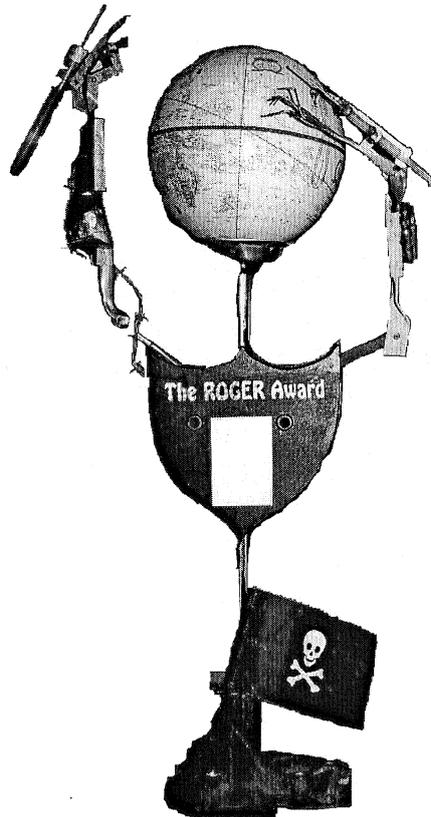


The Roger Award 1998



Winner
Monsanto

Presented on 27th April 1999
Organised by Corso, GATT Watchdog and CAFCA

The dubious distinction of the Roger Award is made to the transnational corporation (TNC) which the judges assessed, on the evidence before them, had the most negative impact in each or all of the following fields: unemployment; monopoly; profiteering; abuse of workers/conditions; political interference; environmental damage; cultural imperialism; impact on tangata whenua; pursuing an ideological crusade; and impact on women, health and safety of workers and the public.

The Award for 1998 has been made to the Monsanto Corporation. After a series of takeovers and mergers in the 1980s and 1990s, Monsanto is now the largest transnational biotechnology corporation in the world. This US corporate giant is not only seeking to control and monopolise the production of agricultural produce in the global economy, it is also responsible for promoting research and development on a wide range of genetically engineered products that have the potential to irreversibly alter and damage the ecosystem of the planet and the food supply of future generations. This threat needs to be taken seriously by New Zealanders as Monsanto is already petitioning the Environmental Risk Management Agency (ERMA) to grow genetically modified Canola over several hundred hectares on North Canterbury and Southland farms to produce seeds for the Canadian market (The Press, April 19th, 1999). Perhaps more worrying is the establishment of a Crown Institute/Monsanto quango, Gene Pool, with the backing of the Royal Society (representing the scientific establishment) to campaign for New Zealand to become a site in the development of genetic engineering. Such a strategy is also backed by Federated Farmers of New Zealand. It seems that just as the 1980s saw New Zealand become the testing ground for neo-liberalism or 'Rogernomics,' so the country is to become a laboratory for genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the 21st century, the effects of which could be devastating for the environment, food supply, and population.

The panel of judges also ruled that Fletcher Challenge and Tranz Rail each receive a special Roger Award. Fletcher Challenge for a 'dishonourable award' because of the negative impact of the company's forestry and pulp and paper operations in the Central North Island which have inflicted so much damage on indigenous communities. The award was also made on the grounds that despite claims to the contrary, the sale of the former ForestCorp has led to many job losses in communities such as Rotorua, Kaingaroa, and Taupo. The judges recommended Tranz Rail for a 'continuity award' for the company's persistent failure to address its appalling safety record, for which it received the 1997 Roger Award.

The judgement that Monsanto should receive the Supreme Roger Award for 1998 rests on a growing body of evidence from across New Zealand (and worldwide) that clearly shows it to be engaged in a broad range of corporate activities which not only pose a serious threat to democratic processes in this country, but a risk to the health and well-being of the population in its pursuit of profit. This report documents the negative impact of these activities on New Zealanders.

Monopoly

Monsanto is now the world's largest agrochemical corporation and second largest seed company, reputedly controlling over 10% of the global seed market. The corporation's total 1996 revenues were US\$9.26 billion. Along with seven other transnational corporations, Monsanto controls world trade of 20 food crops that account for 90% of food consumption. Four of these crops alone account for 50% of food grown in the world (potatoes, rice, wheat and maize).

Not satisfied with their virtual monopoly over the production, distribution and exchange of food crops, the same transnationals have increasingly focused their attention on gaining control over the world's seedstocks. Their strategy has been a simple, yet alarmingly ruthless one in its novelty and design. The approach has been for agrochemical and biotech corporations to take over or buy out seed companies. However, their control does not stop there. Once they have taken control over a seed company, these corporations have then begun to systematically 'genetically improve' (i.e. alter) the gene line of the seed and, therefore, the crop. This enables companies such as Monsanto to then apply for the patent right over the 'improved' seed and the crop that grows from it, effectively removing control over a food source that had been in the public domain for hundreds if not thousands of years.

Monsanto has proved itself to be particularly adept at pioneering enforcement strategies for protection of its plant patents. Much of this pioneering work has been centred on its genetically altered soya beans that have the ability to withstand spraying with the company's leading herbicide, Roundup Ready (this kills native plants but not the soya bean). In 1996 the company set a new precedent requiring farmers buying its Roundup Ready soya beans to sign and adhere to the terms of its 1996 Roundup Ready Gene Agreement. As the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has documented, the terms that the Agreement set were as follows:

- A \$5.00 per bag 'technology fee' was levied
- Farmers had to give Monsanto the right to inspect, monitor and test his/her fields for up to three years
- Only Monsanto's brand of glyphosate herbicide (Roundup Ready) could be used on the crop. Farmers' rights to save and replant the patented seeds had to be transferred to Monsanto. The farmer must agree not to sell or otherwise supply the seed to 'any other person or entity'

A final clause stipulated that if the farmer terminated the agreement he/she would be liable to pay Monsanto "100 times the then applicable fee for the Roundup Ready gene, times the number of units of transferred seed, plus reasonable attorney's fees and expenses." (CCPA, 1998)

The company has used a similar licensing agreement for its genetically engineered cotton. Monsanto has also made it known that it intends to apply similar agreements to all of its genetically engineered seedstock that it will bring to the market in the future. Such agreements would no doubt eventually apply to farmers using Roundup Ready canola seeds if ERMA allows Monsanto's trial to proceed in the Canterbury and Southland regions. No doubt other agrochemical corporations such as Cargill, which has monopoly control over New Zealand's wheat supply, would soon follow the precedent set by Monsanto.

Profiteering

Monsanto is the largest TNC among the newly emerging 'life sciences industry.' During 1997 the life sciences industry was extremely active in consolidating its power over the world's biological resources. As a direct result of this process of consolidation, in 1996 the top ten life sciences industries accounted for 82% of global agrochemical sales. The top ten seed corporations controlled approximately 40% of the world seed market, with a value of US\$15 billion. The world pharmaceutical market is worth an estimated \$251 billion. The top ten corporations control 36% of the global market. By the end of 1997 the top ten veterinary medicine corporations controlled 63% of the world market.

In all of these sectors of the life science industry, Monsanto is either the leader or one of the top ten (particularly after its merger with American Home Products).

In relation to genetically engineered seed, crops and foods, Monsanto claims that the push toward the production of these products is necessary to feed a growing world population to eradicate hunger, starvation, and ultimately famine. The corporation argues that recent biotechnological breakthroughs in this area present a unique opportunity to boost world food production through the introduction of its new pesticide/herbicide technologies (such as Roundup) in combination with GE crops. However, evidence from this country and around the world suggests that this 'opportunity' is a purely commercial, not a humanitarian one. On the contrary, this evidence clearly shows that the secret agenda of Monsanto and the other life sciences corporates is aimed at controlling the production of 20 major crops that account for 90% of world consumption. Six of these crops have already been genetically engineered and patented, and are now in commercial production.

Consequently, the real dynamo driving Monsanto's GE research and operations around the globe is the desire to privatise the world's food gene lines through International Patent Rights (IPRs) and the genetic manipulation of agricultural seeds and crops. This accounts for the company's takeovers of seed companies over the last few years. For example, between 1996 and 1997 Monsanto invested nearly US\$2 billion in seed company acquisitions alone. As a result it now controls 30% of the Brazilian seed market and is positioning itself to capture a large share of the US seed industry through its recent US\$ 1.2 billion takeover of Holdens Foundation Seeds which is likely to give the company a 25-30% share of US maize acreage. These and its other corporate activities (e.g. pharmaceuticals) generated US \$9.26 billion in revenues in 1996 for the company.

With the reforms that Rogernomics bequeathed to the New Zealand economy coming to fruition in the 1990s it is already evident that Monsanto views this country as a trial site for its GE agrochemical technologies. To further its corporate interests here it has already entered into a partnership with Auckland-based Fernz corporation. No doubt if it receives the go-ahead for its Roundup-canola trials from the government it might well begin to increase its investments through the same take-over process it has used in other countries.

Political Interference

There is no doubt that Monsanto and the GE industry has attempted to manipulate individual politicians, political institutions, and more broadly, public debate on the introduction of GE products to New Zealand and other countries. Such political manipulation has mostly been indirect and subtle, but nevertheless because of this approach, all the more effective and powerful.

In both Britain and the USA there is clear evidence of a 'revolving door' of political interests between government institutions and Monsanto. For example, in the US both the Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the US Surgeon General have taken positions at Monsanto after the end of their tenure. In the UK a similar arrangement played out, causing some controversy, where a key adviser to a senior Cabinet Minister ("nuclear" Jack Cunningham) responsible for evaluating genetically modified food took a job with a lobbying firm that advises Monsanto.

A number of recent incidents here in New Zealand have also highlighted the way that American-style lobbying has muzzled potential criticism over the introduction of GE foods. Some glaring examples of how this process works within government was broadcast by a TV One Assignment programme on the subject of genetically modified food (22/04/99). Interviewed for the programme, former associate Minister of Health Neil Kirton claimed that the American ambassador to New Zealand, Josiah Beeman, brought undue pressure on him and other ministers to ensure that labeling of Monsanto's GE products would not be imposed on imported American agricultural produce or foods. In an interview with the New Zealand Herald, Kirton has also claimed that Beeman visited him on at least two occasions after he called for labeling of GE food. At the time of the visits, Kirton remembered that "I was struck dumb by the aggression shown by him ... the bullying tactics he used." So much for US diplomacy. Although the ambassador refused to comment on this, he did make it clear during his interview for Assignment (which was repeated on TV One's 10pm News) that if the New Zealand government did make labeling a requirement, this would have inevitable consequences for trade relations between the two countries. A tit-for-tat trade war the implication.

Another example of how the US ambassador has attempted to muzzle public debate on the proliferation of GE foods in New Zealand can be seen from his ordering an investigation of Susanne Wuerthele, a scientist at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), who dared to raise some awkward questions about the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in food during an interview on National Radio's Kim Hill show last November. Apparently tipped off by the New Zealand-based representative of Monsanto about the interview, Beeman made a complaint to the EPA via the US State Department. According to the Listener (6/03/99), "Beeman accused her of representing herself as the voice of the EPA - which regulates genetically engineered plant pesticides and micro-organisms used to produce chemicals - and also of entering New Zealand without his permission." The transcript from the show reveals quite clearly she did not claim to represent the EPA but had consented to do the interview in a personal capacity. On her return to the EPA, she was told by her supervisor that the State Department had asked for her to be fired. Her position at the EPA is still uncertain until an internal investigation is completed on her interview. Wuerthele's crime was to merely raise some thorny questions about the possible, and as yet unknown, long-term effect of GMOs on the environment and humans. Oh yes, and then there was entering New Zealand without the good ambassador's permission!

Although not immediately apparent but nevertheless working behind the scenes orchestrating this political chicanery is Monsanto. It is clear from the 'bullying' tactics of the US ambassador to the political lobbyists hired by Monsanto in New Zealand and abroad, that the company is bent on concerting a campaign to misinform the public about the very real dangers that GMOs represent to the environment, humans, and other species. Consequently, when Wyatt Creech calls for a "balanced debate" on GMOs in New Zealand (as he did in Assignment), he should remember that the scales of the balance have for some time been deliberately tipped in Monsanto's favour. Perhaps this explains why it has been suggested that approximately 60% of the foods on supermarket shelves already contain GMOs?

Environmental damage

Before its nomination and 'success' in this year's Roger Award, Monsanto had already established what can only be said to be a truly appalling record on widespread damage and destruction to the environment across the globe. A recent edition of the British magazine, *The Ecologist*, well documents the corporate negligence that Monsanto has displayed toward the environment since its founding in 1901. The *Ecologist's* Monsanto Files make grim reading. What the Files reveal is that, before its most recent move into the production of GMOs, the company had been responsible for the manufacture and production of a long line of chemical and pharmaceutical agents that have had severe detrimental effects on the environment, the companies' workers, and consumers who have used them. The list is too long to reproduce for this report. However, Monsanto's products and their effects have included: styrene/polystyrene (rated fifth by the EPA for the hazardous waste material that is a by-product of their manufacture); PCBs (a highly toxic carcinogen, compromises the human immune system); Dioxin (a highly toxic carcinogen, compromises the human immune system, causes birth defects); and the infamous 'Agent Orange' that was used by the American armed forces to defoliate Vietnamese forests. Exposure to Agent Orange, as subsequent court cases against Monsanto have revealed, has left many American - not to mention New Zealand - soldiers exposed to it suffering from a wide range of long-term health disorders.

In recent years Monsanto has increasingly focused its operations on agrochemicals and biotechnology products. Several of its products have achieved notoriety in the last decade. They are:

Roundup Ready herbicide
Genetically modified seedstock
'Terminator' seeds

Each of these biotechnologies represent a major threat to the environment. Monsanto advertises Roundup Ready as the world's leading herbicide. It claims that it can be safely used on anything from lawns and gardens, to agricultural crops and even forests. In New Zealand it is regularly used in the Hawkes Bay, Manawatu, Canterbury, and Southland on Monsanto's Roundup canola crops. Spraying these crops with the herbicide kills native weeds without harming the crops which have been genetically modified to be resistant to the effects of the chemical. There is accumulating evidence from around the country and from abroad that the extensive and repeated use of Roundup Ready is already having a serious negative impact on the environment. First, it appears that prolonged use of the chemical (after three years) can render soil sterile by killing off worms and other biota which sustain fertility. Second, there is a growing body of scientific research on Roundup Ready's active compound (glyphosate) which suggests that the chemical can compromise the immune systems of significant numbers of chemical-sensitive individuals and that it should not be used in close proximity to either people or animals. This is of particular concern given that research has shown that Roundup canola has levels of herbicide 200 times above that of canola grown using traditional farming methods. Last, little research has been conducted on the possibility of herbicide resistance, particularly via pollen transferred to the same or related crops. Despite the evidence, Monsanto continues to promote the herbicide widely to urban and rural local authorities, gardeners, and farmers as a safe and effective chemical. In October last year the company also signed a supply deal with Auckland-based Fernz Corporation to market glyphosate.

Monsanto has also pioneered the development of genetically engineered seedstock. It is now the world's leading supplier of GE seeds and dominates the US market, where 50% of all commercial crops will be derived from GE processes this year. Genetic engineering of seedstock has been developed by Monsanto to increase the dependence of farmers and growers on its chemical-intensive, industrial approach to agriculture. For example, Monsanto has genetically modified canola, cotton, maize, and soya beans so that its herbicide, Roundup Ready, can be used on these crops. The company has also sponsored more ambitious

research in which genes from a bacteria (bacillus thuringiensis or Bt) are spliced into Monsanto's seed New Leaf Superior potatoes, rendering them toxic to the Colorado potato beetle. As it happens, Bt is regularly used (but sparingly) in a powdered form by organic farmers as a natural pesticide of last resort. Consequently, insects have not developed resistance to Bt. However, the development of Monsanto's New Leaf Superior increases the possibilities of resistance given that Bt is present in the potato and insects are continuously exposed to it. As Peter Montague of the National Writers Union has noted:

"Not every potato beetle will be killed eating Monsanto's pesticidal potatoes. A few hardy beetles will survive. When those few resistant beetles mate with other resistant beetles, a new variety of potato beetle will spring into being ...At that point, the bacteria will have lost its effectiveness as a pesticide. Then Monsanto will start marketing some new 'silver bullet' to control the Colorado potato beetle. But what will the nation's organic farmers do? For private gain, Monsanto will have destroyed a public good - the natural pesticidal properties of Bt. Monsanto scientists acknowledged to the New York Times that the Bt-containing potato will create Bt-resistant potato beetles. They know exactly what they are trying to do. They are hoping to make a mint selling Bt-laced potatoes and, in the process, depriving their competitors (organic farmers) of an essential, time honoured tool. The strategy is brilliant, and utterly ruthless."

Such a strategy undermines Monsanto's clarion call that it is developing GE biotechnologies to 'feed the world.' Quite clearly, in the case of the New Leaf Superior potato the company is willfully manipulating the gene pools of two totally unrelated 'species' (Bt and a potato) to eradicate competition from organic farmers for purely commercial purposes. The possible development of insect resistance that these technologies pose for the environment in New Zealand must be a negative consideration in their adoption and use here. Despite this obvious concern, in November last year CRMA allowed trials of herbicide resistant genetically engineered sugar beet to proceed in Canterbury. Monsanto has also recently made an application to CRMA for trials of Roundup Ready canola to be trialed in Canterbury and Southland. If accepted, planting will commence in the Spring of 1999.

Monsanto has also recently added to its arsenal of GE products the so-called 'Terminator' seed. The principle of the Terminator biotechnology is quite simple. Genes are inserted within a seed that programme the plant to sterilize any seeds it may produce. This prevents farmers from collecting and saving their own seed while ensuring that they are forced to go back to the seed supplier to purchase a fresh consignment for the following season. The effect of this technology is to transfer control over a food source from the land/farmer to the HQ of Monsanto in St Louis. Aside from the legal and regulatory monopoly that this would give Monsanto over New Zealand farmers and growers, the Terminator also poses a serious threat to the reproduction of other plant species through cross pollination. It is not inconceivable that Terminator genes could be transplanted to other crops through natural processes. If this did occur, the potential damage to the New Zealand environment could be unimaginable.

Impact on Tangata Whenua

Indigenous peoples here in Aotearoa/New Zealand and around the globe perceive genetic engineering as a major assault on the traditional relations that they have established over many thousands of years with the land and ecosystem of the planet. In its attempts to genetically re-engineer the natural environment for commercial purposes, Monsanto and other GE corporates not only exhibit a profound disrespect for these relations, they also continue a 500 year old process of colonisation that has seen native peoples systematically displaced and /or eradicated from their traditional lands. The similarities between the displacement and/or eradication of native people from their traditional lands through the law-making powers of colonialists and the regulatory framework that is being constructed to protect the patent rights of Monsanto's GE products today should not be lost on us. Just as the colonial powers transformed the common property rights of native people into the private property of settlers and commercial interests, so the international patent rights over seedstock held by Monsanto and other GE corporates will effectively privatise the produce of small farmers and sharecroppers around the globe. The sharing, exchange and distribution of seedstock by these farmers will therefore eventually have to submit to the monopolistic control of Monsanto's headquarters in St Louis. Monsanto's authority to police this monopoly around the globe will be enforced by international trade agreements, such as those currently being negotiated by the World Trade Organisation, on intellectual property rights.

Aside from its extensive interests in genetically engineered agricultural products, Monsanto has also been actively pursuing a substantial stake in the Human Genome Project. For Monsanto this is a double-edged investment. First, it has formed alliances with some 'advanced genomic' companies (e.g. California-based Incyte) that have developed sophisticated mapping techniques from their work on human genes. Monsanto has applied this biotechnology to identify, map, and gain control over key crop genes. Second, the company has also invested in genetic modification research connected with the Human Genome Project. For this reason, the Fourth World Institute in Colorado has named Monsanto the "worst transnational in the world."

Pursuing an ideological crusade

Monsanto is conducting an ideological crusade to hood-wink the public into believing its products are not only harmless but life enhancing. For example, the company's often-repeated justification for the development of its GE related products is that it aims to 'feed the world.' As the company's CEO Robert Shapiro writes in the introduction to Monsanto's 1996 Environmental Review, the use of genetically engineered crops "will help immensely in closing the gap between hungry people and adequate food supplies." In other words there is a direct causal link drawn between Monsanto being allowed to develop and market its GE products and the eradication of world hunger, starvation and famine. It is with respect to this philanthropic vision of itself that the company also refers to its research and development activities on GE crops as delivering "genetically improved" food to the market. To reinforce this image, Monsanto and other GE corporates now refer to themselves as the 'life sciences industry.'

These and other images of a beneficent corporation battling to expand the world's food supply constitute the central messages of Monsanto's public relations effort to convince public opinion that it is on 'their' side. In New Zealand the Monsanto public relations effort has been spearheaded through the co-optation of the scientific establishment in the form of the Royal Society. The Gene Pool travelling roadshow which completed a tour of New Zealand in 1997, for instance, prominently featured a Monsanto video extolling the potential of GE. As in other countries around the globe, Monsanto has also been engaged in a systematic media campaign aimed at assuaging public opinion that GE foods are safe. To placate and pacify public anxiety over GE, Monsanto and other GE corporates employ the services of Burson-Marsteller, a multinational public relations agency that specialises in the GE industry. A visit to its global website (www.burson-marsteller.com) is very revealing of the hidden agenda that Monsanto and other GE corporates seek to promote. As Burson-Marsteller boldly claim, "Perceptions are real. They color what we see . . . what we believe . . . how we behave. They can be managed . . . to motivate behavior . . . to create positive business results." And this is the nub of what is really at stake for Monsanto, quite simply, commercial gain and private profit.

Despite the mask of greenspeak, sustainable development, and wild promises to feed the world, Monsanto is clearly engaged in an ideological crusade to win the hearts and minds of the public over to its view of what the aims and purposes of the GE industry. This explains why, despite the efforts of many ecologists and political activists, public opinion in New Zealand has been relatively quiescent on issues surrounding GE until recently. However, as Assignment (TV One, 22/04/99) recently showed, there are signs that ordinary people here are no longer prepared to uncritically accept the placatory messages of Monsanto's public relations campaign, the apparent complicity of either 'expert' scientific opinion, or the present government's deliberate silence on the very real and potential hazards that GE crops and food present to the environment and population in New Zealand.

Impact on women, health and safety of workers and the public

The impact of GE food on New Zealanders' health is still as yet unknown. Studies on the long-term effects of this type of food have, significantly, rarely been conducted by the GE corporates such as Monsanto. One such study, by a UK scientist on rats given genetically modified potatoes found, that it stunted their growth and seriously compromise their immune systems. Follow-up studies on the experiment found that "there was something in the process of genetic modification that was causing damage" that the scientists little understood (The Press, 22/02/99). For his efforts, the scientist who discovered this connection was promptly sacked from his position by the company that employed him (the Rowett Research Institute) - a common response of GE companies to scientists whose research does not support the official line that GE foods are harmless, even beneficial. This study and other formerly suppressed research that is gradually trickling out is adding to a growing body of counter-evidence that strongly suggests that the long-term effects of GE foods on public health are not only unknown at present, but are potentially damaging. Such lack of research should give the New Zealand public pause for concern given that an estimated 60% of foods sold here are genetically modified.

A case in point is Monsanto's BGH or Bovine Growth Hormone, a GE hormone that increases the milk yields of dairy herds. As The Ecologist's Monsanto files notes "Monsanto's 14-year effort to gain approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to bring recombinant BGH to market was fraught with controversy, including allegations of a concerted effort to suppress information about the hormone's ill effects. One FDA veterinarian, Richard Burroughs, was fired after he accused both the company and the agency of suppressing and manipulating data to hide the effects of BGH injections on the health of dairy cows." The report goes on to document that after Monsanto gained FDA approval to market the hormone in 1994:

"[the] Wisconsin Farmers Union released a study of Wisconsin's farmers' experiences with the drug. [The] findings exceeded the 21 potential health problems that Monsanto was required to list on the warning label for its Posilac brand of BGH. [The research] found widespread reports of spontaneous deaths among BGH-treated cows, high incidences of udder infections, severe metabolic difficulties and calving problems, and in some cases an inability to successfully wean treated cows off the drug. Many experienced farmers who experimented with BGH suddenly need to replace large portions of their herd. Instead of addressing the causes of the farmers' complaints about BGH, Monsanto went on the offensive, threatening to sue small dairy companies that advertised their products as free of the artificial hormone, and participating in a lawsuit by several dairy industry trade associations against the first and only mandatory labeling law for BGH in the United States. Still, evidence for the damaging effects of BGH on the health of both cows and people continued to mount." (The Ecologist: October, 1998)

The effects of the drug on dairy herds and the reaction of Monsanto to farmers' concerns in this case should be a warning to New Zealand dairy producers, particularly as Monsanto has applied to the New Zealand National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee for its Posilac brand of BGH to be approved for general use among dairy farmers here. New Zealand dairy farmers should take note of the high levels of opposition recorded among Canadian farmers and public to the use of BGH in dairy produce. As a direct consequence of this opposition, the Canadian federal government last year refused to grant Monsanto a license to market BGH until further research had been reviewed on its effects on both cows and humans. The New Zealand government should also take note of its own Dairy Board which has some concerns over the use of BGH among herds here.

Public health in New Zealand is also compromised by Monsanto's pharmaceutical products. In particular, its artificial sweetener aspartame which is sold under the brand names of Nutrasweet and Equal have been linked to an alarming range of chronic health conditions. These include: brain cancers, diabetes, epileptic seizures, Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis as well as other neurological conditions that have shown a marked increase since the introduction of aspartame in the early 1980s. Given the widespread use of the chemical in everything from soft drinks (e.g. diet Coke and Pepsi) to processed foods as a sweetener, aspartame represents a serious health threat to all sections of the New Zealand population.

The Roger Award 1998

Statement from the Judges

There were three contenders for the Roger Award of 1998. The finalists were Fletcher Challenge, Tranz Rail, and the US agrochemical giant, Monsanto. On the evidence before them, the judges had to assess which company had the most negative impact in each or all of the following fields: unemployment; monopoly; profiteering; abuse of workers/conditions; political interference; environmental damage; cultural imperialism; impact on tangata whenua; pursuing an ideological crusade; impact on women; health and safety of workers and the public.

The honour of receiving the Roger Award for 1998 goes to Monsanto.

The judges also ruled that Fletcher Challenge and Tranz Rail each receive a special Award. Fletcher Challenge receives a 'dishonourable award' because of the negative impact of the company's forestry and pulp and paper operations in the Central North Island which have inflicted so much damage on indigenous communities. The award was also made on the grounds that despite claims to the contrary, the sale of the former ForestCorp has led to many job losses in communities such as Rotorua, Kaingaroa, and Taupo. The judges recommended Tranz Rail for a 'continuity award' for the company's persistent failure to address its appalling safety record, for which it received the Roger Award in 1997.

The decision to award Monsanto with the prestigious Roger Award was primarily based on a wide range of evidence against the company in the categories of: monopoly; profiteering; political interference; environmental damage; impact on tangata whenua; pursuing an ideological crusade; and impact on women, health and safety of workers and the public.

Monopoly

Monsanto controls 10% of the global seed market. This gives it access to a wide range of crops which it will subject to genetic modification and International Patent Rights (IPRs). Using its recently devised 'Gene Agreements,' Monsanto aims to lock farmers into a dependent, highly regulatory framework, which gives the company monopoly control over agricultural produce. In conjunction with genetically modified seedstock, the Gene Agreements pose a major threat to New Zealand farmers' right to save, share and exchange seeds.

Profiteering

Monsanto is one of the top ten 'life sciences' corporations that has a major share of agrochemical, biotechnological, and pharmaceutical industries around the world. Despite Monsanto's claims that the push toward the production of genetically engineered (GE) products is necessary to feed a growing world population to eradicate hunger, starvation, and ultimately famine, evidence from this country and around the world suggests that the company's motives are for purely commercial, and not humanitarian purposes. The real dynamo driving Monsanto's GE research and operations around the globe is the desire to privatise the world's food gene lines through International Patent Rights (IPRs) and the genetic manipulation of agricultural seeds and crops to increase profits.

Political Interference

Several recent incidents in New Zealand have highlighted the way that Monsanto's and the US government's interests converge to manipulate the government and public debate on GE foods here. A glaring example of how pressure was applied to the government ministers was recently screened by a TV One Assignment programme on the subject of genetically modified food (22/04/99). Interviewed for the programme, former associate Minister of Health Neil Kirton claimed that the American ambassador to New Zealand, Josiah Beeman, brought undue pressure on him and other ministers to ensure that labelling of Monsanto's GE products would not be imposed on imported American agricultural

produce or foods. In an interview with the New Zealand Herald, Kirton claimed that Beeman visited him on at least two occasions after he called for labeling of GE food. At the time of the visits, Kirton remembered that "I was struck dumb by the aggression shown by him ... the bullying tactics he used." So much for US diplomacy. Although the ambassador refused to comment on this, he did make it clear during his interview for Assignment (which was repeated on TV One's 10pm News) that if the New Zealand government did make labeling a requirement, this would have inevitable consequences for trade relations between the two countries. A tit-for-tat trade war the implication.

Environmental damage

A recent edition of British magazine *The Ecologist* documents the corporate negligence that Monsanto has displayed toward the environment since its founding in 1901. The company has a history of producing chemical and pharmaceutical agents that have had severe detrimental effects on the environment, the company's workers and consumers who have used them. In recent years Monsanto has increasingly focused its operations on agrochemicals and biotechnology products. Several of its products have achieved notoriety in the last decade. They include: Roundup Ready herbicide; genetically modified seedstock and 'terminator' seeds. Roundup Ready is advertised by Monsanto as the world's leading herbicide. It claims it can be safely used on anything from lawns to gardens, to agricultural crops and even forests. In New Zealand it is regularly used in the Hawkes Bay, Manawatu, Canterbury and Southland on Monsanto's Roundup canola crops. There is accumulating evidence from around the country and from abroad that the extensive and repeated use of Roundup Ready is already having a serious negative impact on the environment. It appears that prolonged use of the chemical (after three years) can render soil sterile by killing off worms and other biota which sustain fertility.

Monsanto has also pioneered the development of genetically engineered seedstock. It is now the world's leading supplier of GE seeds and dominates the US market, where 50% of all commercial crops will be derived from GE processes this year. Genetic engineering of seedstock has been developed by Monsanto to increase the dependence of farmers and growers on its chemical-intensive, industrial approach to agriculture.

Impact on Tangata Whenua

Genetic engineering is perceived by Indigenous Peoples here in Aotearoa and around the world as a major assault on the traditional relations they have established over many thousands of years with the land and ecosystems of the planet. The similarities between the displacement and/or eradication of native people from their traditional lands through the law-making powers of colonialists and the regulatory framework that is being constructed to protect the patent rights of Monsanto's GE products today should not be lost on us. Just as colonial powers transformed the common property rights of native people into the private property of settlers and commercial interests, so the international patent rights over seedstock held by Monsanto and other GE corporates will effectively privatise the production of small farmers and sharecroppers around the globe.

Pursuing an ideological crusade

Monsanto's attempt to hoodwink the public into believing its products are not only harmless but life enhancing can surely be called an ideological crusade. The company's often-repeated justification for the development of its GE related products is that it aims to 'free the world'. Monsanto's CEO Robert Shapiro wants us to believe that the use of genetically engineered crops "will help immensely in closing the gap between hungry people and adequate food supplies". In other words there is a direct causal link drawn between Monsanto being allowed to develop and market its GE products and the eradication of world hunger, starvation and famine. It is with respect to this philanthropic vision of itself that the company also refers to its research and development activities on GE crops as delivering "genetically improved" food to the market. To reinforce this image, Monsanto and other GE corporates now refer to themselves as the "Life Sciences Industry".

Impact on women, health and safety of workers and the public

It is not known what the effects of GE food will be on the health of New Zealanders. Studies of long-term effects of this type of food have, significantly, rarely been conducted by the GE corporate such as Monsanto. One such study, by a UK scientist on rats given genetically modified potatoes found it stunted their growth and seriously compromises their immune systems. Follow-up studies on the experiment found that "there was something in the process of genetic modification that was causing damage" that the scientists little understood (The Press, 22/02/99).

The health of people in New Zealand is also compromised by Monsanto's production of the artificial sweetener aspartame which is sold under the brand names Nutrasweet and Equal. These sweeteners have been linked to an alarming range of chronic health conditions. These include brain cancers, diabetes, epileptic seizures, Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis as well as other neurological conditions that have shown a marked increase since the introduction of aspartame in the 1980s.

And in the year that the New Zealand government hosts APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation), it is well worth noting that Monsanto actively participates in APEC's Agricultural Technical Cooperation Experts' Group Committee, especially in its biotechnology workshops.

In the 1980s New Zealand became the testing ground for a set of radical market economic theories now commonly known as Rogernomics. As we move towards the 21st century, the country is now being pressured to become a laboratory for genetically modified organisms, the effects of which could be devastating for the environment, food supply, and population. The sheer power, impact and global reach of Monsanto point to the fact that its activities in New Zealand are inextricably connected with its worldwide operations.

Maxine Gay
Moana Jackson
Annette Sykes
Sukhi Turner

April 27th 1999

The Roger Award

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Judges

The judges for the 1998 Roger Award were:

Maxine Gay (President, New Zealand Trade Union Federation)

Moana Jackson (Director, Nga Kaiwhakamarama I Nga Ture)

Annette Sykes (Ngati Pikiao, Lawyer, Treaty activist)

Sukhi Turner (Mayor of Dunedin)