



TACTIC 3: Cultivating Third-Party Allies

“The key will be keeping Monsanto in the background so as not to harm the credibility of the information.”

Eric Sachs, Monsanto

As pressure mounted in the European Union to ban glyphosate in the wake of the IARC 2015 cancer ruling, members of a new group called **Freedom to Farm** began appearing at agricultural events and farmers’ markets across Europe. Marketing itself as a grassroots effort led by farmers, the group warned of the “threat to farming” posed by restricting the use of glyphosate. But Freedom to Farm was not the grassroots uprising it purported to be. Monsanto’s name did not appear anywhere on Freedom to Farm materials, yet the operation was fully staffed and supported by PR firms working for the company. An [“intelligence report”](#) prepared for Monsanto by the PR firm FleishmanHillard, reveals the scope of the operation: 39.5 full-time equivalent staff from four PR firms were promoting “Freedom to Farm” in seven countries. And that was not all: “In addition to the campaign team,” the report noted, “56 trained operatives are supporting the on-site recruiting process for grassroots.”²⁴²

PR firm **FleishmanHillard**, the document noted, was also buying URLs and developing websites on the Freedom to Farm theme and working with research partners across Europe to

produce papers on additional topics, including economic impact studies and research to pitch glyphosate as a climate solution.

Astroturf groups and other third-party allies

Freedom to Farm was a classic “astroturf” operation, an effort that appears to be led by grassroots groups when it is actually an industry PR construct. The Monsanto-funded PR operation was run by **Red Flag Consulting**, a Dublin-based political firm, with help from the U.S. political consulting agency **Lincoln Strategy Group**, according to a [2019 investigation](#) by *Unearthed*, the investigative wing of Greenpeace.²⁴³ Red Flag counts among its clients²⁴⁴ the tobacco giant British American Tobacco. Lincoln Strategy Group has been exposed for numerous stealth PR campaigns, including Protect America’s Consumers, a secretive group tied to the Koch brothers.²⁴⁵ The group spent more than \$130,000 on TV and radio ads attacking the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, according to Politico.²⁴⁶ Founders of the Lincoln Strategy Group have also been linked to suspected voter²⁴⁷ fraud and political bribery.²⁴⁸



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FH Glyphosate Campaign Weekly Intelligence Report
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Dashboard

- Current campaign team EFT of **39.5** (addition to MON staff; slight increase to reflect Publicis in France and .5 additional staff in Brussels)
 - Twenty one active employees in FH country level teams in Brussels (5.5), France (4.5), Germany (3.5), Italy (3), UK (3.5) and Poland (1)
 - Two and a half EFT employees from Llorente & Cuenca in Spain
 - Nine EFT Red Flag employees across grassroots (5) and climate change (4). An additional Red Flag employee is expected to join to support grassroots by the end of the year.
 - Seven core EFT Lincoln employees managing grassroots campaigns

Monsanto’s [“Freedom to Farm”](#) astroturf operation had 39.5 full time employees plus 56 “trained operatives” in the field recruiting farmers to oppose glyphosate restrictions.

Ultimately, the EU did not ban glyphosate; it extended authorization of the chemical to the end of 2022, then delayed the decision again to 2023.²⁴⁹ Red Flag’s promotional materials, Unearthed noted, boasts how the firm “won the single-biggest regulatory and public affairs campaign in the European Union,” using “non-traditional allies.”²⁵⁰ While Red Flag did not name Freedom to Farm and its campaign to protect glyphosate, that’s the implication: “Red Flag leveraged these efforts on identified targets through media and direct engagement to ultimately change votes in a key committee in Brussels to bring about a win for our client.”²⁵¹

The PR machine behind Freedom to Farm is just one example of how companies use third-party allies to push messaging that seems like it’s coming from independent sources. Internal Monsanto documents make clear that the company relied on a wide range of such third-party allies to disseminate its messaging on glyphosate. While many of these industry allies present themselves to the public as independent authorities on pesticides and GMOs, the documents tie their messaging — and in many cases their funding — back to Monsanto.

Taxonomy of Third-Party Allies

- **Astroturf groups** — seemingly led by grassroots activists when they’re actually an industry PR construct;
- **Front groups** — presented as neutral, or as serving the public interest, that actually serve a company of industry and whose funding is often opaque or hidden;
- **Industry spin groups** — run by PR firms of funded by industry groups that disclose their industry funding but do not make clear their purpose as PR and lobbying arms of industry;
- **Science spin and lobby groups** — industry-funded organizations conducting or promoting science to assist with corporate lobbying;
- **Professional associations** — groups that receive funding from industry and/or offer industry executives positions of leadership.

“Put your words in somebody else’s mouth.”

PR executive Merryl Rose describes the third-party strategy

The tactic of using third-party allies dates back to the dawn of the public relations industry at the turn of the last century and Edward Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud. Long considered the father of modern-day public relations, Bernays worked for various political and corporate interests to shift public opinion in ways that often left the public unaware they were being influenced, or nudged, at all. In one of his earliest campaigns, Bernays hired a team of doctors in 1913 to promote the benefits of bacon for breakfast. Bernays did not disclose that the doctors he hired were paid by the pork industry. As historian Alan Brandt noted about Bernays’ work, “the best public relations work left no fingerprints.”²⁵²

“Put your words in somebody else’s mouth,” is how Merryl Rose, an executive at the PR firm Porter Novelli, sums up this third-party strategy.²⁵³ Monsanto’s internal documents provide a rare window into how the company moved its product-defense messaging through many mouths — and name many of the third party allies the company relied on. The reach and influence of these industry allies — and the powerful false impression of independence they create — cannot be overstated. They are an industry unto themselves; an entire sector of the economy devoted to efforts to convince the public and policy makers to accept Monsanto’s spin, and the pesticide industry more broadly.

“(T)he best public relations work left no fingerprints.

Historian Alan Brandt

The PR Firms Behind the Scenes

The years 2013 and 2014 brought a noticeable uptick in pesticide industry defense efforts, as new writers, speakers, and groups emerged, and existing ally groups accelerated their output. The timing was no coincidence, and no mystery: In spring 2013, a few months after California voters narrowly defeated a ballot initiative to label genetically engineered foods, the pesticide industry announced a new PR offensive to rehabilitate the image of its embattled GMO and pesticide products. Monsanto selected PR firm **FleishmanHillard** to “reshape” its reputation amid “fierce opposition” to GMO foods, according to the *Holmes Report*.²⁵⁴ FleishmanHillard also became the PR agency of record for Bayer.²⁵⁵

In 2013, the **Council for Biotechnology Information (CBI)** — a trade group funded by Bayer, Corteva (formerly DowDuPont), Syngenta, and BASF — hired **Ketchum** to lead the GMO Answers campaign, a marketing and PR effort to promote GMOs and pesticides using the voices of academics (discussed in Tactic 5). **FTI Consulting**, along with **Red Flag** and **Lincoln Strategy Group**, are also identified in Monsanto documents and news reports as key players in Bayer and Monsanto’s efforts to defend glyphosate from cancer concerns.

All these PR firms have histories of using covert tactics to defend polluting industries, including working for tobacco and oil companies. In the 1980s, for example, FleishmanHillard helped convert a tiny air ventilation company into the Healthy Buildings Institute, a promotional group that received hundreds of thousands of dollars from tobacco industry lobbyists “to spread the message that secondhand smoke was a symptom, not a cause, of indoor air pollution,” *Washington Post* reported.²⁵⁶ FleishmanHillard also used espionage tactics against public health and tobacco control advocates, sending industry spies to conferences and secretly tape recording sessions despite explicit instructions from conference organizers not to do so, according to a study by Ruth Malone in the *American Journal of Public Health*.²⁵⁷

Ketchum — owned by the same parent company, **Omnicom**, as FleishmanHillard — also did work for the tobacco industry and has a history of subterfuge.²⁵⁸ The firm was

once involved in an espionage operation conducted against environmental groups that opposed hazardous chemicals and GMOs, according to leaked documents reported in 2008 by James Ridgeway in *Mother Jones*.²⁵⁹ The documents establish that Beckett Brown International (BBI), a private security firm that worked extensively with Ketchum, “spied on Greenpeace and other environmental organizations from the late 1990s through at least 2000, pilfering documents from trash bins, attempting to plant undercover operatives within groups, casing offices, collecting phone records of activists, and penetrating confidential meetings,” *Mother Jones* reported. That Ketchum was using BBI’s services to craft PR campaigns for its client Dow Chemical is established by an [August 1999 “intelligence analysis”](#) from BBI that Ketchum shared with its “Dow Global Trends Tracking Team.”²⁶⁰ The document details the internal plans and budgets for environmental and health groups that were trying to clean up polluted areas and reduce toxic chemical exposures from Dow products — information that, according to the memo, was “supplied by confidential sources and should be used with great discretion.”

FTI Consulting, another firm that worked with Monsanto and Bayer to spin the glyphosate story, is known as a key player in oil and gas industry efforts to discredit climate change science. The firm “drove influence campaigns nationwide for Big Oil,” the *New York Times* reported in 2020.²⁶¹ FTI’s work for Monsanto, according to [internal company documents](#), included trying to discredit Carey Gillam’s book about Monsanto’s herbicide business.²⁶² And in May 2019, an employee of FTI Consulting was caught [posing as a freelance journalist](#) at a federal Roundup cancer trial in San Francisco.²⁶³ The employee, Sylvie Barak, claimed to work for the BBC as she chatted with reporters and suggested story angles.^{264, 265} It was not the first time FTI staff were caught pretending to be journalists. As the Climate Docket reported, in January 2019, two FTI Consulting employees “posed as journalists in an attempt to interview an attorney representing Colorado communities that are suing Exxon for climate change-related damages.”²⁶⁶ FTI Consulting also has a long history of working with the tobacco industry, according to the Tobacco Control Research Group.²⁶⁷

Monsanto's many partners

To give a sense of the scope of these third-party efforts, we analyzed the publicly available financial records of seven of the groups named as key allies in Monsanto documents detailing company efforts to defend glyphosate-based Roundup herbicides:²⁶⁸

1. Academics Review
2. American Council for Science and Health (ACSH)
3. Center for Food Integrity (CFI) and the Foundation for Food Integrity
4. GMO Answers/Council for Biotechnology Information (CBI)

5. International Food Information Council (IFIC) and Foundation
6. Science Literacy Project/Genetic Literacy Project
7. Sense About Science

(In addition to these seven non-profit organizations, other specific groups named in the documents we reviewed include Biofortified, Inc., Global Farmer Network, and the Science Media Centre; these groups are not included in our financial analysis due to the lack of publicly available IRS 990 financial disclosures.)

Figure 5: Expenses of Key Third-Party Allies Named in Monsanto Glyphosate Defense Documents

Non-Profit Organizations	2015-2019
Academics Review	\$577,060
American Council on Science and Health	\$8,569,186
Center for Food Integrity	\$14,889,183
Foundation for Food Integrity	\$594,050
GMO Answers / Council for Biotechnology	\$22,687,700
International Food Information Council	\$19,376,743
International Food Information Council Foundation	\$4,694,134
Science Literacy Project/Genetic Literacy Project*	\$2,967,614
Sense About Science	\$1,773,888
	\$76,129,558

Trade Groups	2015-2019
American Chemistry Council	\$622,391,307
American Soybean Association	\$5,159,738
Biotechnology Innovation Organization	\$408,207,588
CropLife America	\$82,541,996
Consumer Brands Association**	\$144,791,582
National Corn Growers Association	\$108,224,267
	\$1,371,316,478

	2015-2019
Total Expenses for Key Trade Groups, Front Groups, and Other Key Third-Party Allies	\$1,447,446,036

*Until 2014 was filing as Statistical Assessment Service

**Known as Grocery Manufacturers Association until 2019

All expenses are pulled from publicly available IRS Form 990s. Where fiscal year doesn't follow the calendar year, the reporting uses the end month of the calendar year.

Based on the available data, these third-party, non-profit organizations Monsanto tapped for glyphosate defense spent more than \$76.1 million during the five-year period, starting the year of the IARC ruling, 2015, through 2019. (See Appendix I).

Well-resourced industry trade associations are also named in key Monsanto internal documents to be tapped for glyphosate defense. These include:

1. **Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO)**
2. **CropLife America (CLA)**
3. **Consumer Brands Association (CBA), formerly Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA)**
4. **National Corn Growers Association (NCGA)**
5. **American Soybean Association (ASA)**
6. **American Chemistry Council and its Campaign for Accuracy in Public Health Research (CAPHR)**

Together, these trade associations spent a total of \$1.37 billion over this same five-year period, advancing their sector's agenda, including the defense of pesticides like glyphosate. (Along with these five trade associations, the documents also named CropLife International (CLI) and the European Crop Protection Association (ECPA), whose budgets are not included in these totals).

While some of these expenses may be duplicative because, as we discuss, some of these trade groups have funded some of these non-profit initiatives, it is still worth remarking on the scale of these expenses. Combined, from 2015 to 2019, seven of the non-profit groups and six of the trade groups named in Monsanto PR documents pertaining to glyphosate defense spent over \$1.45 billion on total operations, including on marketing, advertising, lobbying, and advocacy — work that has helped shape the narratives informing regulations of pesticides and biotech seeds, most of which as of this writing are genetically modified with the trait for glyphosate resistance.

While glyphosate defense is only part of the budgets of these organizations — in some cases a small part — the size of their budgets, taken together, conveys what a huge industry this sector and these trade associations are. These budgets reflect the resources available to be marshaled for promoting and lobbying to deregulate the chemical-intensive farming practices and ultra-processed food products at the heart of our industrial food chain.

Deploying partners to protect Roundup

To explore how these third-party allies engaged in the spin around glyphosate-based herbicides, we reviewed documents that lay out the network of organizations the company tapped, particularly in response to IARC's classification of glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen.²⁶⁹ In a confidential memo from February 23, 2015, a month before IARC issued its report, Monsanto described its "[preparedness and engagement plan](#)." The company's goal? "Protect the reputation and FTO [freedom to operate] of Roundup" and "provide cover for regulatory agencies."²⁷⁰ To push back against the IARC cancer classification, the plan assigned more than 20 Monsanto staffers to a range of jobs including: "neutralize impact of decision," "ensure MON POV [Monsanto Point of View]" and "lead voice" on "outrage" over the IARC decision.

The memo named four tiers of "industry partners" that could disseminate the company's messaging:

1. trade groups like CropLife with ties to powerful Washington DC lobby groups with success in blocking policy and regulation;
2. "science" groups that claim to be independent from corporate interests, though the documents clearly tie their strategies and messaging to Monsanto;
3. "consumer trust" groups funded by food and pesticide companies that work to convince consumers to accept processed foods and pesticides;
4. groups representing industrial corn and soy growers.

2. Inform / Inoculate / Engage Industry Partners

- Develop a “toolkit” containing key information and resources
 - Identify any message shortcomings and address through updates to monsanto.com/glyphosate-and through US and EU blog posts
- Work with RPSA, Stakeholder Outreach Team, Industry Affairs, Government Affairs, US Business, Global CE and Regulatory teams, etc. to engage industry partners
 - Tier 1: Crop Life International / European Crop Protection Association / GMO Answers / BIO – identify committees that are best to engage
 - Tier 2: Academics (AgBioChatter), Biofortified, Sense About Science, Genetic Literacy Project, Academics Review
 - Tier 3: Alert food companies via Stakeholder Engagement team (IFIC, GMA, CFI) for “inoculation strategy” to provide early education on glyphosate residue levels, describe science-based studies versus agenda-driven hypotheses
 - Tier 4: Inoculate key grower associations

Monsanto’s PR plan for the IARC glyphosate report named four tiers of “industry partners” the company planned to engage in its efforts to “protect Roundup.”

In the following section, we describe some of the strategies and groups named in these internal documents and showcase the range of tactics Monsanto used to spin its messaging about the safety of glyphosate and GMO seeds designed to tolerate the chemical. While these examples relate specifically to glyphosate, they are common pesticide industry defense strategies.

Cooking up an academic front group

“Organics Exposed!” “Organic Industry Booming by Deceiving Consumers,” and “Tyranny of the Organic Mommy Mafia” — these headlines appeared in 2014 among a spate of articles criticizing the organic food industry. Many of them linked back to a report written by Dr. Bruce Chassy of **Academics Review**.²⁷¹ Several years earlier, Bruce Chassy was preparing to retire as a professor at the University of Illinois when he teamed up with Dr. David Tribe of the University of Melbourne to launch Academics Review. Described as a “non-profit led by independent academic experts” the group claimed to accept no corporate funds.²⁷² That 2014 report attacking the organic industry underscored such independence, noting “no conflicts of interest associated with this publication.”²⁷³

Internal Monsanto documents tell a different story: They reveal Academics Review was

established with backing from Monsanto and other leading pesticide firms. Tax records also show that most of the funding for Academics Review came from the Council for Biotechnology Information (CBI), a trade group of pesticide firms. Between 2014-2016, CBI donated \$650,000 to Academics Review,²⁷⁴ more than 80 percent of the organization’s spending in those years. (\$790,000 in reported expenses).²⁷⁵

“Where should we send future gifts ‘in support of biotechnology outreach’ by the university?”

Monsanto’s Eric Sachs to Bruce Chassy

Emails obtained by U.S. Right to Know revealed the maneuvering to set up Academics Review as a corporate front group, promoting industry messaging from behind a mask of independence. In [a series of emails from March 2010](#), Chassy discusses the concept for Academics Review with Jay Byrne, Monsanto’s former director of corporate communications.²⁷⁶ Byrne compared the idea for Academics Review with the Center for Consumer Freedom, a front group that Byrne said “has cashed in on this to the extreme and I think we have a much better concept.” (The

Center for Consumer Freedom is directed by Rick Berman, a lobbyist who has been called the “king of corporate front groups” for his work promoting the interests of tobacco and restaurant industries, among many others.)²⁷⁷

The emails suggest Academics Review had a clear role to play for the industry’s communication needs: discrediting critics of GMOs and pesticides. In one email, Byrne told Chassy that he was developing an “‘opportunities list’ with targets” comprised of people and groups critical of agricultural biotechnology. The targets, Byrne noted, would attract money from “a range of well-heeled corporations.” He offered that he and Val Giddings, the former Vice President of the BIO trade group, could serve as “commercial vehicles to connect these entities [corporations] with the project in a manner which helps to ensure the credibility and independence (and thus value) of the primary contributors/ owners.”²⁷⁸

Monsanto’s involvement with Academics Review is documented in these internal emails. In an [email later that year](#), Chassy communicated with Monsanto’s Eric Sachs about setting up a non-profit “to facilitate fundraising.”²⁷⁹ Sachs told Chassy that his colleagues at Monsanto could “help motivate” the industry trade organization to support the effort. Sachs noted, “The key will be keeping Monsanto in the background so as not to harm the credibility of the information.” Chassy responded, “I think we are on the same page.”²⁸⁰

In February 2015, when Monsanto needed help defending glyphosate, the company named Academics Review among the “industry partners” it planned to engage. And Academics Review joined the chorus of messengers trying to downplay cancer concerns, with a March 2015 post that gave the IARC report a failing grade of “F.”²⁸¹

In 2015, *The New York Times* published a story about the ties between Chassy, Academics Review, and Monsanto.²⁸² As of this writing, the Academics Review website last published content three days before that story broke; its website still claims no conflicts of interest.²⁸³

‘Pro-science’ groups promote industry views

“We are funded mostly by readers like you,” claims the homepage of the pro-industry non-profit, the **American Council on Science and Health (ACSH)**. Founded in 1978, ACSH positions itself as a “pro-science consumer advocacy organization,” but internal documents reveal the organization’s significant corporate funding, including from the pesticide industry.²⁸⁴ A “consumer front organization for its business backers,” is how consumer advocate Ralph Nader has described ACSH. “It has seized the language and style of the existing consumer organizations, but its real purpose... is to glove the hand that feeds it.”²⁸⁵

[A leaked financial document](#),²⁸⁶ provided to *Mother Jones* in 2013, provides a rare window into how this spin works.²⁸⁷ The document describes ACSH’s plans to pitch its services to corporations for specific product-defense campaigns. For example, the document includes plans to ask food companies to fund a messaging campaign opposing GMO labeling, to court e-cigarette companies, and to pitch a project to the Vinyl Institute, which, the document notes, “previously supported [ACSH’s] chlorine and health report.” Among the group’s funders in 2012: Bayer CropScience, Syngenta, Coca-Cola, Chevron, and several leading tobacco companies.

“Each and every day, we work hard to prove our worth to companies such as Monsanto.”

Gil Ross, American Council on Science and Health

[Internal Monsanto documents](#) reveal that the company also tapped ACSH to help defend glyphosate. In early 2015, Monsanto executive Daniel Goldstein emailed ACSH’s Gil Ross with concerns that IARC would be assessing glyphosate at a time when both the EU and U.S. were reviewing reregistration of the chemical. Ross replied enthusiastically, noting that ACSH

Message

From: GOLDSTEIN, DANIEL A [AG/1000] [/O=MONSANTO/OU=NA-1000-01/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=527246]
Sent: 2/26/2015 8:08:31 PM
To: VICINI, JOHN L [AG/1000] [/O=MONSANTO/OU=NA-1000-01/cn=Recipients/cn=56908]; REYNOLDS, TRACEY L [AG/1000] [/O=MONSANTO/OU=Na-1000-01/cn=recipients/cn=133378]
CC: SACHS, ERIC S [AG/1000] [/O=MONSANTO/OU=NA-1000-01/cn=Recipients/cn=171736]
Subject: ACSH

While I would love to have more friends and more choices, we don't have a lot of supporters and can't afford to lose the few we have....

I am well aware of the challenges with ACSH and know Eric has valid concerns- so I can assure you I am not all starry-eyed about ACSH- they have PLENTY of warts- but:

You WILL NOT GET A BETTER VALUE FOR YOUR DOLLAR than ACSH:

They are working with us to respond if needed to IARC- Gil has asked for information feed.

Monsanto's Daniel Goldstein pitches his colleagues on funding the American Council on Science and Health.

was already engaged in a “full-court press” against IARC over the agency’s cancer rulings on pesticides, phthalates, and diesel exhaust.²⁸⁸ In an email to his Monsanto colleagues, Goldstein championed ACSH, writing, “While I would love to have more friends and more choices, we don’t have a lot of supporters and we can’t afford to lose the few we have...” To show how ACSH could be effective in shaping the discourse, Goldstein shared links to 53 blogs, two books, and a pesticide review he described as “EXTREMELY USEFUL” (emphasis in original). Goldstein acknowledged problems with ACSH’s reputation, writing, “I am well aware of the challenges with ACSH... I can assure you I am not all starry eyed about ACSH- they have PLENTY of warts- but: You WILL NOT GET A BETTER VALUE FOR YOUR DOLLAR than ACSH”.²⁸⁹ (emphasis in original).

Ross [defended Monsanto's investments](#) in ACSH, at one point confiding to Goldstein that “it does get frustrating at times when we feel as though we can’t count on the unrestricted support of a company like Monsanto — whose products and technologies are constantly vilified by activist groups but heralded by ACSH. Each and every day, we work hard to prove our worth to companies such as

Monsanto...”²⁹⁰ Later that same day, Goldstein informed Ross that Monsanto would send the donation. “Great news. Thanks Dan,” Ross responded. He then asked for information about IARC and glyphosate.²⁹¹ In the wake of these email exchanges, ACSH attacked the IARC report as “Glyphosate-Gate: IARC’s Scientific Fraud.”²⁹² ACSH’s president at the time, Hank Campbell, penned many more attacks on IARC and scientists who wrote critically about glyphosate and published them on his “Science 2.0” website.^{293,294,295}

ACSH, like Academics Review, is one of several groups identified in Monsanto documents as a third-party ally the company reached out to for its glyphosate defense needs. These groups, including **Sense About Science**, the **Science Media Centre**, and the **Genetic Literacy Project**, all promoted common messaging about glyphosate and pesticides more generally: downplaying or denying environmental and health concerns and arguing that glyphosate and other pesticide industry products do not need to be regulated.^{296, 297, 298} (In Tactic 4, we take a closer look at how these groups, especially the Genetic Literacy Project, played a key role in attacking the scientists who raised cancer concerns about glyphosate.)



Dr. Nina Fedoroff, second from right, appears at the ACSH press conference to promote their “junk science” book.

Connections Between Industry Front Groups and Academic Influencers

“Pro-science” spin groups that Monsanto tapped to defend glyphosate also have ties to each other. To give just one example: in 2011, the ACSH published a book by Jon Entine, who went on to found the Genetic Literacy Project. Entine’s book about “chemophobia” (the fear of chemicals) mounts an ardent defense of atrazine, a pesticide manufactured by Syngenta, one of ACSH’s funders at the time. [Internal documents show](#) that ACSH asked Syngenta in 2009 for \$100,000 — a grant “separate and distinct from the general operating support Syngenta has been so generously providing over the years” — to produce a “consumer friendly booklet” about atrazine.²⁹⁹ When asked about the documents, Entine told Tom Philpott at *Mother Jones* that he [had “no idea”](#) his publisher was funded by Syngenta.³⁰⁰

Entine had claimed for years that his own organization, Genetic Literacy Project, had no corporate funding, although its disclosures

suggested otherwise (see page 54). GLP now says it does accept corporate funding; tax records show that Bayer gave the group \$100,000 in 2020/2021. Another top donor was DonorsTrust, a leading funder of climate science denial efforts.³⁰¹

Academics have also helped elevate these front groups. In the photo above, Dr. Nina Fedoroff, a former president of the prestigious AAAS (second from right), appears at a press conference to promote the ACSH’s “Little Black Book of Junk Science.”³⁰² Appearing alongside her, to the left, are Dr. Angela Logomasini of the Competitive Enterprises Institute, a [group that disputes](#) the man-made causes of climate change; and Dr. Alan Moghissi, who served on the advisory board of a Phillip Morris front group that tried to discredit research about the harms of tobacco.³⁰³ Fedoroff also serves as a board member for the Genetic Literacy Project.

Rallying the food industry to defend pesticides

Another powerful third-party ally Monsanto used to defend glyphosate: the world's largest processed food companies. Internal documents show Monsanto's plan to use a "Stakeholder Engagement team" in the wake of the IARC ruling to help disseminate Monsanto's point of view to the food industry. The team was composed of two industry-funded spin groups — the **Center for Food Integrity** and the **International Food Information Council (IFIC)** — and the **Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA)**, the food industry's largest trade group. (The GMA rebranded itself as the Consumer Brands Association in 2020.) According to internal documents, the Stakeholder Engagement team could share Monsanto's "inoculation" strategy for food companies, emphasizing the low levels of glyphosate in food and framing the IARC cancer report as an "agenda-driven hypotheses" at odds with the "science-based studies" Monsanto preferred.³⁰⁴

IFIC's message about glyphosate, and pesticides in general, echoed Monsanto's narrative. In the wake of the IARC ruling, IFIC's "food insight" website offered product-defense blog entries including "Cutting Through the Clutter on Glyphosate"³⁰⁵ and "8 Crazy Ways They're Trying to Scare You About Fruits and Vegetables."³⁰⁶ IFIC advised women not to "freak out" about glyphosate, but rather "listen to the experts... the real experts." These "experts" promoted in IFIC blogs included Val Giddings, the former vice president of the BIO trade association who helped set up the



How IFIC messages to women. This image was removed from the IFIC website after USRTK wrote about it.

front group Academics Review; David Zaruk, a former pesticide industry lobbyist; and Keith Solomon, a toxicologist who had received funds from Monsanto for a paper that downplayed concerns about glyphosate's genotoxicity.³⁰⁷ (Some of the content and images in IFIC blogs, such as this image of a woman with a Post-It on her forehead, were removed or edited after U.S. Right to Know published a [fact sheet about IFIC](#) describing internal emails showing how the group works with corporations on product defense campaigns.)³⁰⁸

IFIC's product-defense messaging defending glyphosate is part of a broader effort to support the interests of the processed food, beverage and chemical companies that fund the group. A 2022 study co-authored by U.S. Right to Know found that IFIC is "central to promoting industry-favorable content in defense of products facing potentially negative press."³⁰⁹

In one resource, IFIC pushes the message that low levels of pesticide residues on food do not pose a health threat by pointing consumers to its "safe produce" calculator.³¹⁰ Consumers are invited to click on a type of food, for example strawberries, to learn that "a woman could consume 453 servings of strawberries in one day without any effect even if the strawberries have the highest pesticide residue recorded for strawberries by USDA."³¹¹ The analysis is based on a report funded by the **Alliance for Food and Farming**, a trade association that represents large conventional grower groups that rely on pesticides.³¹² Their messaging leaves out crucial context about how government safety standards fail to account for the long-term health risks of exposure to multiple pesticide residues found on fruits and vegetables sold in the U.S.³¹³ Scientists have raised concerns especially about the documented health risks of pesticides for children.³¹⁴ Groups like IFIC are well funded to produce messaging and materials designed to persuade the public that pesticides and chemical additives in food do not pose a health risk. Between 2013 and 2017, IFIC spent over \$22 million, according to tax forms filed with the IRS. Public disclosures show that its funders include Bayer CropScience, DowDuPont, Coca-Cola, and many processed food companies.³¹⁵

From previous research we know that negative perceptions of processed foods are deeply rooted and cut across all consumer demographics. For this reason, it is crucial that the benefits of food processing are communicated by credible individuals and organizations such as the IFIC Foundation. **If you are not a current supporter, please consider contributing the suggested \$10,000 voluntary contribution to the Foundation to support the *Understanding Our Food* initiative** to help further our work. Attached for your use internally is a new resource which illustrates the accomplishments and future deliverables of the initiative.

IFIC's Dave Schmidt solicits funds from corporate executives on the IFIC Board of Directors. Past supporters of the processed food promotional materials, he noted, included Bayer, DuPont, Dow and Monsanto.

Internal emails provide more details about how IFIC works with these funders. One email obtained by U.S. Right to Know reveals that IFIC solicited money from corporations to produce specific product-defense materials.³¹⁶ In April 2014, the group's CEO, Dave Schmidt, [emailed a long list](#) of corporate board members asking for \$10,000 contributions to update IFIC's "Understanding Our Food" initiative³¹⁷ to improve consumer views of processed foods. The email notes previous financial supporters included Bayer, Coca-Cola, Dow, Kraft, Mars, McDonalds, Monsanto, Nestle, PepsiCo, and DuPont.³¹⁸

Co-opting professional trade groups

Professional organizations for dieticians, beekeepers, food technologists, farmers, and other groups that represent fields with obvious — and sometimes not so obvious — pesticide industry connections have also been tapped to amplify pesticide industry messaging, including the defense of glyphosate. These groups sometimes receive funding from pesticide companies or include pesticide industry executives in positions of leadership on their boards or advisory councils.

Some professional groups spend enormous sums on direct marketing efforts that echo pesticide industry views. Commodity groups, such as corn and soy growers' associations, spend tens of millions each year on programs to defend and expand chemical-intensive corn and soy crops, nearly all of which are genetically modified to tolerate glyphosate in the U.S.³¹⁹ Just one of these groups that appears in Monsanto PR materials, the **National Corn Growers Association**, spent over \$108

million in five years. (See Appendix I.) To give a sense of state level spending, in 2017, groups representing corn growers in five Midwestern states (Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, North Carolina and South Dakota) spent over \$32 million. That Monsanto counted on these groups for glyphosate messaging support is noted in the company's response plan for the IARC ruling. In a section describing efforts to engage industry partners, the plan states: "inoculate key grower associations."³²⁰ In the wake of the IARC report, commodity groups issued press statements defending glyphosate and trying to preempt cancer concerns about other pesticides. For example, a June 2015 joint press release from the National Corn Growers' Association and the **American Soybean Association** — both named as third-party allies³²¹ in the Monsanto documents — accused IARC of creating "confusion and unnecessary fear amongst the public" and using "narrowly-focused data removed from real-world situations to find almost everything that it reviews as potentially carcinogenic."³²² The release also warned that IARC might raise cancer concerns about other widely used herbicides, including dicamba and 2,4-D. (A couple weeks after its IARC ruling, the cancer agency did issue a report on 2,4-D, classifying the widely used herbicide as a possible human carcinogen.³²³) For further information on IARC and its glyphosate report, the trade groups' joint press release links to a resource from **CropLife America**, the pesticide industry trade group.

Influencing journalism groups

Bayer also exerted influence over journalism groups, according to internal emails from 2018. The emails revealed [details of a sponsorship agreement](#) between Bayer and the U.S. arm

of the **Foreign Press Association (FPA)**.³²⁴ The agreement states that Bayer would be guaranteed that “selection of the honorary awardees for the Foreign Press Awards should not be contradictory to Bayer’s strategic communications plans and initiatives,” and that Bayer would be made “aware in advance about the honorees of the Foreign Press Awards.” The company was also promised the Association’s annual all-day forums for media professionals would be on topics “relevant to Bayer’s strategic communications goals and priority (for example agriculture, or any other issue that matter to Bayer)” and that Bayer could help identify “media influencers from the American and international community of journalists” to attend its two main cocktail parties each year. In addition, the Association offered to organize “three background briefings” with Bayer representatives and “selected members of the international and national press and online bloggers” to dive into “topics that fit in Bayer’s communications priorities and strategic goals.”³²⁵

While the FPA has since replaced the executive director behind these emails, and current leadership stands by the group’s independence, the internal emails indicate that there had been widespread support for this kind of industry influence. As the FPA’s executive director [shared](#) with his Bayer contacts in 2018: “I informed all Board Members of the FPA and the FPF [Foreign Press Foundation] about the dissatisfaction from Bayer that over the last couple of years the FPA didn’t deliver as much as it was expected given that Bayer was one of the major contributors of our programs. I got everyone from the two boards to agree that this situation won’t happen again and I got the full and exclusive authorization from our boards to work with you from my role on the initiatives I deployed in my previous emails and discussed over the phone with Chris [from Monsanto] for 2018, 2019 and 2020.”³²⁶

Using a prestigious scientific group to promote industry messaging

Another key industry strategy is to work with experts connected to groups that have the veneration of scientific impartiality. We see this in the way Monsanto used the branding of the

American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the world’s largest multidisciplinary scientific society, to advance its product-defense messaging.

To give one example of this, a 2015 op-ed for the *Guardian* opposing the U.S. Right to Know investigation into the pesticide industry’s ties with academic institutions, three former AAAS presidents touted their affiliation with the prestigious scientific organization, but not their industry ties.³²⁷ Nina Fedoroff, Peter Raven, and Phillip Sharp decried the public records research as “science denialism” and compared it to “Climate-gate,” in which climate scientists’ emails were illegally hacked — the same framing Monsanto front groups were pushing.³²⁸ Fedoroff was at that time a Senior Science Advisor at OFW Law,³²⁹ a lobbying firm whose clients included pesticide company Syngenta and a pesticide industry trade group. The *Guardian* later noted that conflict³³⁰ but failed to include those of her co-authors: Peter Raven was identified simply as Director Emeritus of the Missouri Botanical Garden. That group counts Monsanto among its “most generous benefactors”³³¹ and has a Monsanto Hall and a Monsanto Center with a Peter H. Raven Library.³³² Phillip Sharp, whom *MIT Technology Review* described as “the man who helped launch biotech,” is the co-founder of two multi-billion dollar biotech companies, Biogen and Alnylam Pharmaceuticals.³³³

“Appearing to be less than transparent is a really bad idea for the scientific community.”

[AAAS member scientists](#)

This was not the first time Fedoroff used her position with AAAS to aid Monsanto. In 2012, while Fedoroff was chair of the AAAS Board of Directors, the Board issued a statement opposing GMO labeling just weeks before California voters went to the polls to decide on the issue.³³⁴ The Board did not solicit input from the scientific society’s 120,000 members, and its statement contained inaccuracies and misleading assertions, according to long-standing AAAS members.^{335, 336} In a letter to

[Science magazine](#) AAAS-member scientists urged the Board to reconsider their anti-labeling statement; “appearing to be less than transparent,” they noted, “is a really bad idea for the scientific community.”³³⁷

More spin groups

There are many more spin groups associated with Monsanto and the pesticide industry than we can profile here. These include influential nonprofits such as the industry-funded **International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI)**, which funds studies helpful to industry and lobbies for industry interests around the world.³³⁸ The *New York Times* has described ILSI as “the most powerful food industry group you’ve never heard of.”³³⁹ An influential nonprofit called the Science Media Centre, partly funded by corporations, connects reporters with hand-picked experts that share industry views on breaking science stories involving controversial topics such as glyphosate, GMOs, aspartame, cell phones, and fracking.³⁴⁰ The model of influencing science reporting is “spreading around the world,”

as *Nature* reported in 2013.³⁴¹ Professional groups such as the **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**, the world’s largest organization of food and nutrition professionals, and many others receive funding from pesticide companies, have industry executives on their boards, and also provide helpful channels for industry communications.

The groups discussed in this section all appear in internal Monsanto documents or in the public record as neutral-appearing channels that are disseminating similar messaging: downplaying the risks of pesticides, ultra-processed foods and food additives, and working to create a powerful impression on journalists and the public: if all these groups are saying it, mustn’t it be true?

In the next section, we focus in on another key tactic Monsanto used to defend glyphosate: attacking the scientists and others who raised cancer concerns — and the groups Monsanto relied on to do it.

