

Britain Must Break Free from the Agrochemical Cartel

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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Agrochemical manufacturers are knowingly poisoning people and the environment in the name of profit and greed. Communities, countries, ecosystems and species have become disposable inconveniences. Corporate totalitarian tries to hide beneath an increasingly fragile facade of democracy. The agrochemicals industry lobbies hard to have its products put on the market and ensures that they remain there. It uses PR firms and front groups to discredit individuals and studies which show the massive health and environmental devastation caused and gets its co-opted figures to sit on bodies to guarantee policies favourable to its interest are secured.

From bought-and-paid-for science and public relations that masquerades as journalism to policy implementation and the lack of regulation, the agrochemicals industry wallows in a highly profitable cesspool. Money wields power and political influence.

In capitalism, a private corporation is compelled to secure control of assets (in agriculture – seeds, land, water, soil, chemical inputs, etc) and exploit them for a cash profit, while removing obstacles that might hinder this goal. Concerns about what is in the public interest or what is best for the environment lies beyond the scope of hard-headed business interests and is the remit of governments and civil organisations. The best case scenario for private capital is to have toothless, supine agencies or governments.

Rosemary Mason writes to the chair of the ECP

The UK [Expert Committee on Pesticides](#) (ECP)

“provides independent, impartial advice to the government on matters relating to pesticides.”

William Cushley is a professor of molecular immunology and chair of the ECP. Environmentalist Dr Rosemary Mason has just written an open letter to the professor requesting that he acknowledges genuine independent evidence about the toxic impacts of pesticides – not the studies or data being pushed and prioritised by powerful transnational corporations – and breaks the silence over the devastation being caused.



Dr. Rosemary Mason, Environmentalist

Mason felt it necessary to write to Cushley because the financial and political clout of a group of powerful agrochemical corporations ensures that their interests are privileged ahead of public health and the environment to the detriment of both. There is in effect a deeply embedded collusion between powerful corporations and public bodies. The [agrochemical industry has corrupted](#) public institutions, government policies and decision making.

Mason draws Cushley's attention to some of the outcomes. For instance, she notes independent research that recognises the extreme toxicity of low levels of systemic neonicotinoid insecticides, which have become widespread in the environment. They cause a virtually irreversible blockage of postsynaptic nicotinic acetylcholine receptors (nAChRs) in the central nervous system of insects (to which the human foetus is also exposed). The damage is cumulative: with more exposure, more receptors become blocked.

In the Netherlands, the levels of imidacloprid in Dutch surface have been increasing since 2004 and such increases are correlated with a decline in invertebrates and in insect-feeding birds.

Mason then goes on to point out that in 2006 she set up a small nature reserve in Wales in response to the decline in birds and invertebrates such as bumblebees, butterflies, dragonflies and moths. However, even the reserve's biodiversity soon began to witness a loss of biodiversity.



About that time, she received the article by US Scientists Anthony Samsel and Stephanie Seneff 'Glyphosate, pathways to modern diseases' and immediately suspected that Monsanto's Roundup was destroying the reserve. That's because for many years Monsanto's contractors had been spraying Roundup on Japanese knotweed in the Swansea area where she lives, until it had become Roundup-resistant.

It was clear that the reserve was thus under threat from numerous agrochemicals, which

have wide-ranging consequences, not least where human health is concerned.

In the UK, some farmers have been spraying glyphosate pre-harvest since 1980, and the US Center for Disease Control has found strong correlations between it and various diseases which have been increasing over the last 30 years. These include obesity, autism, type 2 diabetes, dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, liver and kidney failure, hypercholesterolemia, stroke and various cancers such as kidney, liver, pancreas, thyroid, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, myeloma and leukaemia. In her previous documents, Mason has noted spiralling rates of [illness in Wales and the UK](#) in general and has indicated how they are linked to agrochemical use, especially glyphosate (as well as other toxins courtesy of Monsanto having used a quarry as a toxic dump).

Mason informs Cushley that detrimental health outcomes are caused by even small exposure to common chemicals like the ones found in pesticides as well as in plastics and air pollution. There are documented links between prenatal exposure to environmental chemicals, and adverse health outcomes span the life course and include impacts on fertility and pregnancy, neurodevelopment and cancer. The global health and economic burden related to toxic environmental chemicals is in excess of millions of deaths and billions of dollars every year.

The health problems are even greater for babies exposed in the womb, who face increased risks of cancer, reduced cognitive function and even miscarriage or stillbirth.

There has been a sharp increase over the past four decades in chemical manufacturing, which continues to grow by more than three per cent every year.

A system set up to serve corporate needs

As with all her numerous [open letters and correspondence](#) with various officials, Mason supplies Cushley with a lengthy fully-referenced document ([Open Letter to the Chairman of the Expert Committee on Pesticides](#)) that supports all the claims made and which sheds further light on the issues raised (readers should consult that document to access texts and links which are also relevant to the article you are now reading).

On this occasion, she outlines conflicts of interest within the UK's Health and Safety Executive, the damning verdict of the judges of the International Monsanto Tribunal and a report presented to the UN Human Rights Council about the Right to Food. The disastrous effects of Roundup and neonicotinoids are also discussed along with the agrochemical industry's hold on the UK government.

Mason's evidence indicates the not-so-hidden hand of the agrochemical sector, including Bayer, Syngenta and Monsanto, has conspired to cover up the damaging effects of its products. The power of the industry – underpinned by its ability to fund and thus slant research, to lobby government officials effectively, to infiltrate and co-opt institutions and to push people through the revolving door into key positions – has corrupted science and decision making and destroyed any notion of objective and independent regulation and policy formulation.

Industry-backed research has been favoured ahead of independent studies, directives are ignored, court rulings are overturned in favour of the industry and public bodies act more as product promoting agencies than acting in the interests of the public.

Cushley is informed that the UK government is being directed by the pesticides industry. Mason tells Cushley that he, as Chairman of the ECP, has the responsibility for giving chemicals authorisation and should realise he is being fed industry information.



Professor William Cushley

For instance, Mason argues that the industry had known – but has consistently denied – that neonicotinoid pesticides are harmful to bees. Tests and protocols that had allowed registration of the systemic pesticides were not adapted to assess potential hazard and risk from this type of pesticide. Despite knowing all this, protection agencies have allowed the pesticides industry to keep neonicotinoids on the market.

In discussing the International Monsanto Tribunal, Mason notes that Monsanto has violated human rights to food, health, a healthy environment and the freedom indispensable for independent scientific research. This corporation holds huge sway over governments and promotes a highly-profitable (but damaging and unnecessary) chemical-intensive model of farming.

To strengthen her case, Mason also presents Cushley with details concerning a report to UN Human Rights Council about the Right to Food. Global agricultural corporations (like Monsanto) are severely criticised by Hilal Elver the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and co-author of the report, which is highly critical of the global corporations that manufacture pesticides, accusing them of the “systematic denial of harms”, “aggressive, unethical marketing tactics” and heavy lobbying of governments which has “obstructed reforms and paralysed global pesticide restrictions.”

The reports adds:

“It is time to create a global process to transition toward safer and healthier food and agricultural production.”

Elver says:

“Using more pesticides is nothing to do with getting rid of hunger. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, we are able to feed 9 billion people today. Production is definitely increasing, but the problem is poverty, inequality and distribution.”

Whilst spouting platitudes about feeding the world, the increasingly globalised system of agriculture being rolled out by the transnational agritech/agribusiness cartel was [never designed](#) to do that. Part of that design it to undermine [alternative, credible approaches](#) that could feed the world sustainably without being dependent on the agrochemical cartel and its dubious products.

But that’s the problem: these independent alternatives are a threat to the prevailing business models of companies such as Monsanto and Bayer, which resort to the practices Elver outlines.

Mason proceeds by discussing in some detail the well-documented disastrous effects on the environment of Roundup and neonicotinoids, in terms of the destruction of biodiversity, ecosystems, environmental degradation and human and animal health, etc. Evidence is provided that shows pesticide residues on British food are increasing annually, and statistics show a massive increase in glyphosate between 2012 and 2014

Mason quotes Robert van den Bosch, writing in 1978 in 'The Pesticide Conspiracy':

"If one considers how dangerous these chemicals are, one would suppose that it would be Government policy to minimize their use by every possible means. However the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) notes, 'there is... no such policy in the UK, nor does the possible need for it appear to have been considered, notwithstanding the great increases in the use of these chemicals.'"

However, the agrochemical industry, on the contrary, seems to be under the impression it is government policy to encourage the maximum use of pesticides.

Mason notes Theo Colborn's crucial research in the early 1990s into endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) that were changing humans and the environment was ignored. In the 1996 book 'Our Stolen Future: How Man-made Chemicals are Threatening our Fertility, Intelligence and Survival', Colborn, Dumanoski and Peters revealed the full horror of what was happening to the world as a result of contamination with EDCs.

Mason concludes by stating:

"Britain will soon become a biological desert just as Craig Childs described in Apocalyptic Planet with reference to the fields of GM Roundup-Ready corn on a Farm in Iowa... "

"Few can avoid the pollution of water, soil and air by genotoxic and teratogenic herbicides, insecticides and other industrial chemicals. Governments and regulators only measure a small fraction of them. Human health depends on biodiversity. Food depends on natural pollinators.

"The devastating effects of these silent killers on us and our environment do not distinguish between farmers or city dwellers, the wealthy or the poor, between media moguls, editors or their reporters, Monsanto or Syngenta executives, prime ministers or presidents. Humans and the environment are being silently poisoned by thousands of untested and unmonitored chemicals.

"What will your grandchildren experience in the way of wildlife? Nothing. It will all have been poisoned by chemical biocides just to make money for the agrochemical corporations and the British government. They should be prosecuted in the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity."

Mason encourages Cushley to break the silence and inform people what is happening.

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