

# Post-Brexit Agrochemical Apocalypse for the UK?

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*The British government, regulators and global agrochemical corporations are colluding with each other and are thus engaging in criminal behaviour. That's the message put forward in a new report written by environmentalist Dr Rosemary Mason and sent to the UK Environment Agency. It follows her January 2019 open letter to Werner Baumann, CEO of Bayer CropScience, where she made it clear to him that she considers Bayer CropScience and Monsanto criminal corporations.*

Her letter to Baumann outlined a cocktail of corporate duplicity, cover-ups and criminality which the public and the environment are paying the price for, not least in terms of the effects of glyphosate. Later in 2019, Mason wrote to Bayer Crop Science shareholders, appealing to them to put human health and nature ahead of profit and to stop funding Bayer.

Mason outlined with supporting evidence how the gradual onset of the global extinction of many species is largely the result of chemical-intensive industrial agriculture. She argued that Monsanto's (now Bayer) glyphosate-based Roundup herbicide and Bayer's clothianidin are largely responsible for the destruction of the Great Barrier Reef and that the use of glyphosate and neonicotinoid insecticides are wiping out wildlife species across the globe.

In February 2020, Mason wrote the report '[Bayer Crop Science rules Britain after Brexit - the public and the press are being poisoned by pesticides](#)'. She noted that PM Boris Johnson plans to do a trade deal with the US that could see the gutting of food and environment standards. In a speech setting out his goals for trade after Brexit, Johnson talked up the prospect of an agreement with Washington and downplayed the need for one with Brussels - if the EU insists the UK must stick to its regulatory regime. In other words, he wants to ditch EU regulations.

Mason pondered just who could be pulling Johnson's strings. A big clue came in February 2019 at a Brexit meeting on the UK chemicals sector where UK regulators and senior officials from government departments listened to the priorities of Bayer Crop Science. During the meeting (Westminster Energy, Environment & Transport Forum Keynote Seminar: Priorities for UK chemicals sector - challenges, opportunities and the future for regulation post-Brexit), Janet Williams, head of regulatory science at Bayer Crop Science Division, made the priorities for agricultural chemical manufacturers known.

Dave Bench was also a speaker. Bench is a senior scientist at the UK Chemicals, Health and Safety Executive and director of the agency's EU exit plan and has previously stated that the regulatory system for pesticides is robust and balances the risks of pesticides against the benefits to society.

In an open letter to Bench, Mason responded:

“That statement is rubbish. It is for the benefit of the agrochemical industry. The industry (for it is the industry that does the testing, on behalf of regulators) only tests one pesticide at a time, whereas farmers spray a cocktail of pesticides, including over children and babies, without warning.”

It seems that post-Brexit the UK could authorise the continued use of glyphosate. Of course, with a US trade deal in the pipeline, there are major concerns about glyphosate-resistant GMOs and the lowering of food standards across the board.

Mason says that glyphosate causes epigenetic changes in humans and animals: diseases skip a generation. Washington State University [researchers found](#) a variety of diseases and other health problems in the second- and third-generation offspring of rats exposed to glyphosate. In the first study of its kind, the researchers saw descendants of exposed rats developing prostate, kidney and ovarian diseases, obesity and birth abnormalities.

Glyphosate has been the subject of numerous studies about its health effects. Robert F Kennedy Jr, one of the attorney’s fighting Bayer (which has bought Monsanto) in the US courts, has explained that for four decades Monsanto manoeuvred to conceal Roundup’s carcinogenicity by capturing regulatory agencies, corrupting public officials, bribing scientists and engaging in scientific fraud to delay its day of reckoning.

Kennedy says there is also cascading scientific evidence linking glyphosate to a constellation of other injuries that have become prevalent since its introduction, including obesity, depression, Alzheimer’s, ADHD, autism, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s, kidney disease, inflammatory bowel disease, brain, breast and prostate cancer, miscarriage, birth defects and declining sperm counts.

In her [new document](#) sent to the UK Environment Agency, Mason argues there is criminal collusion between the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Chemicals Regulation Division and Bayer over Brexit. She also claims the National Farmers Union has been lying about how much pesticides farmers use and have ignored the side effects of chlorpyrifos, chlorothalonil, glyphosate and neonicotinoids. The NFU says farmers couldn’t do without these inputs, even though they destroy human health and the environment.

Of course, farmers can and do go without using these chemicals. And the shift away from chemical-intensive agriculture is perfectly feasible. [In a recent article](#) on the AgWeb site, for instance, US farmer Adam Chappell describes how he made the shift on his 8,000-acre farm. Chappell was not some dyed-in-the-wool organic evangelist. He made the shift for financial and practical reasons and is glad he did. The article states:

“He was on the brink of bankruptcy and facing a go broke or go green proposition. Drowning in a whirlpool of input costs, Chappell cut bait from conventional agriculture and dove headfirst into a bootstrap version of innovative farming. Roughly 10 years later, his operation is transformed, and the 41-year-old grower doesn’t mince words: It was all about the money.”

Surely there is a lesson there for UK farmers who in 2016 used glyphosate on 2,634,573 ha

of cropland. It is not just their bottom line that could improve but the health of the nation. Mason says that five peer-reviewed animal studies from the US and Argentina released in July 2020 have focused minds on the infertility crisis being caused by glyphosate-based herbicides. Researchers at The National University of Litoral in Sante Fe, Argentina, have published three concerning peer-reviewed papers including two studies on ewes and rats and one review. In one study, researchers concluded that glyphosate and glyphosate-based herbicides are endocrine disruptors. They also stated that glyphosate-based herbicides alter reproductive outcomes in females.

But such is the British government's willingness to protect pesticide companies that it is handing agrochemical giants BASF and Bayer enormous pay-outs of Covid-19 support cash. The announcement came just weeks after Bayer shareholders voted to pay £2.75 billion in dividends. The fact that Bayer then went on to receive £600 million from the government speaks volumes of where the government's priorities lie.

According to Mason, the new Agriculture Bill provides a real opportunity for the UK to adopt a paradigm shift which embraces non-chemical farming policy. However, Defra has stated that after Brexit Roundup Ready GA21 glyphosate tolerant crops could be introduced.

It is also concerning that a post-Brexit funding gap could further undermine the impartiality of university research. Mason refers to Greenpeace, which notes that Bayer and Syngenta, both sell neonicotinoid insecticides linked to harmful effects on bees, gave a combined total of £16.1m to 70 British universities over five years to fund a range of research. Such private funding could create a conflict of interest for academics and after Brexit a potential shortage of public money for science could force universities to seek more finance from the private sector.

Neonicotinoids were once thought to have little or no negative effects on the environment because they are used in low doses and as a seed coating, rather than being sprayed. But evidence has been mounting that the chemicals harm bees – important pollinators of food crops. As a result, neonicotinoids have been banned by the EU, although they can still be used under license.

According to Bayer's website, academics who reviewed 15 years of research found "no adverse effects to bee colonies were ever observed in field studies". Between 2011 and 2016, the figures obtained from the 70 universities – about half the total in the UK – show Bayer gave £9m to fund research, including more than £345,000 on plant sciences. Syngenta spent nearly £7.1m, including just under £2.3m on plant sciences and stated that many years of independent monitoring prove that when used properly neonicotinoids do not damage the health of bee populations.

However, in 2016, Ben Stewart of Greenpeace UK's Brexit response team said that the decline in bee populations is a major environmental and food security concern – it's causes need to be properly investigated.

He added:

"But for this research to command public confidence, it needs to be independent and impartial, which is why public funding is so crucial. You wouldn't want lung cancer studies to be heavily reliant on funds from tobacco firms, nor research on pesticides to be dependent on the companies making

them.”

Stewart concluded:

“As Brexit threatens to cut off vital public funds for this scientific field, our universities need a cast-iron guarantee from our government that EU money will not be replaced by corporate cash.”

But Mason notes that the government long ago showed its true colours by refusing to legislate on the EU Directive (2009/128/EC) on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides. The government merely stated that current statutory and voluntary controls related to pesticides and the protection of water, if followed, afford a high degree of protection and it would primarily seek to work with the pesticides industry to enhance voluntary measures.

Mason first questioned the government on this in January 2011. In an open letter to the Chemical Regulation Directorate. The government claimed that no compelling evidence was provided to justify further extending existing regulations and voluntary controls.

Lord Henley, the Under-Secretary of State for Defra, expanded further:

“By making a small number of changes to our existing approach we can continue to help feed a growing global population with high-quality food that’s affordable – while minimising the risks of using pesticides.”

In her numerous reports and open letters to officials, Mason has shown that far from having ‘high-quality food’, there is an ongoing public health crisis due to the pesticides being used.

She responded to Henley by stating:

“... instead of strengthening the legislation, the responses of the UK government and the CRD have considerably weakened it. In the case of aerial spraying, you have opted for derogation.”

Mason says that, recently, the day that Monsanto lost its appeal against Dewayne Lee Johnson the sprayers came around the Marina in Cardiff breaking all the rules that the EU had set for Roundup.

We can only wonder what could lie in store for the British public if a trade deal is done with the US. Despite the Conservative government pledging that it would not compromise on the UK’s food and environment standards, it now proposes that chlorine-washed chicken, beef treated with growth hormones, pork from animals treated with ractopamine and many other toxic foods produced in the US will be allowed into the UK. All for the bottom line of US agribusiness corporations. It is also worth mentioning at this point that there are around [2,000 untested chemicals](#) in packaged foods in the US.

Ultimately, the situation comes down to a concentration of power played out within an interlocking directorate of state-corporate interests – in this case, global agrochemical conglomerates and the British government – and above the heads of ordinary people. It is clear that these institutions value the health of powerful corporations at the expense of the

health of the population and the state of the environment.

Readers can access Mason's new paper 'Criminal collusion between Defra, the Chemicals Regulation Division and Bayer over Brexit Agenda' via [academia.edu website](#) (which cites relevant sources), where all her other documents can also be found.

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