

From Rachel Carson to Monsanto: The Silence of Spring

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Former Monsanto Chairman and CEO Hugh Grant is currently in the news. He is trying to avoid appearing in court to be questioned by lawyers on behalf of a cancer patient in the case of Allan Shelton v Monsanto.

Shelton has non-Hodgkin lymphoma and is one of the 100,000-plus people in the US claiming in lawsuits that exposure to Monsanto’s Roundup weed killer and its other brands containing the chemical glyphosate caused their cancer.

According to [investigative journalist Carey Gillam](#), Shelton’s lawyers have argued that Grant was an active participant and decision maker in the company’s Roundup business and should be made to testify at the trial.

But Grant says in the court filings that the effort to put him on the stand in front of a jury is “wholly unnecessary and serves only to harass and burden” him.

His lawyers state that Grant does not have “any expertise in the studies and tests that have been done related to Roundup generally, including those related to Roundup safety”.

Gillam notes that the court filings state that Grant’s testimony “would be of little value” because he is not a toxicologist, an epidemiologist, or a regulatory expert and “did not work in the areas of toxicology or epidemiology while employed by Monsanto”.

Bayer acquired Monsanto in 2018 and Grant received an [estimated \\$77 million](#) post-sale payoff. Bloomberg reported in 2017 that Monsanto had increased Grant’s salary to \$19.5 million for that fiscal year.

Even by 2009, Roundup-related products, which include genetically modified seeds developed to withstand glyphosate-based applications, represented about [half of Monsanto’s gross margin](#). It is reasonable to say that Roundup was integral to Monsanto’s

business model and Grant's enormous income and final payoff.

But the cancer lawsuits in the US are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the damage done by glyphosate-based products and many other biocides.

Silent killer

June 2022 marks 60 years since the publication of Rachel Carson's iconic book *Silent Spring*. It was published just two years before her death at age 56.



Carson documented the adverse impacts on the environment of the indiscriminate use of pesticides, which she said were 'biocides', killing much more than the pests that were targeted. *Silent Spring* also described some of the deleterious effects of these chemicals on human health.

She accused the agrochemical industry of spreading disinformation and public officials of accepting the industry's marketing claims without question. An accusation that is still very much relevant today.

Silent Spring was a landmark book, inspiring many scientists and campaigners over the years to carry on the work of Carson, flagging up the effects of agrochemicals and the role of the industry in distorting the narrative surrounding its proprietary chemicals and its influence on policy making.

In 2012, the American Chemical Society designated *Silent Spring* a National Historic Chemical Landmark because of its importance for the modern environmental movement.

For her efforts, Carson had to endure vicious, baseless smears and attacks on her personal life, integrity, scientific credentials and political affiliations. Tactics that the agrochemicals sector and its supporters have used ever since to try to shut down prominent scientists and campaigners who challenge industry claims, practices and products.

Although Carson was not calling for a ban on all pesticides, at the time Monsanto hit back by publishing 5,000 copies of 'The Desolate Year' which projected a world of famine and disease if pesticides were to be banned.

A message the sector continues to churn out even as evidence stacks up against the deleterious impacts of its practices and products and the increasing body of research which indicates the world could feed itself by shifting to agroecological/organic practices (see the online article [Living in Epoch-Defining Times: Food, Agriculture and the New World Order](#), January 2022).

The title of Carson's book was a metaphor, warning of a bleak future for the natural environment. So all these years later, what has become of humanity's 'silent spring'?

In 2017, [research](#) conducted in Germany showed the abundance of flying insects had plunged by three-quarters over the past 25 years. The research data was gathered in nature reserves across Germany and has implications for all landscapes dominated by agriculture as it seems likely that the widespread use of pesticides is an important factor.

Prof Dave Goulson of Sussex University in the UK was part of the team behind the study and said that vast tracts of land are becoming inhospitable to most forms of life: if we lose the insects then everything is going to collapse.

Flying insects are vital because they pollinate flowers and many, not least bees, are important for pollinating key food crops. Most fruit crops are insect-pollinated and insects also provide food for lots of animals, including birds, bats, some mammals, fish, reptiles and amphibians.

Flies, beetles and wasps are also predators and important decomposers, breaking down dead plants and animals. And insects form the base of thousands of food chains; their disappearance is a principal reason Britain's farmland birds have more than halved in number since 1970.

Is this one aspect of the silence Carson warned of – that joyous season of renewal and awakening void of birdsong (and much else)? Truly a silent spring.

The 2016 [State of Nature Report](#) found that one in 10 UK wildlife species is threatened with extinction, with numbers of certain creatures having plummeted by two thirds since 1970. The study showed the abundance of flying insects had plunged by three-quarters over a 25-year period.

Campaigner Dr Rosemary Mason has written to public officials on [numerous occasions](#) noting that agrochemicals, especially Monsanto's glyphosate-based Roundup, have devastated the natural environment and have also led to spiralling rates of illness and disease.

She indicates how the widespread use on agricultural crops of neonicotinoid insecticides and the herbicide glyphosate, both of which cause immune suppression, make species vulnerable to emerging infectious pathogens, driving large-scale wildlife extinctions, including essential pollinators.

Providing evidence to show how human disease patterns correlate remarkably well with the rate of glyphosate usage on corn, soy and wheat crops, which has increased due to 'Roundup Ready' seeds, Mason argues that over-reliance on chemicals in agriculture is causing irreparable harm to all beings on the planet.

In 2015, writer [Carol Van Strum](#) said the US Environmental Protection Agency has been routinely lying about the safety of pesticides since it took over pesticide registrations in 1970.

She has described how faked data and fraudulent tests led to many highly toxic agrochemicals reaching the market and they still remain in use, regardless of the devastating impacts on wildlife and human health.

The research from Germany mentioned above followed a warning by a chief scientific adviser to the UK government, Prof Ian Boyd, who claimed that regulators around the world have [falsely assumed that it is safe to use pesticides at industrial scales](#) across landscapes and the "effects of dosing whole landscapes with chemicals have been largely ignored."

Prior to that particular warning, there was [a report](#) delivered to the UN Human Rights Council saying that pesticides have catastrophic impacts on the environment, human health

and society as a whole.

Authored by Hilal Elver, the then special rapporteur on the right to food, and Baskut Tuncak, who was at the time special rapporteur on toxics, the report states:

“Chronic exposure to pesticides has been linked to cancer, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases, hormone disruption, developmental disorders and sterility.”

Elver says that the power of the corporations over governments and the scientific community is extremely important: if you want to deal with pesticides, you have to deal with the companies which deny the damage inflicted by their chemicals as they continue to aggressively market their products

While these corporations falsely claim their products are essential for feeding a burgeoning global population, they also mouth platitudes about choice and democracy, while curtailing both as they infiltrate and subvert regulatory agencies and government machinery.

Whether it is the well-documented harm to the environment or tales of [illness and disease in Latin America](#) and elsewhere, the devastating impacts of chemical-intensive agriculture which the agribusiness-agritech corporations rollout is clear to see.

Corporate criminals

Post-1945 the nutritional value of what we eat has been depleted due to reliance on a narrower range of crops, the side-lining of traditional seeds which produced nutrient-dense plants and modern ‘cost-effective’ food-processing methods that strip out vital micronutrients and insert a cocktail of chemical additives.

Fuelling these trends has been a network of interests, including the Rockefeller Foundation and its acolytes in the US government, giant agribusiness conglomerates like Cargill, the financial-industrial complex and its globalisation agenda (which effectively further undermined localised, indigenous food systems) and the giant food corporations and the influential groups they fund, such as the International Life Sciences Institute.

Included here in this network is the agrochemical-agritech sector which promotes its proprietary chemicals and (genetically-engineered) seeds through a well-developed complex of scientists, politicians, journalists, lobbyists, PR companies and front groups.

Consider what [Carey Gillam says](#):

“US Roundup litigation began in 2015 after the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen. Internal Monsanto documents dating back decades show that the company was aware of scientific research linking its weed killer to cancer but instead of warning consumers, the company worked to suppress the information and manipulate scientific literature.”

Over the years, Monsanto mounted a deceitful defence of its health- and environment-damaging Roundup and its genetically engineered crops and orchestrated toxic smear campaigns against anyone – scientist or campaigner – who threatened its interests.

In 2016, Rosemary Mason wrote an open letter to European Chemicals Agency Executive Director Geert Dancet: Open Letter to the ECHA about Scientific Fraud and Ecocide. More of

an in-depth report than a letter, it can be accessed on the academia.edu site.

In it, she explained how current EU legislation was originally set up to protect the pesticides industry and Monsanto and other agrochemical corporations helped the EU design the regulatory systems for their own products.

She also drew Dancet's attention to the journal Critical Reviews in Toxicology and how, in 2016 Volume 46, Monsanto commissioned five reviews published in a supplement to the journal. Monsanto also funded them. Mason argues the aim was to cast serious doubts about the adverse effects of glyphosate by using junk science. Straight out of the Big Tobacco playbook.

Mason told Dancet:

"CEO Hugh Grant and the US EPA knew that glyphosate caused all of these problems. The corporation concealed the carcinogenic effects of PCBs on humans and animals for seven years. They have no plans to protect you and your families from the tsunami of sickness that is affecting us all in the UK and the US."

Meanwhile, on the US Right to Know site, the article [Roundup Cancer Cases - Key Documents and Analysis](#) sets out just why more than 100,000 cancer sufferers are attempting to hold Monsanto to account in US courts.

In a just (and sane) world, CEOs would be held personally responsible for the products they peddle and earn millions from. But no doubt they would do their utmost to dodge culpability.

After all, they were 'just doing their job' - and they would not want to feel harassed or burdened, would they?

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Food, Dispossession and Dependency. Resisting the New World Order

We are currently seeing an acceleration of the corporate consolidation of the entire global agri-food chain. The high-tech/big data conglomerates, including Amazon, Microsoft, Facebook and Google, [have joined traditional agribusiness giants](#), such as Corteva, Bayer, Cargill and Syngenta, in a quest to impose their model of food and agriculture on the world.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is also involved (documented in '[Gates to a Global Empire](#)' by Navdanya International), whether through [buying up huge tracts of farmland](#), promoting a much-heralded [\(but failed\) 'green revolution' for Africa](#), pushing [biosynthetic food](#) and [genetic engineering technologies](#) or more generally [facilitating the aims of the mega agri-food corporations](#).

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