

Monsanto and the Ownership of Life

Monsanto did not begin as a villain. It began as a chemical company in 1901, producing saccharin — an artificial sweetener used in Coca-Cola. From the beginning, its role was clear: to replace nature with chemistry, not out of malice, but out of efficiency. This is how dystopia usually starts. Over the twentieth century, Monsanto became a master of industrial substitution: chemicals replaced plants. Formulas replaced ecosystems. Control replaced relationship. They produced PCBs, synthetic rubber, plastics, and later herbicides like 2,4-D, a component of Agent Orange. Each product fit the same logic: scalable, profitable, and manageable by institutions.

When agriculture industrialized after World War II, Monsanto saw the next frontier. Food.

The real transformation came when Monsanto moved from chemicals to genetics. Seeds had always been shared. Saved. Replanted. Adapted to place and season. They were living knowledge — decentralized and free. Monsanto changed that. With genetically modified organisms (GMOs), seeds became intellectual property. Farmers were no longer stewards of life — they became licensed users. Saving seed became a violation. Replanting became a crime. The field became a platform. The farmer became a subscriber. This was not just about crops. It was about who controls the future of food.

Glyphosate and the Chemical Loop

Monsanto's flagship product, Roundup, was paired with Roundup Ready crops engineered to survive it. This created a closed loop: Plant the patented seed, spray the patented chemical, repeat every season. It was elegant. It was profitable. And it was fragile. Over time, weeds evolved resistance — exactly as biology always does. Farmers responded by spraying more, mixing chemicals, or switching to stronger compounds. The system escalated. Not because farmers were reckless. Because the system had no exit. The debate around Monsanto often collapses into shouting. But the real story is quieter and more disturbing: Soil health declined, biodiversity collapsed, monocultures replaced resilience, farmers took on debt, ecosystems simplified. This was not an accident. It was a predictable outcome of replacing living complexity with industrial uniformity. Life does not like being optimized.

When Bayer acquired Monsanto in 2018, it wasn't just a merger. It was the completion of a century-long arc: pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and agriculture becoming one integrated system. The same logic now touched: What we grow, what we eat, what we spray, what we ingest, what we treat. This is not conspiracy. It is consolidation.

Monsanto's story is not about evil scientists. It is about a system that cannot tolerate what it cannot control. Seeds that reproduce freely are dangerous to markets. So they must be owned. Soil that regenerates itself is dangerous to inputs. So it must be dependent. Farmers who save

seed are dangerous to revenue. So they must be regulated. And food — the most intimate relationship between humans and Earth — becomes a product optimized for quarterly returns. This is how dystopia grows: not through hatred of life, but through ownership of it.

The tragedy of Monsanto is not that it existed. It is that we built a world where its logic made sense. And until we change that logic, we will keep calling control “innovation” and dependence “progress,” while wondering why the land no longer remembers us.