

# Monsanto: A Corporate Profile

Fact Sheet • April 2013

**R**oundup herbicide. Agent Orange. PCBs. Genetically engineered seeds. These may not seem related, but they all have something in common: **Monsanto.**

Once known as a chemical company, Monsanto is now a global agricultural biotechnology powerhouse that specializes in genetically engineered (GE) seeds and herbicides, most notably Roundup herbicide and GE Roundup Ready seed.<sup>1</sup> GE seeds have been altered with inserted genetic material to exhibit traits that repel pests or withstand the application of herbicides. In 2009, in the United States alone, nearly all (93 percent) of soybeans and four-fifths (80 percent) of corn were grown with seeds containing Monsanto-patented genetics.<sup>2</sup>

Monsanto has been at the forefront of the biotechnology industry and is one of the largest agricultural patent-holding companies, with more than 1,676 patents on seeds, plants and other agricultural applications.<sup>9</sup> Because of Monsanto's market dominance, its products are changing the face of farming — from the use of Monsanto's pesticides and herbicides to the genetic makeup of the food we eat — and the company wields its influence all over the world.

Monsanto was not always a purveyor of life sciences, purportedly working to “produce better foods for consumers and better feed for animals”<sup>10</sup>; it began as a purveyor of controversial chemicals.<sup>11</sup> The company's transformation from a chemical manufacturer to an enormously powerful agricultural and life sciences company, which *Fortune* magazine once labeled “possibly America's most feared corporation,”<sup>12</sup> has made the company infamous for tactics such as environmental damage, influencing government policy and aggressive treatment of competitors and farmers.

Multiple Monsanto-owned facilities have been deemed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as Superfund sites,<sup>13</sup> which are places that are so contaminated that they rank among the worst in the United States and are put on the National Priority List for cleanup by a designated EPA fund. Monsanto produced approximately 99 percent of U.S.-produced polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs),<sup>14</sup> known carcinogens that have been banned since 1976 but that continue to cycle through the air, water and soil.<sup>15</sup>

Monsanto has a close relationship with the U.S. government, which helps it to find loopholes or simply create regulations that benefit its bottom line. From 2000 to 2012, Monsanto spent over \$62 million on lobbying the government.<sup>16</sup> Members of Monsanto's Board of Directors have also held a wide array of positions in the U.S. government since the 1980s.<sup>17</sup>

Monsanto's extensive patents on GE seeds and traits ensure the company legal rights to sue farmers for any assumed patent violations. Farmers who buy Monsanto seed are locked into a “technology use guide” agreement, which stipulates that farmers must not save any seed for commercial use (a thousands-year-old and cost-saving tradition).<sup>18</sup> The agreement also allows Monsanto to investigate farmers' fields at any time it deems necessary.<sup>19</sup> According to a study conducted by The Center for Food Safety, Monsanto had filed 136 lawsuits against American farmers as of 2010 — these lawsuits involved 400 farmers and 53 small busi-

## Monsanto: By the Numbers

- **2011 Net Sales:** \$11.8 billion<sup>3</sup>
- **Top Products:** Include Roundup and Harness herbicides, DEKALB corn seeds, Asgrow soybean seeds, Deltapine cotton seeds, Seminis vegetable seeds, De Ruiters vegetable seeds, Smartstax insect-repellent corn and Bollgard insect-repellent cotton<sup>4</sup>
- **Global Facilities:** 404 facilities in 66 countries across six continents<sup>5</sup>
- **Global Reach:** In 2009, Monsanto's products were grown on more than 282 million acres worldwide, and on 40 percent of the U.S. crop acreage.<sup>6</sup>
- **U.S. Political Campaign Contributions (2000–2012):** \$829,662<sup>7</sup>
- **U.S. Lobbying Expenditures (2000–2012):** \$62,356,730<sup>8</sup>



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nesses.<sup>20</sup> Many farmers settle out of court rather than try to defend themselves to avoid excessive legal costs. In addition to lawsuits, Monsanto investigates roughly 500 farmers each year.<sup>21</sup>

Monsanto's international power has grown at an alarming rate, much to the dismay of both industrialized and developing countries that have inadvertently been exposed to the company's relentless business strategy. India has been subjected to massive economic reforms since the 1990s, including trade liberalization and privatization, which resulted in the opening of its seed and agriculture market to global companies.<sup>22</sup> Monsanto capitalized on this opportunity, introducing its insect-repellent *Bt* cotton seed in 2002.<sup>23</sup> After the first eight years of *Bt* cotton cultivation, 87 percent of all Indian cotton produced was *Bt*<sup>24</sup>; however, increased costs<sup>25</sup> and water requirements<sup>26</sup> put many farmers into economic hardship, the pressures of which have caused an alarming number to take their own lives.<sup>27</sup> *Bt* cotton continues to be at the center of an ongoing debate about the causes of India's agrarian crisis.

All of these tactics add up to make Monsanto a company that farmers and consumers around the world need to know about.

**For more information, please read the full report available at [www.foodandwaterwatch.org](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org).**

## Endnotes

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- 3 Monsanto Co. (November 14, 2011) at 22.
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- 8 *Ibid.*
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- 18 Monsanto Co. "Technology Use Guide." 2013 at 2 and 3; Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG). "Farmers' Guide to GMOs." February 2009 at 11.
- 19 Monsanto Co. "Technology Use Guide." 2013 at 4; FLAG (2009) at 15 to 18.
- 20 The Center for Food Safety. "Monsanto Versus US Farmers: 2010 Update." 2010 at 1.
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- 24 Choudhary, Bhagirath and Kadambini Guar. International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications. "Bt Cotton in India: A Country Profile." July 2010 at 5.
- 25 Sengupta, Somini. "On India's Farms, a Plague of Suicide." *The New York Times*. September 19, 2006.
- 26 DeMartini (2011) at 7.
- 27 Sengupta (2006).

### For more information:

WEB: [www.foodandwaterwatch.org](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org)

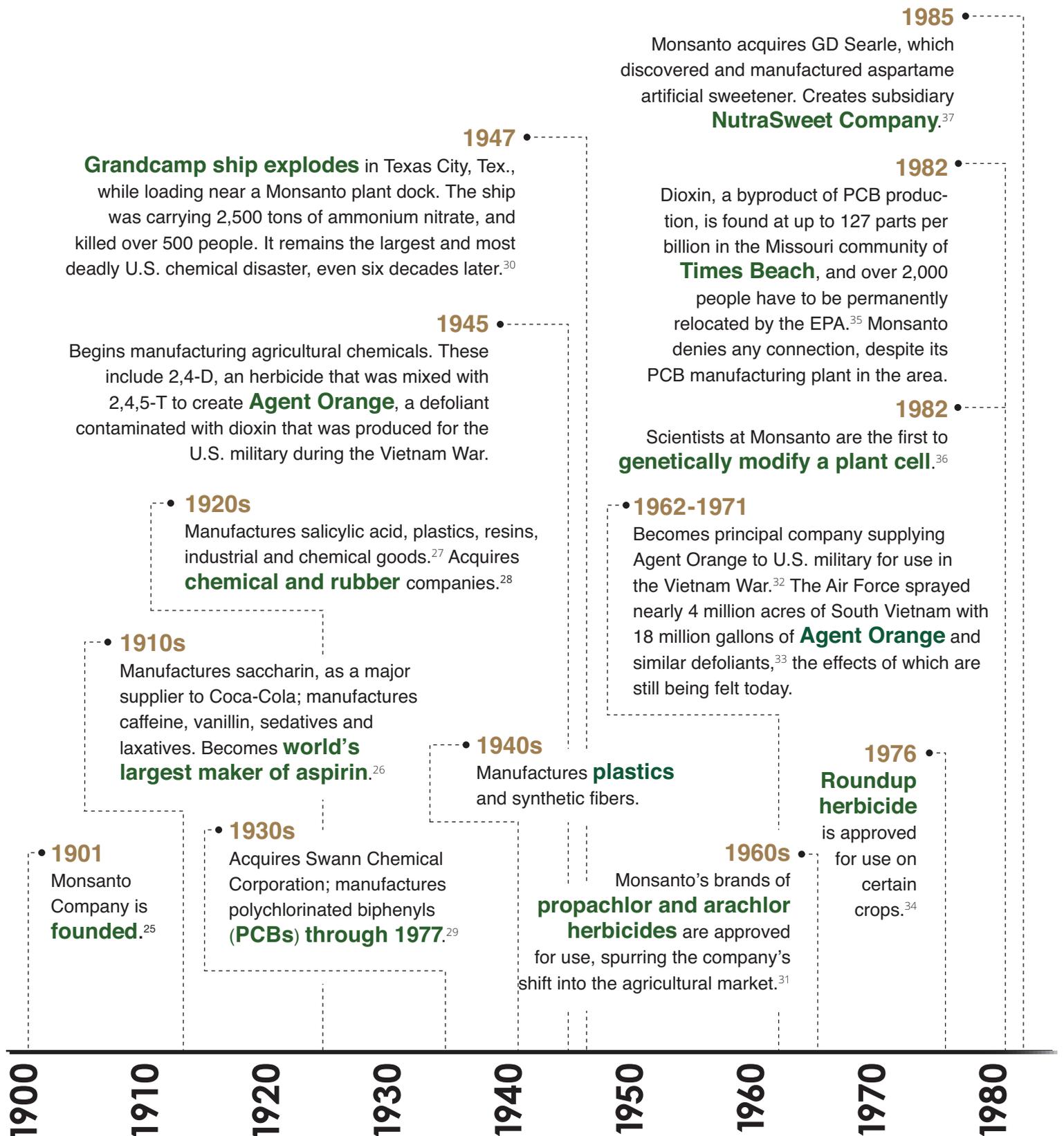
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