

Ban glyphosate? Environmental chemist debunks ‘flawed’ case against Bayer’s herbicide

Contrary to sensational media reports and class actions, global regulators consider glyphosate not to be carcinogenic. Consequences could be dire if market forces dictate its phase-out

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Since 1974, a very large body of quality-controlled evidence on glyphosate has been critically reviewed by specialist scientists None of these studies shows a significant causal link between glyphosate and cancer.

[Editor’s note: Ivan Kennedy is Professor Emeritus in Agricultural & Environmental Chemistry, Institute of Agriculture, University of Sydney.]

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World agriculture will resist attempts to restrict the use of glyphosate. However, market forces in trade may dictate that glyphosate will be phased out, whether by government decree or from commercial decisions.

This would be a very frustrating outcome, given the huge intellectual and financial investment in this successful technology and the uncontrolled risk of negative consequences on human health from substitute herbicides.

So, what might be used instead? Substituting glyphosate with other less safe herbicides or even returning to mechanical control would be a huge backward step for productivity of farmers and safety in the environment. Substitutes will be more toxic and probably less effective, having to be used more often. Even if the precautionary principle is applied, it should retain the use of glyphosate because it is less harmful than any of the likely substitutes.

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