

## Sale of progressive climate change data darling to 'Monsatan' stirs enviro fears

When Monsanto, which some environmentalists call [“the world's most evil corporation,”](#) announced last week that it was [buying](#) the [Climate Corporation](#), a company that supplies tera-bytes of climate information and insurance to farmers around the world, many of them claimed that Monsanto was now aiming to “profit off climate change.”

The Climate Corporation sells real-time weather data to farmers to help them better plan their harvests. They also sell insurance that can be instantly doled out based on weather data, so if a farmer's yield is damaged because of drought or other adverse weather, he or she can be immediately compensated for lost crops without the need to file a claim.

For Monsanto, this acquisition means an opportunity to sell services as well as seed. An article in [The Verge](#) described Monsanto's eagerness to get into a “farmer-support infrastructure” that could make it “even more pervasive in the US farmer's day-to-day operations.” Monsanto says that [“data science”](#) will be a \$20 billion market.

Because weather patterns are becoming more erratic due to climate change, Monsanto's vice president of global strategies Kerry Preete, said he [expects](#) to-the-second weather data is going to be highly valuable to farmers, increasing yields by 30 to 50 bushels. Monsanto is also [developing](#) drought-tolerant corn and [cotton](#) in response to the growing threat of climate change.

By locking up an innovative company like Climate Corporation, Monsanto is poised to secure its position as the leading seed company in the world—all of which worries activists who fear the size and influence of the St. Louis based corporation.

Many environmentalists were surprised that the Climate Corporation—known for its progressive philosophy and a darling in the environmentalist community—would agree to be acquired by a corporation that many critics mockingly call “Monsatan.”

The co-founder and CEO of the Climate Corporation, David Friedberg, wrote a letter to his employees methodologically laying out his reasoning for selling his company—and why he believes Monsanto gets an unfair rap. The letter was [published](#) with permission by Michael Specter, science writer for *New Yorker* magazine.

The purpose of the letter, Friedberg wrote, was to acknowledge that many employees have been “feeling assaulted” by friends and family for “joining up with Monsanto.” He wanted to make sure they had the “appropriate context and information needed to feel informed, comfortable and...excited” about partnering with Monsanto.

Friedberg tackled major misconceptions and exaggerated fears about new technologies in general, noting that many innovations are seen as evil at first.

*From Galileo to Servetus to Mendel to Einstein. Revolutionary science has always incited visceral hatred on a mass scale. Galileo told us that the Bible was wrong and he was chastised*

*for denying the word of God. Mendel was engaged in the devil's work. And Einstein "invented a weapon that killed millions" because of his original theories of physics.*

The fear that so many experience when faced with new technology often comes down to "innuendo, anecdotal evidence, and out of context facts," Friedberg wrote, and are rooted in "the fear of the unknown."

*Calling a company evil is easy. And if you do it enough times it can become the "reality"—because reality is just the most common perception. Say something enough times and everyone thinks it's the truth.*

He addressed concerns about Monsanto, which many liberals believe to be [uniquely evil](#). The more research he did, Friedberg wrote, the more he was "amazed at how far these inaccurate statements had gone and how wrong so many people were" about the company.

Many anti-Monsanto activists harp on the fact that Monsanto was involved in the development of Agent Orange, a defoliant that was linked with severe health problems when used during the Vietnam War. Since then, however, Monsanto has been involved in agricultural technology (Friedberg does not mention Monsanto's patented Round-Up herbicide, which uses glyphosate as the active ingredient).

*The Monsanto of today is a conglomerate of seed companies that were acquired in the 1990s and 2000s, bundled together, and spun out as a separate company. This new agriculture company was formed to incorporate new science and technology in the development of seed, providing farmers with the ability to create more food with less land, water, and chemicals than had been previously possible.*

Monsanto's biggest mistake, Friedberg wrote, was that its executives decided against changing the name of the company when they became an agriculture company. To this day, anti-Monsanto activists still invoke the Agent Orange connection as ["evidence"](#) that Monsanto is "evil."

Friedberg stressed that he himself is an activist who holds environmental responsibility in the highest degree, and so he proceeded with extreme caution in exploring whether this sale made ethical sense.

*I am not the kind of person that would take easily to partnering with a company that "poison's the world's food system", lays waste to the land, puts farmers out of business, or creates a monoculture that threatens the global food supply. I make decisions as a scientist. Since I was a kid, I've loved science, and believe that truth in the world comes from science. So, I have allowed myself to be informed by science and fact as I have explored this partnership opportunity for The Climate Corporation.*

Friedberg also explained the nuts and bolts of the deal, stressing that his employees "do not work for Monsanto." He noted that when discussing the potential deal with Monsanto executives, they made it clear that the seed company could learn a lot from the Climate Corporation, which would operate as an

independent body. Friedberg will be a member of the executive committee at Monsanto, which he believes will allow him to “help lobby for resources and data [the Climate Corporation] may want.”

*I will ensure we get the resources we need to exceed our wildest aspirations—from developing our own satellite and radar systems to opening new engineering offices to launching in new markets. We should aim to be aggressive, impactful, and revolutionary in our science.*

The Climate Corporation, formerly known as Weatherbill, was founded by Friedberg and a former Google colleague Siraj Khaliq in 2006. Formerly with Google, Friedberg was a major player in identifying and leading several of Google’s largest acquisitions. The acquisition is costing Monsanto \$930 million.

**Additional Resources:**

- [“Why the Climate Corporation sold itself to Monsanto,”](#) New Yorker
- [“5 ways Monsanto wants to profit off climate change,”](#) Mother Jones
- [“Monsanto Buys Climate Corp For \\$930 Million,”](#) Forbes