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

### 1998: Trouble Brewing

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 (RAFI) 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.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Grameen-Monsanto Joint Venture

The Grameen-Monsanto Technology Center, Monsanto's flagship developing-country partnership that was unveiled at the World Microcredit Summit in June 1998, never reached actualization. Upon returning to Bangladesh at the summit's conclusion, Grameen founder Mohammed Yunus was overwhelmed by hundreds of e-mail messages from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide claiming that his organization had become "a partner in the destruction of biodiversity and farmers' livelihoods"<sup>2</sup> (see **Exhibit 1**). The deluge of criticism and the threat of cuts in financial support forced Yunus to withdraw from the venture. The media and NGOs reported the partnership's failure as a rejection of Monsanto's biotech and industrial agriculture products.

#### Monsanto and the Terminator Patent

During the summer, NGOs revealed that Delta & Pine Land, Monsanto's newly announced acquisition target (the merger was awaiting Justice Department approval), had been issued a joint patent with the U.S. Department of Agriculture for a seed sterilization technology. Dubbed the "Technology Protection System" (TPS), it would render a crop's seeds sterile, thus preventing farmers from "pirating" a firm's genetic technology by merely replanting seed. RAFI coined the technology "the Terminator."



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