

# Argentina: 'When We Speak of Greed, We Speak of Monsanto'

by Cynthia R. Rush

In an action that Argentina's Agriculture Secretary has characterized as "extortion" and "abuse," European authorities have, over the course of 2006, confiscated four shipments of Argentine soy flour in three Spanish and one British port, acting on orders of the biotechnology giant, Monsanto. Beginning in June of 2005, the giant multinational began suing European importers of the soy flour, alleging patent infringement and violation of intellectual property rights, because Argentina won't pay royalties on the use of the multinational's genetically-modified Roundup Ready (RR) soy gene.

Despite the fact that RR technology *is not patented in Argentina*, Monsanto is retroactively demanding payment of \$15 for each ton of exported soy flour, because it contains the RR strain. The company has vowed to continue confiscating shipments until an agreement is reached. Argentina's Agriculture, Cattle, Fishing, and Food Secretariat (SAGPyA), which operates under the aegis of the Finance Ministry, replied in a document that Monsanto's "thuggish" actions have "no legal or technical basis," and are tantamount to "extortion." Argentina currently exports 53% of its soy flour production to the European Union, largely for animal feed, for an annual income of almost \$2 billion.

This is not just a local dispute. Monsanto is a central figure in the synarchist financiers' scheme to globalize agriculture on behalf of international food cartels; and with good reason, American statesman Lyndon LaRouche has called for it to be thrown out of South America. Its promotion, over the past ten years of the "soy revolution" in nations such as Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and the United States, at the same time that free-trade policies were gutting these nations' productive capabilities, has produced nothing short of an agricultural catastrophe.

Roberto Requiao, governor of the Brazilian state of Paraná, told reporters in a June 2005 interview that Monsanto's monopolizing of agricultural production has reduced Brazil "to the situation of the Middle Ages, of vassals and feudal lords"—serfdom. This is the cartels' game, he said, one which has led him to ban the use of genetically modified seeds (GMOs) in Paraná.

## The British Plantation Model

The Argentine government of President Néstor Kirchner, and local producer organizations say they will not accept Monsanto's blackmail. On Feb. 1, SAGPyA representatives presented a *friend of the court* brief in a Dutch court as an interested party in the defense of soy flour importers being sued by Monsanto. SAGPyA has said it will take similar action in Danish and Spanish courts, if necessary.

One Argentine journalist likened Monsanto's actions to those of enraged bondholders who tried to seize Argentine assets after the country defaulted on its debt in 2001. The Confederation of Rural Associations of Buenos Aires and La Pampa (CARBAP), called on the government to seize all of Monsanto's assets in the country, and boycott its products. "When we speak of greed" a CARBAP statement noted, "we speak of Monsanto."

But it will take more aggressive action to defeat the fascist globalization schemes that have trapped these nations in the soy monoculture. The destruction of agricultural production in the region cries out for implementation of Lyndon LaRouche's New Bretton Woods development perspective.

Agronomist Alberto J. Lapolla wrote in a 2004 paper that, as a result of Monsanto's criminal activities, Argentine agriculture today looks the way the U.S. South might have looked had the British-backed Confederacy won the 1861-65 Civil War. Instead of the varied crops and beef it once produced for both domestic and foreign markets, the country today produces ever larger quantities of soy on enormous tracts of land owned by the food cartels, or their allied local agents. Argentina has returned to the agro-export *latifundio*, or Southern plantation model so admired by the British, LaPolla charges.

Monsanto began its invasion of Argentina in the early 1990s, abetted by President Carlos Menem's destruction of the productive economy through the International Monetary Fund's free-market, deregulation, and privatization policies. The corporation's promises of a "revolution" that would greatly increase productivity and exports, as well as address hunger problems, seemed like a good deal for an Argentina in desperate need of export revenue to pay its ballooning foreign debt.

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## Western Hemisphere Soybean Crop: 80% World Production, 90% World Exports



The paradise Monsanto promised turned out to be a deadly fraud. As the SAGPyA document points out, when Monsanto first introduced its RR technology in the country, it couldn't hand out its GMO seeds fast enough, often for free. It was only later that it began to retroactively demand royalties. It was more interested in marketing the herbicide glyphosate, to which RR itself is resistant, but which must be used to kill the weeds that otherwise threaten the plant. Over the past decade, Monsanto has reaped huge profits from glyphosate sales.

The number of hectares under soy cultivation skyrocketed, from 5.9 million in 1996 to almost 16 million today. Close to 98% of the soy produced is genetically modified, all of it Monsanto's Roundup Ready variety. Today, Argentina is the world's second largest soy producer after the United States. Soy has replaced wheat as Argentina's most important agricultural product, turning one of the world's premier food producers into a "soy republic."

As Argentina's Rural Reflection Group (GRR) observes, the "sustainable soy" campaign has also produced "an agriculture without farmers." The expansion of soy cultivation has displaced ever greater numbers of rural families, and the traditional crops they once produced. In the past 15 years,

close to 250,000 rural families have been driven out of farming, and into urban centers, unable to compete with large-scale industrial soy production.

The abandonment of mixed and rotation farming, has seriously degraded soil fertility, even in the famously fertile Argentine *pampas*. Deforestation and desertification are on the rise, as more non-agricultural lands are converted for soy production. In the agriculture-rich province of Santa Fe, deforestation of over one million hectares between 1994 and 2003 caused devastating floods. And the growth of weeds resistant to glyphosate has required increased use of pesticides, posing grave health threats to surrounding populations, and further degrading the soil.

The crime here is that Argentina can no longer feed its population. Basic staples that were once produced in the country, such as milk, now are imported from neighboring Uruguay. Between 1998 and 2003, the number of dairy farms in the country dropped by 50%. Rice, corn, wheat, and beef production has declined significantly. Monsanto is one of the chief financiers of the "Soy Solidarity" program for the poor, which replaces a diet based on animal protein (beef, dairy, eggs) with one almost exclusively based on soy. According to one expert, Argentines ate better in 1965 than they do today.

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## Documentation

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*This chronology is taken from "The State's Action Against Monsanto's Coercion," by the Agriculture, Cattle, Fishing and Food Secretariat of the Argentine Finance Ministry, issued on Feb. 15, 2006:*

**In March 2005**, [Agriculture] Secretary [Miguel] Campos met with U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns in Cartagena, and brought up the fact that abuse of patents causes uncertainty among importers, harming not only local producers, but the nation itself.

**In October of 2005**, Secretary [Campos] and Argentine Ambassador Remes Lenicov met with the European Union's Agriculture Commissioner Miriann Fisher Boel, to whom they presented the government's legal arguments regarding Monsanto's actions. Fisher Boel was surprised by the company's demands for retroactive [royalty payment], and added that according to European laws, Monsanto doesn't have the right to collect royalties on Argentine products. . . .

**On Feb. 1, 2006**, Argentina's Agriculture, Cattle, Fishing and Food Secretariat (SAGPyA) spoke before a Dutch court in the patent infringement suit brought by Monsanto against European importers of Argentine soy flour. From a procedural standpoint, the presiding judge accepted SAGPyA's presentation [as a friend of the court—ed.]. . . . Soon, a similar presentation will be made in Danish courts. . . .

**On Feb. 2,** Secretary Miguel Campos sent a formal note to the President of the National Commission for Defense of Competition, requesting that it take relevant action to characterize the multinational's conduct as abusive and contrary to the Defense of Competition Law No. 25,156.