

# Breakfast at Monsanto's Sheds Light on Health Dangers of World's Most Used Weedkiller

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*Sustainable Pulse interview with Lee A. Evslyn, M.D., author of the new eye-opening book [Breakfast at Monsanto's](#) and board-certified pediatrician and Fellow in the American Academy of Pediatrics.*

Sustainable Pulse: What led to your interest in Monsanto and specifically glyphosate herbicides – is this interest related to your work as a pediatrician?

Dr. Lee A. Evslyn: In 2012, the Island of Kaua'i became embroiled in one of the most divisive controversies in its history. Four chemical seed companies and a coffee company were reported to be spraying eighteen tons of restricted use pesticides per year in fields close to several small towns. They were even spraying large amounts less than 100 feet from the open windows of a middle school. The Island's County Council tried to pass legislation requiring buffer zones and the right to know what was being sprayed, and where. The chemical-seed companies mounted an aggressive defense of their right to not be regulated by the county. They bused in hundreds of blue shirted employees to the hearings. The concerned citizens often wore red shirts, and the tensions were high.

Also in 2012, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) published a policy statement. The opening lines included the concept that there is growing concern about the adverse health consequences of chronic low-level pesticide exposure in children. Low-level meaning the type of exposure you might get from living near agricultural fields, or from pesticides in your food, or from playing in fields, homes, or playgrounds that have been recently sprayed.

In 2014, I was invited to join a Hawai'i state-sponsored fact-finding task force. We were asked to examine the possible health and environmental consequences of the intensive pesticide spraying on Kaua'i. The committee met extensively over a period of 14 months. I became deeply concerned by the disconnect between what the chemical companies were saying about the safety of their products and the dangers that were so clearly demonstrated in the medical and scientific literature. Two pesticides particularly drew my attention. They were the toxic insecticide, chlorpyrifos, and the herbicide, Roundup. After the task force

concluded its review and published recommendations, I continued my research and legislative activism. Hawai'i became the first state in the union to ban chlorpyrifos and my Roundup research turned into this short book.

SP: Are other pediatricians aware of the serious issues surrounding glyphosate and other harmful pesticides?

DLAE: The pediatricians on the island joined me in our testimony to the County Council and the Hawaii Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics submitted testimony to the State Legislature concerning chlorpyrifos. The 2012 AAP policy statement outlining the dangers of low-level cumulative exposure of pesticides was an eye-opener for most pediatricians. We were taught about poisoning from drinking a pesticide or being inadvertently sprayed. Most of us had not given much thought to the possible dangers of chronic low-level exposure. I think there is a growing understanding by pediatricians about the dangers of environmental toxins and probably not nearly enough concern about our daily exposure to Roundup-like chemicals in our diet, yards, and parks.

SP: Your book offers a powerful review of the scientific evidence linking glyphosate to adverse effects on humans and other life forms – however how did you make sure to not cherry pick your sources and did you have a particular view on the subject before you studied the evidence and wrote the book?

DLAE: I first became concerned about glyphosate-based herbicides (GBHs) such as Roundup when I learned that glyphosate had been patented as an antibiotic. My earliest research centered on this chemical's ability to alter the balance of bacteria in and on our bodies. I then reviewed Dr. Nancy Swanson's study. Her team graphed the large number of medical conditions that increased in prevalence in lock step with the increasing use of these herbicides.

A correlation in time never proves that one event causes another but if there are mechanisms that might demonstrate a connection, those mechanisms should be explored. The more I looked at the scientific research on GBHs, the more I realized that most of the more recently published research shows these chemical formulations to be toxic. I also discovered that the majority of studies reported to show safety were done decades ago, were often done with less sophisticated testing modalities, and because they were paid for by Monsanto and other corporate bodies, many of the studies are not even available for review by the public.

When I was reviewing the academic literature, I made sure to explore evidence across the spectrum. I wanted to understand what published scientific research said about the safety of these increasingly common chemicals.

SP: Do you believe your book will lead to change – how do you see your work affecting the conversation surrounding glyphosate and other toxic chemicals?

DLAE: I have heard great comments from readers, many who have stated that my book is enjoyable and easy to read despite its scientific orientation. The book is short, to the point, and compelling. It clearly calls for greater scrutiny and regulation. Roundup-like chemicals are the most heavily sprayed herbicides in history. Studies from around the world show that the populations of many countries have some glyphosate in their bodies most of the time. It is time for all of us to be concerned and I hope my book helps raise the level of awareness.

SP: Do you have any other books in the pipeline as we would love to find out more about this and other subjects that have caught your attention?

DLAE: In the last eighteen months, I have been mostly involved in COVID related research activities. I was hoping that we would soon move on from the devastating effect of this pandemic, but unfortunately COVID is not done with us.

I do believe though, that these Roundup-like herbicides may have made COVID worse in America. The book outlines the real possibility that these chemicals play a role in our twin epidemics of obesity and chronic diseases. People with chronic diseases and obesity are among those who become the sickest and die the most often from this virus.

SP: What do you believe others in the medical world can do to change the public's level of knowledge on exposure to glyphosate?

DLAE: I would love to see the day come that a routine part of a medical history includes documenting exposures to possible toxins including pesticides. This is beginning to happen but is not yet sufficiently widespread. I would also like to see the increased ease of testing and reporting on the quantities of pesticides (including glyphosate) in our food and in biologic samples such as urine, hair, and blood.

The more we can measure, the better we can regulate and set policies. The evidence of toxicity is much too strong to continue to treat chronic pesticide exposure as a safe aspect of modern life.

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