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Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing about the prevalence of the herbicide glyphosate in British bread. As I'm sure you're aware, glyphosate is one of the three pesticides regularly found in samples of British bread by the Defra Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF) routine testing for pesticides in food. Glyphosate occurs routinely in some crops from North America because of the use GM Roundup-ready crops, but no GM wheat is grown in North America.

In Europe Monsanto advises farmers to use Roundup (glyphosate) as a weed killer pre-harvest, to maximise the impact on weeds in cereal crops. Glyphosate is also used by British farmers as a desiccant pre-harvest, to ensure even ripening and a faster harvest. Advice to farmers is that glyphosate should only be used when wheat grains are hard and will not absorb the herbicide, but given the regular occurrence of glyphosate in bread, it is clear that current advice about application is inadequate to prevent British flour and bread being contaminated.

I'm sure you're also aware of the recent findings of the World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer, which concluded that 'glyphosate is probably carcinogenic to humans'.

Of course, the levels of glyphosate found in bread are below the Maximum Residue level (MRL) set by the EU. However, the MRL was set well before this latest determination by the IARC. In addition, the MRL for glyphosate has always been a matter of controversy, because, if glyphosate is an endocrine disrupter as some scientists suggest, there may be no safe lower level for human consumption. Whatever the MRL, research into public opinion shows that the presence of any chemicals in food is one of the main health concerns for consumers, especially those with children.

The Soil Association is holding a scientific briefing in London on 15 July on glyphosate and the new IARC findings, led by one of the scientists on the IARC panel. You will find more information and an invitation here. We would be delighted if you or one of your colleagues is able to attend.

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In the light of the World Health Organisation's IARC findings, and the continuing controversy around the world about the safety of glyphosate, I would be interested to know whether your business will be taking steps to ensure that none of the bread you sell contains glyphosate weedkiller.

Best wishes,

Peter Melchett
Policy Director