMOs.”

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