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Monsanto faces a surge in lawsuits following cancer ruling

American agro-chemicals company Monsanto is facing a surge in lawsuits that may cost its new owners, Bayer, billions in damages.

Last month it lost a \$289m (£225m) court case that alleged its products Roundup and RangerPro had led to a Californian man's terminal cancer.

5 The firm's shares have lost 11% of their value since it lost the case in a California court to groundskeeper Dewayne Johnson, who claimed Monsanto herbicides containing glyphosate, had caused his cancer.

10 Chief executive Werner Baumann said that when it bought Monsanto, Bayer "could not foresee the scope of the current lawsuits." The \$63bn deal was completed earlier this month.

Mr Baumann reiterated Bayer's stance that the court's verdict was not in line with the approach taken by regulators in the US and elsewhere, which allow the use of glyphosate-based weedkillers.

However, scientific opinion is divided.

15 The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency last September concluded that glyphosate is not likely to be carcinogenic to humans.

But the World Health Organization in 2015 classified glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic to humans."

Bayer said it will try to have the Californian verdict reversed.

20 Mr Bauman said the company would defend all the cases brought against Monsanto.

Liam Condon, head of Bayer's Crop Science division said: "Nothing whatsoever has changed in the regulatory status of the product. There is simply very high demand for glyphosate. It is an invaluable tool for growers."

25 Chief Financial Officer Wolfgang Nickl said that Bayer's next financial results, due next month, would set aside money for legal defence costs but not for any possible future damages.

Adapted from *www.bbc.co.uk*, August 23rd, 2018