

FINANCIAL POST

Terence Corcoran: Fake 'green' scaremongering against a chemical miracle of the modern age

Reasons to ban glyphosate don't exist except in the minds of green activists



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The world of agriculture, food production, international trade and European unity dodged an economically toxic junk-science bullet this week when 28 members of the powerful European Commission (EC) failed to get a majority to support a ban on one of the great chemical miracles of the modern age. But the world is not safe yet. Another EC vote on whether to keep or ban the herbicide glyphosate is expected later this year.

For 40 years, glyphosate — the key ingredient in Monsanto’s Roundup herbicide and similar products from other companies — has helped feed the planet and liberate farmers in developed and developing nations. But Europe is split on glyphosate. News reports indicate a lack of majority for either side, but the fact that a ban or phase-out was avoided at a Wednesday EC meeting provided temporary relief to farmers, industry and many governments around the world.

Reasons for banning glyphosate are non-existent except in the minds of global green activists who have managed to turn glyphosate into a killer chemical that causes cancer in humans and generally threatens life on earth, including (according to the Suzuki Foundation) North America’s Monarch butterfly. “It’s the asbestos of our generation,” said a Greenpeace activist.

For 40 years, glyphosate has helped feed the planet

A Google search under the single word “glyphosate” produces thousands of hits that portray the weed-controlling chemical as a global scourge. Despite scores of reports and regulatory conclusions that glyphosate is not carcinogenic, international green chemo-phobic activists — who are philosophically opposed to most of human existence within nature — have managed to twist public opinion through a constant barrage of fabricated alarmism.

Junk science occurs when scientific facts are distorted, risk is exaggerated and the science adapted and warped by politics and ideology to serve another agenda. The activists’ campaign is the main reason the European Commission is

even considering a ban on Monsanto's invention. It's effectiveness in improving crop production and reducing farmer effort and costs is beyond dispute. So is the evidence that the chemical does not pose a cancer risk to humans.

From around the world, the conclusions have been the same:

- Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency, April 2017: "Glyphosate is not genotoxic and is unlikely to pose a human cancer risk.
- A 2016 UN Food and Agriculture Organization/World Health Organization expert panel on pesticide residues in food and the environment: "In view of the absence of carcinogenic potential in rodents at human-relevant doses and the absence of genotoxicity by the oral route in mammals, and considering the epidemiological evidence from occupational exposures, the meeting concluded that glyphosate is unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans via exposure from the diet.
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2016: "For cancer descriptors, the available data and weight-of-evidence clearly do not support the descriptors 'carcinogenic to humans', 'likely to be carcinogenic to humans', or 'inadequate information to assess carcinogenic potential'."
- A report from the European Union's Chemicals Agency Risk Assessment Committee (RAC), March 2017: "RAC concluded that the available scientific evidence did not meet the criteria to classify glyphosate as a carcinogen, as a mutagen or as toxic for reproduction.

There's more, but the conclusions are all the same ... except for one. In Lyons, France, another UN organization — the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) — produced a rogue report in 2015 that claimed there is "limited evidence of carcinogenicity in humans for non-Hodgkin lymphoma" and that glyphosate is therefore "probably" carcinogenic to humans.

There is more, but the conclusions are all the same

No other regulator has agreed with IARC, an agency that has also claimed bacon, coffee and red meat are "probably carcinogenic to humans." Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency said IARC's glyphosate conclusions failed to take into account "the level of human exposure, which determines the actual risk.

As for the level of human exposure and the actual risk, Matt Ridley, writing in the London Times, noted that Ben and Jerry's ice cream was recently found to contain glyphosate at a concentration of up to 1.23 parts per billion. "At that rate," said Ridley, "a child would have to eat more than three tonnes of ice cream every day to reach the level at which any health effect could be measured.

More damaging to the IARC conclusions are two investigative reports from Reuters. One, earlier this month, showed that IARC had edited out or dismissed studies that showed no glyphosate cancer link. Another, last June, showed that a U.S. scientist neglected to provide IARC with research that cleared glyphosate.

When it comes to the media, no claim is too extreme or wildly speculative

So far IARC's research failures have failed to deter green populist agitators and media that continue to portray the glyphosate risks as a genuine debate. Greenpeace, the Suzuki Foundation, Equiterre, Environmental Defence and the other regulars on the scaremongering beat have been using IARC's fringe conclusions to discredit others.

When it comes to the media, no claim is too extreme or wildly speculative. In August, Bruce Livesey, an "investigative reporter" with Vancouver's eco-propagandist National Observer website, wrote a typical bit of scaremongerism. He quoted a pair of activist "scientists" (one is a computer engineer) who wrote papers "conjecturing that, based on its chemical makeup, glyphosates could be responsible for increased rates of obesity, heart disease, dementia, autism, cancer, Parkinson's and other chronic diseases." One of the scientists also claimed to see a link between the chemical and increasing incidence of concussions.

That's the kind of information that finds its way into the Google line-up and foments popular political activity, which in some European countries, especially France and Germany, runs high. Adoption of a ban could severely put global agriculture and food trade — and EU food production—at risk. No wonder some countries want out of Europe.