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Monsanto, the Weed and Seed Cartel

In years past, it was common practice for farmers to save a portion of the year's crop as seed for the following year. Over the years, one company has changed all this, and not for the betterment of farmers or farming. Vernon Hugh Bowman is a 75 year-old farmer from Indiana who farms corn, soybean, and wheat. In 2007, Monsanto sued Bowman for patent infringement. Bowman had signed a contract stating he would not save the seeds from the current harvest for next year's planting season. For the past eight years, Bowman had been buying commodity-grain from the local grain elevator. He mixed this grain with Monsanto's Round-Up Ready seeds, thus contra venting the contract Bowman signed. To date, in the U.S., Monsanto has sued 410 farmers and 56 small farm businesses for alleged seed patent violation of this type. Monsanto has won every single case. The company was awarded nearly \$24 million from just 72 of those judgments, the Center for Food Safety found (Lo, "Monsanto Bullies Small Farmers..."). Due to Monsanto's Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) monopoly on the seed market, if something is not done, only genetically modified seeds will be available. Farmers wanting to plant organic seeds will be forced out of business, along with independent farmers, and the price of seeds will continue to rise as Monsanto takes over all seed production and continues to force farmers to pay their price for seeds, regardless of the cost.

A monopoly is "exclusive control of a commodity or service in a particular market, or a control that makes possible the manipulation of prices" (dictionary.reference.com). In America, a

monopoly in a market is considered to be against Anti-Trust Laws due to price-fixing that occurs when a company controls a majority of shares in the market. Legislation is supposed to be in place to prevent unfair business practice “between competitors, contractual arrangements between sellers and buyers, the pursuit or maintenance of monopoly power, and mergers” (“Antitrust Law”).

Knowing this, it is obvious the Monsanto monopoly is out of control. Not only does Monsanto control 95 percent of the seed market, they have bought out all of the other competition. During the late 1990’s and 2000’s Monsanto bought about forty seed companies and forced all farmers to sign the same agreement Mr. Bowman had to sign (Cheeseman). If any farmers tried to save their seeds, due to a bad crop the previous year, Monsanto would find out and shut down the farmers. The reason Monsanto can sue farmers for reusing their seeds is because Monsanto forces farmers to sign a contract every year, as the only seed company, this creates a lose-lose situation. The contract states that if anyone opens a bag of seed with the Monsanto name, they are automatically put under the Monsanto contract for the coming planting season. Monsanto owns almost all of the corn and soybean markets. There is no alternative and no assistance of any kind for farmers to get out of this vicious circle. They continue to lose year after year. “Judges don’t understand agriculture,” says Bill Freese (Lo, “Monsanto Bullies Small Farmers...”). Judges do not understand the cost of seeds year after year, or the effects of the Monsanto monopoly on the average farmer.

Of all the corn and soybean seeds planted in the world, 80 percent of corn and 90 percent of soybeans is produced by Monsanto. If the Monsanto seed company isn’t regulated more closely, and acquires the power of smaller seed companies, it will own all of the seed market (“The Monsanto Monopoly”). Monsanto has gone global; they account for 23 percent of all of

the seeds in the whole world. In 2007, Monsanto's Biotech seeds accounted for 87 percent devoted to GMO ("Monsanto Is Putting Normal Seeds Out of Reach"). If Americans can't stop Monsanto here in the United States, when Monsanto grows more globally it will be almost impossible to stop them. The main reason Monsanto has gained so much power is because they patented a genetic trait that is resistant to Roundup Ready chemicals, thus creating an herbicide-resistant plant, when sprayed with a plant killing-chemical, lives and thrives (Cheeseman).

Roundup Ready was first marketed in 1996 and became a hit with farmers all across America. Monsanto had inserted a gene in the seeds that made their plants resist the chemical that destroyed all the other weeds around the soybeans, corn, or any other seed plant Monsanto patented. For that reason, whenever farmers spray their crops with Roundup Ready herbicide, they can be sure their crop and yield will not be effected. This trait accounts for better yields and a better harvest. This genetic trait Monsanto patented is very popular and for this reason every farmer would want to get their hands on these seeds. Monsanto has put these chemical-resistant genes in soybeans, corn, cotton, alfalfa, spring and winter canola, and sugar beets, further increasing their strangle-hold on the seed market (Lo).

While Monsanto had taken over a majority of the market, the main crops affected by Monsanto's patents are corn and soybeans. Almost every country grows maize, also known as corn, Monsanto forces small farms, in countries like the Philippines, out of business because their prices are too high for these small farmers to afford. Unfortunately, the Philippines is only offered GMO seeds ("The Monsanto Monopoly").

Foods produced using GMOs are very flavorful because companies can add modifications to them to enhance the flavors. For example, the corn is sweeter and has a lot better quality. Anyone who eats GMO food will be more resistant to getting diseases. The food

acts as a vaccine that becomes encoded into a person's genetics. Foods can have beneficial vitamins and minerals added to them, through genetic modifications, to provide a better nutritional diet. This helps most with poor countries that can't afford other types of plant foods provide their citizens sources of vitamins and minerals ("Pros and Cons...").

While there are some advantages to using a GMO seed, there are also drawbacks, which make the Monsanto monopoly even more detrimental. One disadvantage to growing GMO plants is they can crossbreed with weeds around them, therefore making those plants resistant to weed-killing chemicals. This calls for more GMO research and development. This also damages the environment since that GMO trait in the weed is not able to be revoked. Another drawback to growing GMO foods is the time in which it takes to grow this plant. A chemically altered plant does not grow any faster than a non-modified seed. This means the plant and growing process has little to no economic value, although one has been genetically modified. Once again, Monsanto's stranglehold on the market only seems to have one real goal: to create a monopoly ("Pros and Cons...").

The worst possible harm GMO foods create is the increase of food allergies in the general public. Unfortunately, the allergies can also spread to an allergic reaction from consumers eating the beef, swine, or any other to any other livestock that consumes the modified seed and plant. As stated earlier, the only real reason Monsanto wants to take over this market and control it is to increase their personal revenue and increase the monopoly to take control of the seed market. Companies trying to enter this market find the reaction from Monsanto overwhelming. For example, in 2010 the DuPont Seed Company made a huge push to get farmers to buy their company's seeds. The reason DuPont became aggressive in its sales stemmed from a reaction when Monsanto suddenly raised their seed prices due to improved performance and production

costs of its own seed. They realized they could corner the market, and made a move to do just that. Due to the price rise, many farmers looked for a cheaper alternative to Monsanto's GMO seeds. Monsanto was forced to lower its prices, this brought cheaper prices from Monsanto because they didn't have the business they used to have ("Pros and Cons...").

If Monsanto is not reined in, farmers wanting to plant crops, including those with organic seeds, will be forced out of business. The price of seeds will continue to rise due to less competition in the market. Monsanto will gain control of all crop production by suing the farmers of America and those in other countries for contract infringement. Monsanto's exclusive control of a commodity and manipulation of prices needs to stop.

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