

How Bayer-Monsanto merger might impact research efforts to find alternatives to the herbicide glyphosate

Approval of the mega deal in Europe comes in the wake of similar decisions in South Africa, Brazil and China. The last big hurdle for the deal is the U.S., where there is the extra challenge of weighing up the effects of the merger on the country's genetically modified food market.

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A huge fear among environmentalists was that Bayer would no longer be motivated to find an alternative to the controversial pesticide glyphosate once it decided to acquire Monsanto. Glyphosate, which activists argue is a risk to human health and biodiversity, is the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup, one of the world's blockbuster herbicides.

To combat the glyphosate problem, the Commission has not only told Bayer to divest its rival product to glyphosate, known as glufosinate, to BASF, but is also forcing it to sell all of its research looking into finding an alternative. BASF, which currently sells no product like glyphosate, will now become a player in this market.

This new role for BASF is significant as the drive to replace glyphosate in Europe is picking up steam after the EU agreed to renew its license in Europe for another five years in November last year. France, Italy and Germany have all said glyphosate should be phased out once a healthier and more environmentally friendly alternative comes online.

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