

# Genetic Engineering: Scientists warn of link between dangerous new pathogen and Monsanto's Roundup

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Urges USDA to rescind approval of genetically engineered alfalfa: "In layman's terms, it should be treated as an emergency."



A plant pathologist experienced in protecting against biological warfare recently warned the USDA of a new, self-replicating, micro-fungal virus-sized organism which may be causing spontaneous abortions in livestock, sudden death syndrome in Monsanto's Roundup Ready soy, and wilt in Monsanto's RR corn.

Dr. Don M. Huber, who coordinates the Emergent Diseases and Pathogens committee of the American Phytopathological Society, as part of the USDA National Plant Disease Recovery System, warned Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack that this pathogen threatens the US food and feed supply and can lead to the collapse of the US corn and soy export markets. Likewise, deregulation of GE alfalfa "could be a calamity," he noted in his letter (reproduced in full below).

On January 27, Vilsack gave blanket approval to all genetically modified alfalfa. Following orders from President Obama, he also [removed buffer zone requirements](#). This is seen as a deliberate move to contaminate natural crops and destroy the organic meat and dairy industry which relies on GM-free alfalfa. Such genetic contamination will give the biotech industry complete control over the nation's fourth largest crop. It will also ease the transition to using [GE-alfalfa as a biofuel](#).

"My letter to Secretary Vilsack was a request to allocate necessary resources to understand potential nutrient-disease interactions before making (in my opinion) an essentially irreversible decision on deregulation of RR alfalfa," Huber told [Food Freedom](#) in an email.

But, he cautions:

"Although the organism has been associated with infertility and spontaneous abortions in animals, associations are not always evidence of cause in all cases and do not indicate what the predisposing conditions might be. These need to be established through thorough investigation which requires a commitment of resources.

"I hope that the Secretary will make such a commitment because many growers/producers

are experiencing severe increases in disease of both crops and animals that are threatening their economic viability.”

On Feb. 16, Paul Tukey of [SafeLawn](#) telephoned Dr. Huber who told him, “I believe we’ve reached the tipping point toward a potential disaster with the safety of our food supply. The abuse, or call it over use if you will, of Roundup, is having profoundly bad consequences in the soil. We’ve seen that for years. The appearance of this new pathogen may be a signal that we’ve gone too far.”

Tukey also conveyed that while Huber admits that much further study is needed to definitively confirm the link between Round-Up and the pathogen, “In the meantime, he said, it’s grossly irresponsible of the government to allow Roundup Ready alfalfa, which would bring the widespread spraying of Roundup to millions of more acres and introduce far more Roundup into the food supply.”

Huber, who has been studying plant pathogens for over 50 years and glyphosate for over 20 years, has noticed an increase in pathogens associated with the herbicide. In an [interview](#) with the Organic and Non-GMO Report last May, he discussed his team’s conclusions that glyphosate can, “significantly increase the severity of various plant diseases, impair plant defense to pathogens and diseases, and immobilize soil and plant nutrients rendering them unavailable for plant use.”



([Image](#): Sudden Death Syndrome in soy where the right field was sprayed the previous year with glyphosate. Iowa, 2010. Photo by Don Huber)

This is because “glyphosate stimulates the growth of fungi and enhances the virulence of pathogens.” In the last 15-18 years, the number of plant pathogens has increased, he told the Non-GMO Report. “There are more than 40 diseases reported with use of glyphosate, and that number keeps growing as people recognize the association (between glyphosate and disease).”

In his undated letter to the USDA, Huber highlighted “the escalating frequency of infertility and spontaneous abortions over the past few years in US cattle, dairy, swine, and horse operations.” He reported that spontaneous abortions occurred in nearly half the cattle where high concentrations of the pathogen were found in their feed. Huber notes that the wheat “likely had been under weed management using glyphosate.”

Other Research Supports Huber’s Warning

Last year, Argentine scientists found that Roundup causes birth defects in frogs and chickens. Publishing their paper, "[Glyphosate-Based Herbicides Produce Teratogenic Effects on Vertebrates by Impairing Retinoic Acid Signaling](#)," in *Chemical Research in Toxicology*, Alejandra Paganelli, et al. also produced a large set of reports for the public at [GMWatch](#):

"In Argentina and Paraguay, doctors and residents living in GM soy producing areas have reported serious health effects from glyphosate spraying, including high rates of birth defects as well as infertility, stillbirths, miscarriages, and cancers. Scientific studies collected in the new report confirm links between exposure to glyphosate and premature births, miscarriages, cancer, and damage to DNA and reproductive organ cells."

One of the researchers, Andrés Carrasco, told GM Watch, "The findings in the lab are compatible with malformations observed in humans exposed to glyphosate during pregnancy."

When trying to present these findings to the public in August of last year, Dr. Carrasco and the audience were attacked by 100 thugs who beat them and their cars with clubs, leaving one person paralyzed, [Amnesty International](#) reported. Local police and a wealthy GM rice grower were implicated in that attack.

In a 2009 study, researchers linked organ damage with consumption of Monsanto's GM maize, based on Monsanto's trial data. As [we reported](#) last year, Gilles-Eric Séralini, et al., concluded that the raw data from all three GMO studies reveal that novel pesticide residues will be present in food and feed and may pose grave health risks to those consuming them.

In a [2005 paper](#) published in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Sophie Richard, et al. compared the toxicity of Roundup with that of just glyphosate, its active ingredient. They found Roundup to be more toxic, owing to its adjuvants. They also found that endocrine disruption increased over time so that one-tenth the amount prescribed for agriculture caused cell deformation. Citing other research, they also reported that Roundup adjuvants bond with DNA.

Such negative findings probably explain why Monsanto and other biotech firms so vociferously [block independent research](#).

Tom Laskawy at [Grist](#) estimated that in 2008, nearly 200 million pounds of glyphosate were poured onto US soils. But, he notes that "exact figures are a closely guarded secret thanks to the USDA's refusal to update its [pesticide use database](#) after 2007." This figure more than doubles what the [EPA estimates](#) was used in 2000.

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