

Has Zelensky sold off Ukraine's agriculture to US multinationals?

Monday 22 August 2022, by [PITT Bob](#) (Date first published: 8 August 2022).

According to a story doing the rounds on social media, Volodymyr Zelensky has sold 17 million hectares of his country's farmland to the companies Monsanto, DuPont and Cargill. It's fake news, as anyone who bothered to do a basic fact-check could easily find out. (For a start Monsanto [no longer exists](#), having been taken over by the German multinational Bayer in 2018, while DowDuPont's agricultural unit was [hived off](#) the following year to form the independent company Corteva.) But the story has been circulating for a couple of months now, shared repeatedly by people who haven't made the slightest effort to confirm its accuracy, because it fits in with what they want to believe.

Currently the main source of this fake news story is a Facebook [post](#) by a deluded individual named Veronica Ivonne. To evaluate the reliability of that source, take a look at Ivonne's [timeline](#). You'll find her [offering](#) the following helpful medical advice: "If you have cancer or a history of cancer STOP eating meat, chicken, pork, eggs, milk, cheese, yogurt and all other forms of animal fat/protein!" Then you'll be free from cancer! As you might expect, Ivonne is a fervent [anti-vaxxer](#) and gives credence to the bizarre [claim](#) that Covid-19 vaccines are designed to infect us all with HIV. (I'll admit hadn't encountered that one before, but apparently in anti-vax circles [it's a thing](#).) It also comes as little surprise to find that she supports the New World Order conspiracy theory, and [recommends](#) that we read the Book of Revelation in order to prepare ourselves for the coming NWO apocalypse.

The source Ivonne herself cites for her attack on Zelensky is a website called the Australian National Review, which supporters of the fake news story have misidentified as the Australian edition of the long-established US conservative magazine *National Review*. In reality it's a fringe conspiracy site run by former "property spruiker" [Jamie McIntyre](#) that peddles the usual nonsense about [George Soros](#), the [Rothschilds](#) and the [deadly effects](#) of vaccination. The Australian National Review [article](#) itself was just copied-and-pasted from the [Telegram channel](#) of a crackpot named Laura Aboli (another purveyor of [Soros/Rothschild](#) conspiracy theories and [anti-vax paranoia](#)) who failed to offer any evidence for her allegation that Monsanto et al have bought up vast swathes of Ukrainian farmland. Despite being entirely unsubstantiated, the story spread unchecked (in both senses of the word) from there across the internet.

In order to suggest to the casual reader that there was some factual basis to her claim, Aboli added a link to an [analysis](#) of Ukrainian agriculture [originating](#) with the Oakland Institute. But anyone who took the trouble to read all the way through that article — evidently very few did — would have found that it provided no support at all for Aboli's fairytale. In fact it contained a useful summary, taken from the [LaScala](#) website, of the major agroholdings in Ukraine — from which the names of Monsanto, DuPont and Cargill were conspicuously absent.

A more recent LaScala list of the top ten Ukrainian land users can be found [here](#). The majority of those ten companies are in the hands of Ukrainian capitalists and only two of them — Agroprosperis

(a subsidiary of US private equity firm NCH Capital) and Continental Farmers Group (in which the Saudi Agricultural and Livestock Investment Company is a majority shareholder) — are under foreign ownership. Estimates of the area of farmland controlled by foreign companies vary, but a commonly accepted [figure](#) is that it amounts to 3–4 million hectares out of a total of 41 million. In short, it would appear that the penetration of international capital into Ukrainian landholding has so far been limited.

This is not least because it is [illegal](#) for foreign companies to own agricultural land in Ukraine, and as a result they have to resort to leasing it from Ukrainian landowners. In other words, Zelensky couldn't have sold 17 million hectares of Ukrainian farmland to US multinationals even if he'd wanted to. It's true that Monsanto, DuPont and Cargill did establish a presence in the Ukrainian agricultural sector years ago, and this has been maintained by successor organisations. However, with the exception of Cargill (who bought a 5% stake in UkrLandFarming in 2014 before [selling](#) the shares back two years later) their involvement hasn't been through landholding but through [activities](#) like the sale of seeds, pesticides, fertilizers and animal feed, provision of grain storage facilities, sunflower oil production and so on.

There are certainly grounds for criticising the Ukrainian government's agricultural programme. As a condition for being granted a [\\$5 billion IMF loan](#), a moratorium on the sale of agricultural land, which had been introduced in 2001 in an attempt to prevent oligarchs buying up all the farmland, was lifted in July last year. Despite the unpopularity of this reform — a poll just before the legislation came into effect [found](#) that 65% of Ukrainians favoured retaining a ban on the sale of agricultural land — it was forced through under [pressure](#) from Zelensky. As already mentioned, foreign buyers remain excluded from the land market. However, Zelensky aims to overturn that restriction, and the issue is due to be put to a referendum in 2024.

The Oakland Institute [article](#) referred to above offered a detailed assessment of the reform and concluded that “imposing the creation of a land market in Ukraine will further concentrate control of land in the hands of oligarchs and large agribusinesses, while favoring the interests of foreign investors and banks. It is unfortunately the vast majority of Ukrainian farmers and citizens who will have to pay the cost”. Even Radio Free Europe [warned](#) of the “uncertain consequences” of the reform, and pointed out that 84% of Ukrainians oppose Zelensky's plan to extend the sale of land to foreigners. If anyone wants to criticise Kiev's agricultural policies they should concentrate on these real issues, rather than promoting a bullshit story about Zelensky selling 17 million hectares of farmland to Monsanto, DuPont and Cargill.

This raises a more general question: Why is it that people happily share fake news without asking whether it's true? Why do they mindlessly repeat the fraudulent claims of obscure cranks and conspiracy loons without exercising any critical judgement? That sort stupidity has unfortunately become widespread on social media. At worst, as in the case of anti-vax propaganda, it poses an actual threat to people's lives. At best it represents the degeneration of rational thought.

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