

# CASE STUDY: MONSANTO GHOST-WRITING AND FUNDING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

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Court proceedings have shown how the agrochemical and agricultural biotechnology giant Monsanto was involved in manipulating scientific research linked to its herbicide 'Roundup', revealing how companies seek to influence academic publications to their advantage.



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As of early 2019, more than 13,000 plaintiffs had brought cases against Monsanto in the US courts, claiming that the herbicide Roundup had caused non-Hodgkin lymphoma in themselves or their loved ones.<sup>[1]</sup>[\(#\\_ftn1\)](#) As a result of this litigation, Monsanto was forced to release millions of pages of internal documents.<sup>[2]</sup>[\(#\\_ftn2\)](#)

Dubbed 'The Monsanto Papers', these documents reveal active involvement in silencing researchers whose results were not in Monsanto's best interests. This includes pressuring a public institution to end its cooperation with a respected medical researcher who had shown the harmful impacts of glyphosate products such as Roundup, and silencing scientists funded by Monsanto when they discovered the genotoxicity of glyphosate, stopping them from publishing their results, and signing secrecy agreements with these scientists.<sup>[3]</sup> (#\_ftn3).

Monsanto employees also explicitly used the term 'ghost-write' in the email trail. The correspondence described situations in which Monsanto employed scientists to write certain articles. However, scientists who were not publicly affiliated with Monsanto would then be credited as the official 'authors' of the publications. Among these ghost-written publications is a piece by Williams et al. that has been repeatedly referenced as proof that glyphosate (Roundup) is non-carcinogenic.<sup>[4]</sup> (#\_ftn4).

In addition to ghost-written pieces, other authors who had ties to Monsanto have failed to disclose conflicts of interests.<sup>[5]</sup> (#\_ftn5). For example, a review of glyphosate in the *Critical Reviews in Toxicology* declared that "Neither any Monsanto company employees nor any attorneys reviewed any of the Expert Panel's manuscripts prior to submission to the journal".<sup>[6]</sup> (#\_ftn6). However, emails released as part of the court proceedings reveal that "Monsanto was engaged in organizing, reviewing, and editing the drafts, even arguing with one of the authors and overruling him about language in the manuscript".<sup>[7]</sup> (#\_ftn7).

In March 2019, a California court found that Roundup was a factor in causing a man's non-Hodgkin lymphoma and awarded over \$80 million in damages to the plaintiff. In May 2019, a Californian couple was awarded \$2 billion in damages for the same reason.<sup>[8]</sup> (#\_ftn8). In both cases, Bayer, the German pharmaceutical company that bought Monsanto in 2018, declared its disappointment with the verdicts and announced it would appeal against the verdict.<sup>[9]</sup> (#\_ftn9).

[1] (#\_ftnref1) Lyanne Melendez and Kate Larsen, "Monsanto Verdict: Jury awards \$2 billion to Livermore couple who says Roundup caused cancer", *ABC7 News*, May 14, 2019, <https://abc7news.com/5298404/> (<https://abc7news.com/5298404/>) (accessed October 23, 2019).

[2] (#\_ftnref2) Danny Hakim, "Monsanto Weed Killer Roundup Faces New Doubts on Safety in Unsealed Documents", *The New York Times*, March 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/14/business/monsanto-roundup-safety-lawsuit.html> (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/14/business/monsanto-roundup-safety-lawsuit.html>) (accessed October 23, 2019).

[3] (#\_ftnref3) "Spinning Science & Silencing Scientists: A Case Study in How the Chemical Industry Attempts to Influence Science," Minority Staff Report Prepared for the Members of the Committee on Science, Space & Technology (Washington, DC: U.S. House of Representatives, 2018), p. 18,

<https://www.baumhedlundlaw.com/pdf/monsanto-documents/Final-minority-report-glyphosate-spinning-science-silencing-scientists.pdf> (<https://www.baumhedlundlaw.com/pdf/monsanto-documents/Final-minority-report-glyphosate-spinning-science-silencing-scientists.pdf>) (accessed October 23, 2019).

[4] (#\_ftnref4) Sheldon Krinsky and Carey Gillam, "Roundup Litigation Discovery Documents: Implications for Public Health and Journal Ethics," *Journal of Public Health Policy* 39, no. 3 (August 2018): p. 318–26, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41271-018-0134-z> (<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41271-018-0134-z>) (accessed October 23, 2019).

[5] (#\_ftnref5) van Teeffelen, Jasper, and Roeline Knottnerus. "Een Giftige Lobby?" Lobbywatch Nederland, November 2016, [https://lobbywatch.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Rapport\\_lobbywatch\\_online2.pdf](https://lobbywatch.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Rapport_lobbywatch_online2.pdf) ([https://lobbywatch.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Rapport\\_lobbywatch\\_online2.pdf](https://lobbywatch.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Rapport_lobbywatch_online2.pdf)) (accessed June 2, 2020)

[6] (#\_ftnref6) Krinsky and Gillam, p. 321.

[7] (#\_ftnref7) Krinski and Gillam, p. 321.

[8] (#\_ftnref8) Julia Jacobs, "Monsanto Ordered to Pay \$80 Million in Roundup Cancer Case", *The New York Times*, March 28, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/27/us/monstanto-roundup-california-verdict.html> (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/27/us/monstanto-roundup-california-verdict.html>) (accessed October 23, 2019); Melendez and Larsen.

[9] (#\_ftnref9) Melendez and Larsen.



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