



The Monsanto Company: Quest for Sustainability (B) (ABSTRACT)

1998: Trouble Brewing

For more than a decade, WRI's Sustainable Enterprise Program (SEP) has harnessed the power of business to create profitable solutions to environment and development challenges. BELL, a project of SEP, is focused on working with managers and academics to make companies more competitive by approaching social and environmental challenges as unmet market needs that provide business growth opportunities through entrepreneurship, innovation, and organizational change.

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The summer of 1998 proved to be critical to Monsanto's life sciences strategy as events forced the agbiotech debate to the forefront of public concern, particularly in Europe. Monsanto had planned some events to communicate the virtues of genetically modified (GM) crops and to operationalize the firm's sustainability goals. Other incidents surfaced independently.

The Monsanto Media Campaign

Monsanto's European ad campaign, criticized from the outset by rival European agbiotech firms for its probiotech bias, drew the ire of an already suspicious public. The Prince of Wales entered the debate with a statement in the London *Daily Telegraph* that crop biotechnology took humankind into realms that belonged to God alone. In Europe, the Rural Agriculture Foundation International (RAFT) reported that the Gaia Foundation, Action-Aid, and Greenpeace managed to draw more attention to Africa's opposition to the campaign than Monsanto received from its own publicity.¹