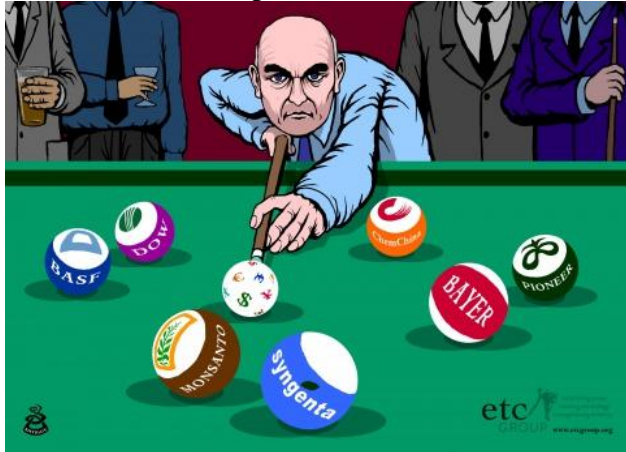


The Monsanto–Bayer tie-up is just one of seven; Mega-Mergers and Big Data Domination Threaten Seeds, Food Security

Policymakers could still block the agribiz mergers; peasants and farmers will continue the fight for seeds and rights

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Wednesday’s confirmation that Monsanto and Bayer have agreed to a \$66 billion merger is just the latest of four M&A announcements, but at least three more game-changing mergers are in play (and flying under the radar). The acquisition activity is no longer just about seeds and pesticides but about global control of agricultural inputs and world food security. Anti-competition regulators should block these mergers everywhere, and particularly in the emerging markets of the Global South, as the new mega companies will greatly expand their power and outcompete national enterprises. Four of the world’s top 10 agrochemical purchasing countries are in the global South and account for 28% of the world market.^[1] If some of these throw up barriers, shareholders will rebel against the deals regardless of decisions in Washington or Brussels.

“These deals are not just about seeds and pesticides, but also about who will control Big Data in agriculture,” says Pat Mooney of ETC Group, an International Civil Society Organization headquartered in Canada that monitors agribusiness and agricultural technologies. “The company that can dominate seed, soil and weather data and crunch new genomics information will inevitably gain control of global agricultural inputs – seeds, pesticides, fertilizers and farm machinery.”

Neth Daño, ETC’s Asia Director, continues, “Farmers and regulators should be watching out for the seventh M&A – John Deere and Company’s bid to merge its Big Data expertise with Monsanto-owned Precision Planting LLD. After the Bayer-Monsanto merger, it’s not clear whether Precision Planting will go to Deere and Co. or if Bayer will protect its future in agricultural data.” Daño, based in the Philippines, points out that “Deere started connecting its farm machinery to GPS in 2001 and since then has invested heavily in sensors that can track and adjust seed, pesticide and fertilizer inputs meter by meter. The company has 15 years of historic data as well as access to terabytes of other weather, production and market data. Quite literally,

<http://www.etcgroup.org/content/monsanto-bayer-tie-just-one-seven-mega-mergers-and-big-data-domination-threaten-seeds-food>

Deere and the other farm machinery companies (the top three account for half of the world market) own the box in which the other input enterprises have to dump their products. That means Deere also owns the information.”

Silvia Ribeiro, Director of ETC’s Latin American office, agrees that the latest news confirming Monsanto agreement has “created alarm throughout Latin America and raised big concerns about increased input prices, more privatization of research and huge pressure from these Giant companies to make laws and regulations in our countries that allow them to dominate markets, crush farmers’ rights and make peasant seeds illegal.”

Although the mergers will be contested at the national level around the world, Neth Daño in the Philippines and Silvia Ribeiro in Mexico see the battle moving to a number of international fora in the weeks and months ahead. Daño will be in Indonesia **September 27 – 30** when governments, farmers’ organizations and civil society meet to discuss Farmers Rights as part of a legally binding treaty intended to guarantee farmers access and use of seed. “This is an international seed meeting that can’t avoid addressing these mergers,” she asserts. “The hottest topic on the agenda is a Big Data proposal for seeds being pushed by the companies.”

October 17 – 21, Pat Mooney and Silvia Ribeiro will be in Rome attending the UN’s Committee on World Food Security. “Virtually all of the world’s governments, farmer organizations and many agribusinesses companies will be in the same room for a week, with food security on the official agenda. There are going to be a lot of angry people there wanting to stop these mergers,” Ribeiro insists.

December 4–17, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity will be meeting in Mexico where agricultural biodiversity issues are on the agenda. The Convention is famously proactive on seed issues having already set a moratorium against Terminator seeds (seeds genetically modified to die at harvest time forcing farmers to purchase new seeds every growing season) and, as well, a protocol on the trans-boundary movement of transgenic seeds and another protocol that will soon enter into force related to loss and damages caused by GM contamination. When it meets in December, it will debate the risks of a suite of new plant breeding technologies described as “extreme genetic engineering” (synthetic biology) which is much favoured by all the companies now merging as a strategy to sidestep biotech regulations. “Wherever these companies go in the next few months, they are going to have a fight on their hands,” says Silvia Ribeiro.

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