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PII: S0303-7207(20)30234-3

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mce.2020.110934>

Reference: MCE 110934

To appear in: *Molecular and Cellular Endocrinology*

Received Date: 29 November 2019

Revised Date: 30 June 2020

Accepted Date: 1 July 2020

Please cite this article as: Ingaramo, P., Alarcón, R., Muñoz-de-Toro, M., Luque, E.H., Are glyphosate and glyphosate-based herbicides endocrine disruptors that alter female fertility?, *Molecular and Cellular Endocrinology* (2020), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mce.2020.110934>.

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## **Are glyphosate and glyphosate-based herbicides endocrine disruptors that alter female fertility?**

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### **COMPETING FINANCIAL INTERESTS**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest that could be perceived as prejudicing the impartiality of the research reported.

25 **Abstract**

26 Numerous evidences have alerted on the toxic effects of the exposure to glyphosate on  
27 living organisms. Glyphosate is the herbicide most used in crops such as maize and  
28 soybean worldwide, which implies that several non-target species are at a high risk of  
29 exposure. Although the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA-USA) has reaffirmed  
30 that glyphosate is safe for users, there are controversial studies that question this  
31 statement. Some of the reported effects are due to exposure to high doses; however,  
32 recent evidences have shown that exposure to low doses could also alter the  
33 development of the female reproductive tract, with consequences on fertility. Different  
34 animal models of exposure to glyphosate or glyphosate-based herbicides (GBHs) have  
35 shown that the effects on the female reproductive tract may be related to the potential  
36 and/or mechanisms of actions of an endocrine-disrupting compound. Studies have also  
37 demonstrated that the exposure to GBHs alters the development and differentiation of  
38 ovarian follicles and uterus, affecting fertility when animals are exposed before puberty.  
39 In addition, exposure to GBHs during gestation could alter the development of the  
40 offspring (F1 and F2). The main mechanism described associated with the endocrine-  
41 disrupting effect of GBHs is the modulation of estrogen receptors and molecules  
42 involved in the estrogenic pathways. This review summarizes the endocrine-disrupting  
43 effects of exposure to glyphosate and GBHs at low or “environmentally relevant” doses  
44 in the female reproductive tissues. Data suggesting that, at low doses, GBHs may have  
45 adverse effects on the female reproductive tract fertility are discussed.

46

47 **Abbreviations**

48 AMPA, aminomethylphosphonic acid; AR, androgen receptors; As, Arsenic; Bmp2,  
49 bone morphogenetic protein 2; Co, Cobalt; COUP-TFII, COUP transcription factor 2;  
50 Cr, Chromium; Cyp19a1, cytochrome P450, family 19, subfamily A, polypeptide 1;  
51 DOHaD, Developmental Origins of Health and Disease; EDCs, endocrine-disrupting  
52 chemicals; EPA, Environmental Protection Agency; ER, steroid receptors; ER $\alpha$ ,  
53 estrogen receptor alpha; ER $\beta$ , estrogen receptor beta; ERE, estrogen response element;  
54 Foxa2, forkhead box protein A2; FSHR, Follicle Stimulating Hormone Receptor;  
55 GBHs, glyphosate-based herbicides; GnRH, Gonadotropin-releasing hormone; Hoxa10,  
56 homeobox a10; IARC, International Agency for Research on Cancer; IGFBP-3, insulin-  
57 like growth factor binding protein 3; LHR, luteinizing hormone receptor; Ni, Nickel;  
58 NOAELs, no-observed-adverse-effects level; Pb, lead; PND, post-natal day; POEA,  
59 polyethoxylated amine; PR, progesterone receptor; 3 $\beta$ -HSD, 3 $\beta$ -hydroxysteroid  
60 dehydrogenase; WHO, World Health Organization; Wnt, wntless-type MMTV  
61 integration site family.

62 **Outline**

63 1- Introduction

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73 disruptors

74 6- Conclusions

75 ***1- Introduction***

76 The environmental pollution caused by urbanization, agriculture and industrialization  
77 has been reported to affect animal and human health (Luque et al. 2018). Throughout  
78 their lifespan, both humans and animals are exposed to many of man-generated  
79 chemicals, which can have either a positive or a negative impact on their health. These  
80 compounds can be found in the environment, food, cosmetics, household items,  
81 pharmaceutical products, and many other products (Darbre 2018; Darbre 2019). Studies  
82 on the possible hormonal activity of some of these compounds have shown that they  
83 have the potential to disrupt the endocrine system of many animal species, including  
84 humans (Amereh et al. 2020; Tsai et al. 2019). The potential risk of these chemicals can  
85 be assessed by means of *in vitro* studies or animal models, including fish, amphibians  
86 and mammals (Bergman et al. 2013). Colborn et al. (1997) were pioneers in  
87 demonstrating the risks of exposure to chemicals in the environment known as  
88 endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs). The World Health Organization (WHO)  
89 defined an EDC as “an exogenous substance or mixture that alters function(s) of the  
90 endocrine system and consequently causes adverse health effects in an intact organism,  
91 or its progeny or (sub)populations” (Bergman et al., 2013). Exposure to EDCs can occur  
92 via ingestion of water, food and dust, via inhalation of gases and air particles, and via  
93 dermal absorption. Once in the organism, EDCs interact with the endocrine system and  
94 disrupt normal endocrine function, sexual development, and ultimately reproduction.  
95 EDCs exert their actions by triggering genomic mechanisms and non-genomic actions,  
96 through the binding to several hormone receptors, including thyroid and, especially,  
97 steroid receptors, mainly estrogen (ER) or androgen (AR) receptors (Diamanti-  
98 Kandarakis et al. 2009; Gore et al. 2015). These “xenochemicals” (chemicals that are  
99 foreign to the body) may possess a range of agonist, partial agonist or antagonist

100 activities dependent on the dose, presence of endogenous receptor ligand, and nature of  
101 the structure–activity relationship (interaction with the nuclear hormone receptors) (Hall  
102 and Greco 2019). The exposure to EDCs in pregnant mothers may reach the developing  
103 fetus and exposure during early life has been shown to disrupt the normal development  
104 of reproductive tissues and may predispose to diseases in adulthood (Rattan and Flaws  
105 2019). Moreover, the exposure to these chemicals neonatally can negatively impact the  
106 reproductive health of future generations and cause transgenerational effects on  
107 reproduction in both males and females (Brehm and Flaws 2019). The mechanisms of  
108 action by which EDCs transmit adverse effects to future generations include epigenetic  
109 modifications (Rattan and Flaws 2019). Despite several evidences on the potential  
110 adverse effects of EDCs on reproduction, the molecular mechanisms underlying these  
111 effects are not completely understood.

112 Although there are more than 80,000 chemicals in commercial use, the risk of most of  
113 them has not yet been assessed. In 2015, by means of the ToxCast program, the  
114 Endocrine Disruptor Screening Program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
115 (EPA) made efforts to demonstrate the estrogenic and antiestrogenic activities of more  
116 than 1,800 chemicals (US EPA 2015). Among the chemicals that highly contaminate  
117 the environment and for which their toxicity has not yet been completely assessed, we  
118 can mention all the agrochemicals. Moreover, for many of these agrochemicals, there is  
119 an absence of evidence of human and animal levels of exposure. With the development  
120 of herbicide-tolerant soybeans, corn and cotton in 1996, the use of glyphosate and  
121 glyphosate-based herbicides (GBHs) has increased dramatically over the past two  
122 decades. With an estimation of more than 800 million kg sprayed around the globe in  
123 2014, GBHs are among the most used agrochemicals in the world (Benbrook 2016). In  
124 Argentina, glyphosate is the most commonly used herbicide, with around 180–200

125 million liters applied every year (Aparicio et al. 2013). Currently existing information  
126 on the safety of glyphosate and/or its formulations is controversial, suggesting that  
127 glyphosate or its adjuvants are responsible for the adverse impacts on human, animal  
128 and ecological health (Meftaul et al. 2020; Vandenberg et al. 2017). However, most  
129 studies involve exposures over long periods, high doses, or the use of glyphosate alone,  
130 which is not a real situation regarding environmental contamination. This review aims  
131 to analyze and summarize the current literature that has evaluated the effects of low or  
132 “environmentally relevant” doses of glyphosate and GBHs acting as EDCs, mainly  
133 regarding evidences obtained in the female reproductive tissue. We present enough data  
134 suggesting that, at low doses, GBHs may have adverse effects on the development of  
135 the female reproductive tract and fertility.

136

## 137 ***2- Glyphosate and glyphosate-based herbicides (GBHs)***

### 138 *2.1. Formulations, surfactants, exposed species and human exposure*

139 The first GBH, Roundup®, was introduced by Monsanto in the early 1970s.  
140 Glyphosate kills weeds and grasses by inhibiting the enzyme 5-enolpyruvylshikimate-3-  
141 phosphate synthase, involved in the biosynthesis of aromatic compounds in plants and  
142 microorganisms, and was thus considered safe to animals and humans. For this, and  
143 other aforementioned reasons, GBHs are the herbicides most frequently applied  
144 worldwide (Mertens et al. 2018). However, after the WHO’s International Agency for  
145 Research on Cancer (IARC) re-classified glyphosate as “probably carcinogenic to  
146 humans” based on a small number of epidemiological studies following occupational  
147 exposures (Guyton et al. 2015; Myers et al. 2016), concerns about the carcinogenic  
148 properties of GBHs have increased.

149 In the world market, there are several formulations of GBHs, which differ  
150 mainly in the content of surfactants, the most common of which over the last years have  
151 been ethoxylated amines. The addition of surfactants to the active compound promotes  
152 the penetration and stabilization of glyphosate in plants. In addition, arsenic (As), cobalt  
153 (Co), chromium (Cr), nickel (Ni) and lead (Pb), several of which are known to be  
154 EDCs, are present in numerous herbicide formulations, at levels well above admissible  
155 ones in water (Defarge et al. 2018). A comparative cytotoxicity study of surfactants in  
156 human cell lines concluded that alkyl polyglucosides, which are high-quality nonionic  
157 surfactants, are the least toxic compounds, followed by polyethoxylated alkyl phosphate  
158 ethers, which are quaternary ammonium surfactants, and finally by POE-tallow amines,  
159 which are the most toxic (Defarge et al. 2016). However, some occupational and food  
160 risk assessments have shown that there are no significant human health issues  
161 associated with the use of POEA as surfactants in glyphosate products (Martens et al.  
162 2019). The first generation of POEA surfactants (POE-tallow amines) in Roundup® are  
163 markedly more toxic than glyphosate and thus pose higher risks to human health,  
164 especially among heavily-exposed applicators (Defarge et al. 2016). In some cases, the  
165 absence of compositional data may cause problems in the reproducibility of the  
166 experiment because, in formulated GBH products with the same commercial name, the  
167 mixture of chemicals could vary among different countries (Mesnage et al. 2019).

168 In Argentina, the percentage of land destined to agricultural production has  
169 increased significantly in recent years, mainly due to new technologies, including  
170 modern irrigation, pesticides, chemical fertilizers, conservation tillage and the  
171 expansion of soybean crops. This habitat fragmentation and the constant exposure to  
172 pesticides and GBHs affect different species (Burella et al. 2018; Dornelles and Oliveira  
173 2016), including the main agricultural insect pollinator, the honey bee (*Apis mellifera*)

174 (Vazquez et al. 2018). In the last years, the effects of glyphosate either alone or in  
175 formula have been analyzed in several species such as fish, lambs, caimans, mice and  
176 rats (Alarcón et al. 2019a; Albanil Sanchez et al. 2019; Ingaramo et al. 2016; Pham et  
177 al. 2019; Szepanowski et al. 2018; Varayoud et al. 2017). Regarding animal feed,  
178 residues of glyphosate have been found in soybean and maize, both of which play an  
179 important role in animal nutrition (Poppe et al. 2019). Indeed, a study comparing 18  
180 commercial animal feeds from different companies has recently demonstrated that every  
181 product contained detectable glyphosate residues in a range between 78.3 and 2140  
182  $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$ , which results in an exposure of animals 4-12 times higher than that of humans  
183 per kg basis (Zhao et al. 2018).

184         Despite the widespread use of glyphosate, data on the potential human  
185 exposures during common occupational uses are limited. The occupational exposure of  
186 amenity horticulturalists to GBHs has shown that contamination is usually greater than  
187 that reported in environmental studies (Connolly et al. 2018). Very high concentrations  
188 of glyphosate and its main metabolite, aminomethylphosphonic acid (AMPA), may  
189 occur in airborne particulate matter, which can be inhaled by humans and animals  
190 (Bento et al. 2017). In this context, the data of urine levels is a powerful tool in  
191 biomonitoring studies to estimate human exposure (Conrad et al. 2017; Krüger et al.  
192 2014). Some occupational biomonitoring studies have analyzed pooled urine samples  
193 collected over a 24-h period, providing an estimate of the average exposure over this  
194 sampling period (Acquavella et al. 2004; Mesnage et al. 2012), whereas others have  
195 analyzed a spot urine sample as a marker of the 24-h exposure (Connolly et al., 2017).  
196 Several researchers have found that the detectable concentrations of glyphosate in  
197 urines collected from farmers and their families during the study period were in the  
198 range of  $<0.1\text{--}233\text{ ng/mL}$ , with the highest systemic dose estimated at  $0.004\text{ mg/kg}$

199 (Acquavella et al. 2004; Jauhiainen et al. 1991; Thongprakaisang et al. 2013). The  
200 systemic dose, which is calculated as the amount of glyphosate excreted in urine  
201 divided by each individual's body weight, is an integrated measure of the amount of a  
202 substance absorbed per kilogram of body weight that provides a basis to compare  
203 human exposures with levels of toxicological significance (Acquavella et al. 2004).  
204 Parvez et al. (2018) evaluated the exposure of pregnant women to GBHs by direct  
205 measuring in urine samples and found that >90% of them had detectable glyphosate  
206 levels, which were higher in women living in rural areas, and that these levels correlated  
207 significantly with shortened pregnancy lengths. In Thai women, Kongtip et al. (2017)  
208 demonstrated high maternal (0.2–189.1 ng/mL) and umbilical cord (0.2–94.9 ng/mL)  
209 serum concentrations of glyphosate.

## 210 2.2. Metabolism and its potential impact on the toxicity of glyphosate and GBHs

211 Although several reports have claimed no significant transformation of  
212 glyphosate to AMPA *in vivo* (EFSA 2015; Niemann et al. 2015; Williams et al. 2000),  
213 Ford et al. (2017) demonstrated the formation of AMPA and glyoxylate in livers from  
214 glyphosate-treated mice. These authors showed that approximately 4% of the  
215 glyphosate levels detected in the mouse liver are metabolized to glyoxylate (Ford et al.  
216 2017). Glyphosate metabolism may depend on the physiology of the animal. At our  
217 lab in lambs exposed to GBH during their first postnatal days, we found no AMPA  
218 serum levels, suggesting a limited metabolism of glyphosate into AMPA by intestinal  
219 microbial action, considering that the rumen of lambs exhibits limited functional  
220 development on post-natal day (PND) 15 (Alarcón et al. 2019a). Although the acute  
221 toxic effects of glyphosate and AMPA on mammals are low, there are animal data  
222 raising concern of the health effects associated with chronic ultra-low doses of these  
223 compounds, related to their accumulation in the environment (Van Bruggen et al. 2018).

224 Anadon et al. (2009), for example, found that the bioavailability of glyphosate by oral  
225 administration in rats is 23.21%, whereas, in ewe lambs, we have recently found that the  
226 levels of glyphosate in serum and the effects on the female reproductive tract in orally  
227 and subcutaneously GBH exposed animals were similar (Alarcón et al 2019). Several  
228 experiments have demonstrated that the estrogenic potential and toxicity of glyphosate  
229 are different from those of GBHs and polyethoxylated amine (POEA) (De Almeida et  
230 al. 2018; Mesnage et al. 2017; Perego et al. 2017a; Perego et al. 2017b; Richard et al.  
231 2005).

232       Regarding other issues not directly related to reproduction, Davoren and Schiestl  
233 (2018) suggested that glyphosate has the potential to affect the human gut microbiome  
234 profile and function, leading to decreased pathogen defense and inflammation, both in  
235 the intestine and systemically. They suggested that the adjuvant surfactants and  
236 emulsifiers present in GBHs would contribute to microbiome disruption more than  
237 glyphosate alone (Davoren and Schiestl 2018). This represents another pathway through  
238 which glyphosate and GBHs could induce adverse effects related to inflammation and  
239 immune response that may affect reproduction.

240

### 241 **3- Mechanisms of action: *in vitro* studies**

242       Many of the mechanisms by which the neonatal exposure to glyphosate or  
243 GBHs affects the female reproductive tract are not known but the few studies regarding  
244 this issue have been done *in vitro*. However, most of the effects of glyphosate and  
245 GBHs shown *in vitro* have not been able to be reproduced in *in vivo* experiments.  
246 Several of the *in vitro* studies on glyphosate and GBHs have been performed using  
247 cancer cell lines that are estrogen-responsive (HEC1A, MCF-7, and T47D-KBluc cell  
248 lines) or the estrogen-insensitive line MDA-MB-231. HEC1A cells are endometrial

249 cancer cells that express the wild-type form of estrogen receptor alpha (ER $\alpha$ ). Since  
250 estrogen induces the proliferation of these cells (Castro-Rivera and Safe 1998), De  
251 Almeida et al. (2018) demonstrated a non-monotonic reduction in the viability of  
252 HEC1A cells exposed to pure glyphosate (75-500  $\mu\text{g/mL}$ ). These authors also found  
253 that exposure to the GBH Wipeout $\text{\textcircled{R}}$  (75, 125 and 250  $\mu\text{g/mL}$ ) induces proliferative  
254 effects and DNA damage in both HEC1A and MDA-MB-231 cells. Based on the  
255 differential toxicities of the GBHs Roundup $\text{\textcircled{R}}$  and Wipeout $\text{\textcircled{R}}$  in human whole blood and  
256 HEC1A cells, these authors determined that the adjuvants and/or glyphosate impurities  
257 were potential contributing factors of toxicity (De Almeida et al. 2018). They also found  
258 that, in human whole blood, glyphosate and Roundup $\text{\textcircled{R}}$  led to similar non-monotonic  
259 toxicological profiles, evidenced by a significant reduction in cell viability ( $P \leq 0.01$ ) at  
260 pure glyphosate and Roundup $\text{\textcircled{R}}$  concentrations of 10 and 50  $\mu\text{g/mL}$  and no decreased  
261 cell viability at higher concentrations (500  $\mu\text{g/mL}$ ). Finally, they found that Wipeout $\text{\textcircled{R}}$   
262 led to a monotonic reduction in cell viability from a threshold concentration of 50  
263  $\mu\text{g/mL}$  (De Almeida et al. 2018). In human peripheral blood mononuclear cells,  
264 (Martinez et al. 2007) demonstrated that the cytotoxicity of Roundup $\text{\textcircled{R}}$  was higher than  
265 that of glyphosate alone, because the concentration of Roundup $\text{\textcircled{R}}$  to cause 50%  
266 mortality of the cells was 30 times lower than that of pure glyphosate. These results  
267 support the concept that the additives in commercial formulations play a significant role  
268 in the toxicity attributed to GBHs.

269 In HepG2 cells, which are the best characterized human liver cell line and are  
270 used to study xenobiotic toxicity, Gasnier et al. (2009) determined glyphosate  
271 cytotoxicity with three assays (Alamar Blue, MTT, ToxiLight), genotoxicity by the  
272 comet assay, and anti-estrogenic effects (on ER $\alpha$ , ER $\beta$ ) and anti-androgenic effects (on  
273 the androgen receptor (AR) by using gene reporter tests. They also checked androgen to

274 estrogen conversion by aromatase activity and mRNA. At sub-agricultural doses, all  
275 these parameters were disrupted with all formulations within 24 h. In HepG2 cells, the  
276 active formulation R400 (from 2 parts per million (ppm)) inhibited the transcriptional  
277 activities on both estrogen receptors. These effects were more dependent on the  
278 formulation than on the glyphosate concentration. In addition, in MDA-MB453-kb2  
279 cells, these authors observed decreased AR and aromatase transcription from 0.5 ppm of  
280 GBH and inhibited enzymatic activity from 10 ppm (Gasnier et al. 2009). In human  
281 ovarian and prostate cancer cells, Li et al. (2013) demonstrated that glyphosate and  
282 AMPA can inhibit proliferation and promote apoptosis. One of the mechanisms by  
283 which glyphosate would inhibit cell proliferation is through the enzyme serine  
284 hydroxymethyltransferase, a major source of intracellular glycine (Mesnage et al. 2015).  
285 Other *in vitro* studies have shown that exposure of human lymphocytes to different  
286 glyphosate concentrations does not cause effects on their proliferation/mitotic index  
287 (Santovito et al. 2018).

288         Regarding the effects of glyphosate on ovarian tissue and stem cell  
289 differentiation, Gigante et al. (2018) studied swine granulosa cells and found that, at  
290 different doses (0.2, 4 and 16  $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ ), glyphosate decreased the growth of granulosa  
291 cells (by bromodeoxyuridine incorporation and ATP production) and estrogen  
292 production and increased progesterone and nitric oxide secretion, all of which suggest  
293 that the *in vivo* ovarian function may be affected. On the other hand, by using granulosa  
294 cells from bovine ovary, Perego et al. (2017a) found different results between exposure  
295 to glyphosate and Roundup®. While Roundup® (10 and 300  $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ ) dramatically  
296 decreased the number of granulosa cells and estrogen and progesterone production,  
297 glyphosate alone had no effect (Perego et al. 2017a). In cow granulosa cells, Wrobel  
298 (2018) reported that pure glyphosate stimulates the secretion of estrogen, while GBHs

299 and pure glyphosate increase oxytocin and decrease progesterone secretion from luteal  
300 cells. All these *in vitro* studies with bovine ovarian cells suggest that glyphosate and/or  
301 GBHs may affect, at least in part, the female reproductive system via direct action on  
302 the ovarian function.

303 Richard et al. (2005) tested the toxicity of glyphosate and Roundup® and their  
304 possible ability to act as EDCs in human placental JEG3 cells. Their study showed that  
305 Roundup® interacts with the active site of the enzyme aromatase and decreases its  
306 activity and mRNA expression. Besides, they demonstrated that glyphosate is toxic  
307 within the lowest concentrations used in agriculture, and that this effect increases with  
308 higher concentrations and longer times as well as in the presence of Roundup®  
309 adjuvants (Richard et al. 2005). On the other hand, (Thongprakaisang et al. 2013)  
310 observed that, in the range of concentrations described in the environment and at levels  
311 to which humans and domestic animals are exposed, glyphosate increases the  
312 proliferation of the hormone-dependent breast cancer T47D cell line, acting via ER $\alpha$ . In  
313 this cell line, glyphosate exhibits estrogenic activity and interferes with normal estrogen  
314 signaling, probably through the activation of an estrogen response element (ERE) since  
315 these responses can be blocked by the ER antagonist ICI 182780 (Thongprakaisang et  
316 al. 2013). Mesnage et al. (2017) reported that glyphosate ( $\geq 10$   $\mu\text{g/mL}$ ) promotes the  
317 proliferation of estrogen-dependent MCF-7 human breast cancer cells and increases the  
318 expression of an ERE-luciferase reporter gene (ERE-luc) in T47D-KBluc cells, the  
319 latter of which can be blocked by the estrogen antagonist ICI. In MCF-7 cells, they  
320 found a weak and unstable interaction (compared to estrogen) between glyphosate and  
321 ER $\alpha$  and that glyphosate could activate this receptor although at relatively higher  
322 concentrations than estradiol (Mesnage et al. 2017). Based on their results, these authors  
323 proposed the hypothesis that glyphosate exerts its effects in a ligand-independent

324 pathway via the cAMP-dependent protein kinase A, which modulates the balance  
325 between cell proliferation and apoptosis (Mesnage et al. 2017). They also showed that,  
326 at the concentrations at which glyphosate causes estrogenic effects, glyphosate also  
327 causes apoptosis and disturbance in liver cell mitochondrial respiration. Finally, they  
328 found that commercial GBH formulations or their adjuvants alone did not exhibit  
329 estrogenic effects acting through ER $\alpha$  (Mesnage et al. 2017).

330 A recent study using ER+ and ER- breast cancer cell lines demonstrated that  
331 GBHs (but not AMPA) affect several pathways related to DNA damage repair, base  
332 excision repair, nucleotide excision repair and mismatch repair (Stur et al. 2019). Other  
333 authors have suggested that glyphosate would induce cell apoptosis by activating  
334 caspases 3 and/or 7 (Benachour and Seralini 2009; Clair et al. 2012).

335

#### 336 ***4- In vivo effects in animal models***

##### 337 *4.1 Fish and chicken*

338 Despite all the *in vitro* studies previously mentioned, most of the effects  
339 described for glyphosate and GBHs have not been able to be reproduced in *in vivo*  
340 experiments. Another significant issue regarding glyphosate toxicity is the effects of  
341 low or “environmental relevant” doses.

342 Studying the effect of glyphosate in zebrafish (*Danio rerio*), Armiliato et al.  
343 (2014) found a significant increase in the diameter of oocytes, raising the concern on the  
344 effects of glyphosate on fish reproduction. Recently, Smith et al. (2019) showed that  
345 Roundup® and its active ingredient glyphosate can induce developmental, reproductive,  
346 and epigenetic effects on Japanese medaka fish. In addition, in the testes of these fish  
347 exposed to 0.5 mg/L Roundup® or glyphosate, the expression of FSHR was  
348 significantly reduced, whereas in the ovaries the expression of FSHR remained

349 unchanged (Smith et al. 2019). In zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) embryos, glyphosate  
350 treatment inhibited the activity of carbonic anhydrase, caused production of reactive  
351 oxygen species, especially in branchial regions, triggered cellular apoptosis and induced  
352 several types of malformations, including pericardial edema, yolk sac edema, spinal  
353 curvature and body malformation in a dose-dependent manner (Sulukan et al. 2017).

354 Hatching defects, histological alterations and biochemical imbalance were also  
355 reported in chicks by Fathi et al. (2019). The study consisted in evaluating newly  
356 hatched chicks where the eggs were exposed to glyphosate or GBH (Roundup®). The  
357 authors reported a decrease in the hatchability rate in chicks treated with Roundup®  
358 (Fathi et al. 2019).

#### 359 *4.2 Effects on the ovary of rats, mice and ewe lambs*

360 Within the ovary, signaling between granulosa and theca cells is essential to  
361 support follicle development, oocyte development, and ovulation. Moreover, the  
362 ovarian follicle can be considered a very fragile micro-environment where several  
363 interactions between hormones, growth factors, the oocyte and its surrounding somatic  
364 cells are essential to generate a fully competent oocyte. Disruption of this finely tuned  
365 balance can lead to an incomplete germ cell nest breakdown (multi-oocyte follicles)  
366 (Pepling 2012), alter the activation of follicles with an increase of atresia (Monniaux  
367 2018) or anovulation (Petro et al. 2012). Due to this multiple interaction and  
368 complexity, ovaries and follicles are excellent targets to investigate endocrine-  
369 disrupting effects. However, the effects of the exposure to glyphosate or GBHs on  
370 ovarian function and stem cell differentiation are still largely unknown. In female rats  
371 exposed to GBHs (Paraquat and/or Roundup®) during the first days of pregnancy,  
372 Almeida et al. (2017) found lower weight ovaries and a decrease in the number of  
373 corpora lutea. In mice exposed *in utero* to glyphosate a decreased ovarian weight and

374 histopathological alterations, increased atretic follicles, interstitial fibrosis and  
375 decreased mature follicles on gestational day 19 was described (Ren et al. 2018). Serum  
376 levels of progesterone and estrogen were significantly altered following glyphosate  
377 exposure together with changes in the expression of Gonadotropin-releasing hormone  
378 (GnRH), luteinizing hormone receptor (LHR), Follicle Stimulating Hormone Receptor  
379 (FSHR),  $3\beta$ -hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase ( $3\beta$ -HSD) and cytochrome P450, family 19,  
380 subfamily A, polypeptide 1 (Cyp19a1) genes at the hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian axis;  
381 in the ovary oxidative stress increased (Ren et al. 2018). Similar results were observed  
382 by Hamdaoui et al. (2018) in female rats exposed to sub-chronic doses of the GBH  
383 Kalach 360 SL showing impaired folliculogenesis, altered ovary development,  
384 decreased estrogen secretion, oxidative stress and altered ovarian morphology. Results  
385 suggesting that this GBH can induce endocrine-disrupting effects.

386 Experiments performed at our lab in a model of ewe lambs exposed to low doses  
387 of GBH from birth to PND15 (Alarcón et al. 2019a) demonstrated an increase in the  
388 number of atretic follicles and a decrease in the mRNA levels of both FSHR and  
389 Growth/differentiation factor 9, suggesting the promotion of growth arrest in developing  
390 follicles. These GBH-exposed ewe lambs also exhibited an increased incidence of multi-  
391 oocyte follicles (Alarcón et al. 2019a), an end-point demonstrated to be a sensitive  
392 endocrine-disrupting end-point common in other species (such as rats, mice, and  
393 caimans) and with different EDCs such as bisphenol A, genistein, diethylstilbestrol, and  
394 ethinylestradiol (Alarcón et al. 2019a; Jefferson et al. 2006; Rivera et al. 2011;  
395 Rodriguez et al. 2010; Stoker et al. 2008).

396 The developmental origins of health and disease (DOHaD) paradigm posits that,  
397 during development, there are sensitive windows in which tissue formation and function  
398 can be modified by environmental stressors (such as glyphosate or GBHs), which can

399 lead to increased susceptibility to adverse health outcomes across the life course (Luque  
400 et al. 2018). All the *in vivo* studies performed in animal models previously commented  
401 regarding the histophysiology of the ovary and follicles suggest that, when the exposure  
402 to GBHs or glyphosate occurs during development, these compounds may induce  
403 endocrine-disrupting effects observed long after the EDC exposure has ended.

#### 404 *4.3 Effects on pregnancy outcome and genital tracts of rats, mice and ewe lambs*

405 Estrogens and xenoestrogens probably exert most or all of their effects through a  
406 specific receptor and the effects depend on the dose, time, and probably the duration of  
407 exposure; such receptors are present in the brain, pituitary, gonads, and accessory sex  
408 organs at one or another time during fetal, prepubertal, or adult life (Toppari et al.  
409 1996).

410 Even though most of the endocrine disruptive effects of glyphosate and GBHs  
411 have been demonstrated in males (Dallegrave et al. 2007; Pham et al. 2019; Romano et  
412 al. 2012; Romano et al. 2010), some recent studies have also shown adverse effects on  
413 development and functionality of the female reproductive tract. In the uterus of ewe  
414 lambs, we have recently found decreased cell proliferation but no alterations in the  
415 histomorphology after early postnatal oral or subcutaneous exposure to GBH (Alarcón  
416 et al. 2019a). In addition, in subcutaneously GBH-exposed ewe lambs, a decreased  
417 uterine cell proliferation in association with an increased expression of the insulin-like  
418 growth factor binding protein 3 (IGFBP-3) gene and p27 protein and a deregulated  
419 expression of ER $\alpha$  and PR was found (Alarcon et al. 2020). Furthermore, GBH  
420 exposure decreased the expression of Wnt5a and forkhead box protein A2 (Foxa2) in  
421 glandular epithelium, Wnt7a and homeobox a10 (Hoxa10) in subepithelial stroma, and  
422  $\beta$ -catenin in luminal and glandular epithelia (Alarcon et al. 2020). The wingless-type  
423 MMTV integration site family members (Wnt) are a group of signal transduction

424 pathways of morphogenetic proteins that participate in female reproductive physiology  
425 and control essential developmental processes, such as embryonic patterning, cell  
426 growth, migration, and differentiation (Hayashi et al. 2011). In the endometrium,  
427 estrogen induces Wnt signaling in both an ER-dependent and an ER-independent  
428 manner (Susheelamma et al. 2018). Diethylstilbestrol, a synthetic estrogen, in the mouse  
429 endometrium represses Wnt7a expression, causing a range of uterine defects similar to  
430 those seen in Wnt7a knockout mice (Fan et al. 2012; Miller et al. 1998). Estrogens also  
431 up-regulate both ER and progesterone receptor (PR) gene expression in the uteri of  
432 several species (Ing and Tornesi 1997).

433 In adult ovariectomized rats, Varayoud et al. (2017) found that neonatal  
434 exposure to a low dose of GBH (0.5 mg GBH/kg/day) did not affect the uterine weight  
435 or epithelial proliferation but led to an increase in the luminal epithelial cell height. This  
436 suggests that GBH modulates the expression of estrogen-sensitive genes and that the  
437 uterine gene expression of ER $\alpha$ , ER $\beta$  and PR is deregulated (Varayoud et al. 2017).  
438 Guerrero Schimpf et al. (2017) found that neonatal exposure of female rats to GBH (2  
439 mg/kg/day) increased cell proliferation in the uterine luminal and stromal compartments  
440 on PND8 and altered the expression of proteins involved in the differentiation of uterine  
441 organogenesis. ER $\alpha$  was induced in the uterine stromal compartment on PND8 and  
442 downregulated in the luminal epithelial compartment on PND21 (Guerrero Schimpf et  
443 al. 2017). In a further study, these authors found that early postnatal exposure of female  
444 rats to GBH led to an enhanced sensitivity of the adult uterus to an exogenous treatment  
445 with estrogen and to histomorphological and molecular changes associated with uterine  
446 hyperplasia and a deregulation of uterine genes like Wnt7a, ER $\alpha$ , PR and Hoxa10  
447 (Guerrero Schimpf et al. 2018). Moreover, rats exposed to the same doses of GBH (i.e.  
448 2 mg/kg/day) during the neonatal period showed fertility failures (Ingaramo et al. 2017;

449 Ingaramo et al. 2016). The main long-term alterations observed were associated with  
450 low PR expression associated with the downregulated expression of COUP transcription  
451 factor 2 (COUP-TFII, also known as Nr2f2) and bone morphogenetic protein 2 (Bmp2)  
452 mRNA and the increase in Hoxa10 and the cell proliferation at the implantation site  
453 (Ingaramo et al. 2016).

454 In mice, the administration of estrogen up-regulates uterine Wnt5a mRNA  
455 expression (Hou et al. 2004). However, exposure of mice to estrogen or ER agonists  
456 during critical developmental periods inhibits endometrial adenogenesis associated with  
457 reduction or suppression of Wnt proteins, like Wnt5a and Wnt7a (Dunlap et al. 2011;  
458 Hayashi et al. 2011; Yin and Ma 2005). Interestingly, the temporal and spatial  
459 expression of Wnt genes also plays a critical role during implantation and  
460 decidualization in mice. Particularly, the dysregulation of Wnt5a has been associated  
461 with increasing numbers of resorption sites during gestation (Cha et al. 2014; Hayashi et  
462 al. 2009). We have found that the neonatal exposure of prepubertal rats to GBH  
463 increased the expression of both Wnt5a and Wnt7a (Ingaramo et al. 2017). In the uterus  
464 of pregnant adult rats neonatally exposed to GBH, we found a decrease in Wnt5a, a  
465 result suggesting that this could be the mechanism involved in the increased incidence  
466 of fetal resorptions (Ingaramo et al. 2017). Almeida et al. (2017) exposed rats from  
467 gestational day (GD) 1 to GD7 to 500 mg/kg of Roundup® and showed decreased  
468 implantation sites and increased pre-implantation losses in association with more  
469 oxidative stress and altered uterine histology (decreased luminal and glandular epithelial  
470 heights and number of endometrial glands).

471 Dechartres et al. (2019) observed that the treatment of rats with glyphosate and  
472 Roundup® did not alter litter characteristics such as length, weight, and sex ratio,  
473 whereas Ren et al. (2018) demonstrated that prenatal exposure of mice to pure

474 glyphosate influenced the sex ratio of litters. Milesi et al. (2018) exposed pregnant rats  
475 (F0) to GBH (200 mg/kg/day) along pregnancy and found that this exposure impaired  
476 the reproductive performance of F1 females and induced structural congenital anomalies  
477 (conjoined fetuses and abnormally developed limbs) in the F2 offspring.

478         While most studies related to pesticides have addressed the effects of each  
479 individual chemical, it is very important to provide information about the effects of  
480 mixtures of pesticides because mixtures represent more realistic scenarios to mimic the  
481 environmental exposure. Recently, we reported that co-administration of a GBH with a  
482 commercial formulation of endosulfan (Thionex®) causes acute uterine effects and  
483 long-term deleterious reproductive effects that are similar to those induced by the GBH  
484 alone (Ingaramo et al. 2019). Generally, when the exposure levels of the chemicals  
485 within a mixture are in the range of the no-observed-adverse-effects levels (NOAELs)  
486 or below, and the components of the mixture have different modes of toxic action, no  
487 additive or potentiating interactions were observed (Ingaramo et al. 2019).

488         Table 1 summarizes the adverse effects so far described of glyphosate or GBH  
489 exposure on the female reproductive tract, whereas Figure 1 summarizes all the *in vitro*  
490 and *in vivo* cellular mechanisms of action of glyphosate described so far.

491

#### 492 ***5- Evidences that support the hypothesis that glyphosate and GBHs are endocrine*** 493 ***disruptors***

494         The safety of glyphosate and GBHs has been intensely debated. The “low-dose  
495 effects” of estrogenic agonists in mammals have generated considerable concern (Luque  
496 et al. 2018). The term “low-dose effects” is defined as the biological changes that occur  
497 at environmentally relevant exposure levels or at doses that are lower than those  
498 reported in the standard toxicity testing guidelines of the EPA. Moreover, the

499 estrogenicity of the dose effects of estrogenic agonists varies significantly among  
500 species, as well as between *in vivo* and *in vitro* tests. In the regulatory field regarding  
501 chemicals with endocrine-disrupting properties in humans and wildlife, the WHO  
502 defines them as those that may have a) adverse effects, b) endocrine activity, and c)  
503 plausible mechanistic links between the observed endocrine activity and adverse effects  
504 (Serra et al. 2019).

505         The first evidences that suggested that glyphosate may be an endocrine-  
506 disrupting chemical came from studies in male reproduction (Anifandis et al. 2018; Dai  
507 et al. 2016; Johansson et al. 2018; Pham et al. 2019; Romano et al. 2012; Romano et al.  
508 2010; Vanlaeys et al. 2018). In male mice, Dai et al. (2016) and Pham et al. (2019)  
509 found that glyphosate and GBHs were able to cause endocrine-disrupting effects on  
510 male reproduction at low doses. In many of these studies, the endocrine-disrupting  
511 effects observed could be attributed to glyphosate itself and/or to the additives in the  
512 formulations (Benachour and Seralini 2009; Martini et al. 2016; Richard et al. 2005;  
513 Vanlaeys et al. 2018). The different endocrine-disrupting effects caused by different  
514 formulations with glyphosate suggest that the effects could be exerted by other  
515 constituents of the formulation besides the active principle (several of which are  
516 unknown) (Defarge et al. 2016; Jacques et al. 2019). Defarge et al. (2016) tested the  
517 endocrine-disrupting effects of the co-formulants in six GBHs and found inhibition of  
518 aromatase at levels lower than the lowest agricultural dilution recommended. These  
519 results may suggest that the action of glyphosate on aromatase could explain, at least in  
520 part, some of the effects on reproduction found in *in vivo* experiments (Richard et al.  
521 2005).

522         Both *in vitro* and *in vivo* studies have suggested that glyphosate and GBHs act as  
523 xenoestrogens through ERE activation (Lorenz et al. 2019; Thongprakaisang et al.

524 2013). In rats, perinatal exposure to GBH induce decreased DNA methylation in the  
525 uterine site of the ER $\alpha$  gene, that might participate in the transcriptional upregulated  
526 expression of total ER $\alpha$  mRNA (Lorenz et al. 2019). As mentioned previously,  
527 glyphosate showed estrogenic activity and interferes with estrogen signaling, probably  
528 through the activation of an estrogen response element (ERE) since these responses can  
529 be blocked by the ER antagonist ICI 182780 (Thongprakaisang et al. 2013). Exposure to  
530 a GBH causes long-term epigenetic disruption of the uterine ER $\alpha$  gene, which could be  
531 associated with the GBH-induced implantation failures.

532 *In vitro* studies showing higher toxicity of GBHs *versus* glyphosate may explain  
533 the numerous *in vivo* results with GBHs not seen with glyphosate alone (Defarge et al.  
534 2016; Johansson et al. 2018; Vandenberg et al. 2017). It is worth mentioning that  
535 glyphosate alone and commercial formulations might affect different endpoints or have  
536 effects at different ages (Manservisi et al. 2019; Pham et al. 2019; Ren et al. 2018)  
537 (Table 2). The latter might also contribute to the controversy on the toxicity of  
538 glyphosate *versus* GBHs; further *in vivo* studies must be conducted to evaluate the  
539 effects of glyphosate alone, GBHs and different adjuvants. The emerging field of omics,  
540 which refers to the large-scale data-rich biological measurement of the genome, might  
541 contribute to identifying individual risk and susceptibility of disease through targeted  
542 biomarkers that reconstruct past exposure and predict future risk (Messerlian et al.  
543 2017). These new technologies will advance our understanding on the impact of  
544 agrochemicals as endocrine disruptors on animal and human health.

545 Figure 2 summarizes the *in vivo* studies so far performed in rats and ewe lambs,  
546 following pre- and/or postnatal exposure to GBHs.

547

548 **6- Conclusions**

549 *In vitro* studies are useful to describe possible mechanisms of action of  
550 glyphosate but the implications of the *in vitro* effects on *in vivo* outcomes are difficult to  
551 be analyzed. *In vitro* assays exhibit known limitations to simulate *in vivo* metabolism,  
552 predict effects in different tissues and across different life stages or predict the influence  
553 of chemical properties affecting bioavailability (Ginsberg et al. 2019). The gold  
554 standard of safety or risk evaluation for pesticides and environmental contaminants is  
555 whole animal toxicity testing. Predicting the possible adverse effects of EDCs on human  
556 health is usually difficult due to the wide differences between species in the regulation  
557 of endocrine functions and their effects on biological processes (Viguie et al. 2020).  
558 However, due to the similarity between sheep and humans, especially regarding  
559 gestational and thyroid physiologies and brain ontogeny, sheep constitute a highly  
560 appropriate model to evaluate the effects of EDCs (Viguie et al. 2020). Since sheep are  
561 grazing animals, they are also useful models to assess the consequences of chronic  
562 environmental exposure to "real-life" glyphosate mixtures at different stages of the  
563 reproductive life cycle (Viguie et al. 2020). Based on these advantages, at our lab, we  
564 are conducting experiments in ewe lambs to test the adverse effects of glyphosate and  
565 GBHs and their possible endocrine-disrupting activity, with focus on female  
566 reproduction and fertility.

567 If used safely, GBHs could be extremely useful for the agricultural industry.  
568 However, there are evidences that the misuse of these compounds has led to adverse  
569 consequences, including the contamination of soils and rivers and the accumulation of  
570 residues in the food chain. This contamination has led non-target species, including  
571 humans, to be exposed to these compounds. Currently, the use of glyphosate as GBHs is  
572 increasing worldwide and the environmental contamination levels show high  
573 concentrations of these compounds, with levels significantly higher in countries or areas

574 where agriculture is more intense. As described before, it has been demonstrated that  
575 animals (like rats, ewe lambs, cows) neonatally exposed to glyphosate and/or GBHs  
576 show altered ovarian and uterus development. These effects in turn alter tissue  
577 morphology and functioning, suggesting adverse effects on future fertility. Increasing  
578 trends in fertility failures in different species, including humans, could be related, in  
579 many cases, to the effects of EDCs present in the environment. Due to the high abortion  
580 rates observed in women living in agricultural and rural areas, the use of pesticides and  
581 their potential effects create strong concern. The advances in research about the effects  
582 of glyphosate are of absolute interest to the world population due to the massive use of  
583 this compound worldwide. *In vitro* studies in mammalian cells describing the  
584 mechanisms of glyphosate have shown that glyphosate and GBHs interact with ER $\alpha$ ,  
585 affecting signaling pathways involved in the control of cell proliferation (Figure 1).  
586 Studies have also shown that glyphosate and GBHs affect the normal expression of  
587 aromatase. It is important to point out that most of the studies focused on the endocrine-  
588 disrupting effects of glyphosate in endocrine-dependent tissues (ovary and uterus)  
589 presented in this review suggest mechanisms at very low concentrations, which would  
590 be undetected in traditional toxicology studies. It is clear that several studies have  
591 shown that glyphosate is able to cause endocrine disruption alone or in its formulations  
592 depending on the levels and time of exposure. In the environment, however, we are  
593 exposed not only to pure glyphosate but also to different formulations and pesticide  
594 mixes. Since most of the formulations are different regarding their adjuvants, it is  
595 difficult to assert which ones are more dangerous than glyphosate alone. Moreover,  
596 some formulations are patent protected, so their components are unknown. Thus, it  
597 would be important to reduce the danger through the use of more harmless adjuvants. In  
598 addition, beyond the fact that adjuvants may have effects, the adverse health effects

599 reported by the exposure of glyphosate in its pure form or in combination should be  
600 taken in consideration by regulatory agencies to establish better criteria on the safe use  
601 of this substance and to tailor health prevention strategies.

602 Finally, according with the WHO definition and based on the results commented  
603 in the present review, glyphosate and GBHs may have the properties to be EDCs. They  
604 cause adverse effects on the ovary and the female reproductive tract, impairing embryo  
605 implantation and/or development, even when animals are exposed to low doses. In  
606 addition, *in vitro* and *in vivo* results have demonstrated that glyphosate and GBHs  
607 inhibit aromatase activity and stimulate estrogenic pathways. All these features allow  
608 postulating that there is a link between the endocrine activities of glyphosate/GBHs and  
609 the adverse effects on female reproduction. Having in mind that much research is still  
610 needed to know the real toxicity effects of glyphosate and GBHs in humans and  
611 domestic animals, the “precaution principle” should be taken in consideration.

612

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Journal Pre-proof

992 **LEGENDS TO FIGURES**

993

994 **Figure 1.** Schematic representation of the reported effects of the *in vitro* and *in vivo*  
995 exposure to glyphosate or glyphosate-based herbicides (GBHs). 1) The exposure to  
996 glyphosate or GBHs inhibits the transcription of the aromatase gene and the enzymatic  
997 activity of aromatase (Cassault-Meyer et al. 2014; Gasnier et al. 2009; Richard et al.  
998 2005). 2) The exposure to glyphosate or GBHs induces estrogen-like effects by  
999 activating estrogen receptor (ER) through a ligand-independent manner by activating  
1000 protein kinase A (PKA), which in turn induces ER phosphorylation, modulating its  
1001 transcriptional activity by binding to estrogen response elements (ERE) or non-ERE  
1002 promoter sequences of target genes (Mesnage et al. 2017). 3) Depending on the cell type  
1003 or glyphosate nature (formulation) or concentration, the exposure to glyphosate or  
1004 GBHs stimulates cell proliferation (Guerrero Schimpf et al. 2017; Mesnage et al. 2017;  
1005 Thongprakaisang et al. 2013) or cell apoptosis by activating caspases 3 and/or 7  
1006 (Benachour and Seralini 2009; Clair et al. 2012). 4) The exposure to glyphosate or  
1007 GBHs induces the expression of estrogen-dependent proteins like progesterone receptor,  
1008 Wnt7a or Hoxa10 (Guerrero Schimpf et al. 2017; Ingaramo et al. 2017; Mesnage et al.  
1009 2017).

1010

1011 **Figure 2.** Summary of *in vivo* studies performed after neonatal (pre- and/or postnatal)  
1012 exposure of female rats and ewe lambs to glyphosate-based herbicides (GBHs). The  
1013 arrows begin at the time of exposure and the arrowhead points to the moment when  
1014 animals were studied. The most relevant experimental results obtained are mentioned in  
1015 italics. GBH: Glyphosate-based herbicide; IGF1: insulin-like growth factor; ER $\alpha$ :  
1016 estrogen receptor  $\alpha$ ; ER $\beta$ : estrogen receptor  $\beta$ ; Hoxa10: homeobox a10; PR:  
1017 progesterone receptor; Wnt5a wingless-type MMTV integration site family member 5a;  
1018 Wnt7a: wingless-type MMTV integration site family member 7a; Insulin-like growth  
1019 factor binding protein-3; Foxa 2: forkhead box protein A2; GDF9:  
1020 Growth/differentiation factor 9. References: (Alarcón et al. 2019a; Alarcon et al. 2020;  
1021 Guerrero Schimpf et al. 2017; Guerrero Schimpf et al. 2018; Ingaramo et al. 2019;  
1022 Ingaramo et al. 2017; Ingaramo et al. 2016; Lorenz et al. 2019; Milesi et al. 2019;  
1023 Milesi et al. 2018; Varayoud et al. 2017).

1024

**Table 1:** Studies performed *in vitro* and *in vivo* to investigate the effects of glyphosate and glyphosate-based herbicides (GBH) in females.

| <b>Species</b>                                | <b>Reported effect</b>   | <b>Doses of glyphosate or GBHs</b> | <b>Way and Time of exposure</b>      | <b>Authors</b>          |
|---|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Cows  | At 10 and 300 µg/mL of RU: decreased number of GCs and the production of E2 and P4.<br>At 1 µg/mL of RU + FSH + IGF1: increased cell number and steroid hormone.<br>At 10 µg/mL of RU + FSH: decreased cell number and steroid hormone production depending on IGF1 addition.<br>At 10 µg/mL of RU + FSH: increased E2 production.     | 1, 10 and 300 µg/mL                | <i>In vitro</i> ; 48 hours           | (Perego et al. 2017a)   |
|   | At 5 µg/mL of GLY + FSH + IGF1: decreased GC number and E2 production.<br>At 0.5 µg/mL of GLY + FSH + IGF1: only decreased GC number.<br>At 1.7 µg/mL of GLY: increased GC proliferation.  | 0.5, 1.7 and 5 µg/mL               | <i>In vitro</i> ; 48 hours           | (Perego et al. 2017b)   |
|   | At 10 ng/mL of GLY: increased E2 secretion from GCs.<br>At 10 ng/mL of GLY or RU: decreased P4 secretion from LCs.<br>RU but not GLY: increased mRNA expression and OT synthesis in LCs.<br>GLY and RU: increased OT secretion from LCs.<br>GLY decreased PGF2α, whereas RU decreased PGF2α and PGE2 secretion from endometrial cells. | 0.11 and 10 ng/mL                  | <i>In vitro</i> ; 24, 48 or 72 hours | (Wrobel 2018)           |
| Estuarine crab ( <i>Neohelice granulata</i> ) | Lower muscle glycogen content and increased glycemia.<br>Decreased ovarian vitellogenin content.<br>Higher proportion of reabsorbed vitellogenic oocytes.  | 0.01 and 0.2 mg/L                  | Adults; 90 days through tank water   | (Canosa et al. 2018)    |
| Zebrafish ( <i>Danio rerio</i> )              | Increased diameter of previtellogenic I and vitellogenic oocytes.<br>Higher expression of steroidogenic factor-1 in ovaries.   | 65 µg/L                            | Adults; 15 days through tank water   | (Armiliato et al. 2014) |

|               |   |                         |  |                                |
|---------------|---|-------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
|               | Decreased egg production and gonadosomatic index.<br>Delayed embryo development and hatching.<br>Decreased Cyp19a1 and Esr1 expression in the ovary.  | 0.01, 0.5, and 10 mg/L  | Adults; 21 days through tank water                       | (Uren Webster et al. 2014)     |
| Mice (ICR)    | Decreased body weight gain and ovary and liver weight.<br>Increased atretic follicles and interstitial ovarian fibrosis and decreased mature follicles.<br>Alteration of the hypothalamus-pituitary-ovarian axis and disrupted E2 and P4 hormone secretion.<br>Increased oxidative stress.<br>Altered sex ratio of fetuses. | 0.5% w/v of GLY or RU   | Adults; From GD1 to GD19 through drinking water          | (Ren et al. 2018)              |
| Rats (Wistar) | Increased number of resorption sites.<br>Decreased expression of uterine estrogen and progesterone receptors.<br>Downregulation of COUP-TFII and Bmp2 mRNA and increased expression of HOXA10 and proliferation in implantation sites of adult rats.  | 2 mg/Kg/day             | Neonatal period; PND1, 3, 5 and 7 through s.c. injection | (Ingaramo et al. 2016)         |
|               | Increased incidence of luminal epithelial hyperplasia and of the stromal and myometrial thickness.<br>Deregulation of the uterine expression of ER $\alpha$ , PR and Hoxa10 in prepubertal rats.  | 2 mg/Kg/day             | Neonatal period; PND1, 3, 5 and 7 through s.c. injection | (Guerrero Schimpf et al. 2017) |
|               | Increased uterine LEH.<br>Deregulation of uterine protein expression of ER $\alpha$ , ER $\beta$ and PR.<br>Decreased mRNA expression of C3, ER $\alpha$ and PR.  | 0.5, 5, or 50 mg/kg/day | Adults; 3 days through s.c. injection                    | (Varayoud et al. 2017)         |
|               | Altered uterine expression of Wnt5a and $\beta$ -catenin at PND8 and 21.<br>Uterine deregulation of Wnt5a, Wnt7a, $\beta$ -catenin, Dkk1 and sFRP4.   | 2 mg/Kg/day             | Neonatal period; PND1, 3, 5 and 7 through s.c. injection | (Ingaramo et al. 2017)         |
|               | Increased sensitivity of the uterus to estradiol treatment.<br>Higher LEH and stromal cell density.<br>Uterine hyperplasia and abnormal endometrial glands.   | 2 mg/Kg/day             | Neonatal period; PND1, 3, 5 and 7 through s.c. injection | (Guerrero Schimpf et al. 2018) |

|                      |   |                           |  |                        |
|----------------------|---|---------------------------|--|------------------------|
|                      | Increased uterine cell proliferation and deregulated expression of ER $\alpha$ , ER $\beta$ , Wnt7a and $\beta$ -catenin mRNA and protein expression.   |                           |  |                        |
|                      | Decreased body and ovary weights.<br>Decreased surface area of secondary and tertiary follicles.<br>Increased percentage of atretic follicles.<br>Increased malondialdehyde and advanced oxidation protein products.<br>Decreased catalase, superoxide dismutase and glutathione peroxidase.                      | 126 mg/kg or<br>315 mg/kg | Adults; 60 days through oral administration                                  | (Hamdaoui et al. 2018) |
|                      | F1 females ( <i>in utero</i> exposed) showed lower number of implantation sites.<br>F2 (F1 offspring) showed delayed growth in association with lower fetal weight and length and higher placental weight.<br>F2 showed structural congenital anomalies.  | 3.7 and 352 mg/Kg/day     | Adults; from GD9 to LD21 through pellet chow                                 | (Milesi et al. 2018)   |
|                      | ER $\alpha$ increased uterine expression.<br>Epigenetic changes in the O-promoter of uterine ER $\alpha$ .  | 3.7 and 352 mg/Kg/day     | Adults; from GD9 to LD21 through pellet chow                                 | (Lorenz et al. 2019)   |
| Ewe lambs (Friesian) | Decreased primordial follicles and increased transitional and primary follicles.<br>Increased small antral atretic follicles and MOFs incidence.<br>Increased proliferation of granulosa and theca cells and decreased FSHR and GDF9 mRNA expression in the ovary.<br>Decreased cell proliferation in the uterus. | 2 mg/Kg/day               | Neonatal period; from PND1 to 14 through oral administration or sc injection | (Alarcon et al. 2019)  |

GCs: granulosa cells; E2: estradiol; P4: progesterone; FSH: follicle-stimulating hormone; IGF1: insulin-like growth factor; RU: GBH Roundup; GLY: glyphosate; OT: oxytocin; LCs: luteal cells; PGF2 $\alpha$ : prostaglandin F 2 $\alpha$ ; PGE2: prostaglandin E2; Cyp19a1: aromatase gene; Esr1: estrogen receptor  $\alpha$  gene; COUP-TFII: chicken ovoalbumin upstream promoter transcription factor 2; Bmp2: bone marrow protein 2; Hoxa10: homeobox a10; ER $\alpha$ : estrogen receptor  $\alpha$ ; PR: progesterone receptor; C3: complement component 3; Wnt5a: wingless-type MMTV integration site family member 5a; Wnt7a: wingless-type MMTV integration site family member 7a; Dkk1: dickkopf-related protein 1; sFRP4: secreted frizzled-related protein 4; LEH: luminal epithelial height; PND: postnatal day; GD: gestational day; LD: lactational day; MOF: Multi-oocyte follicles

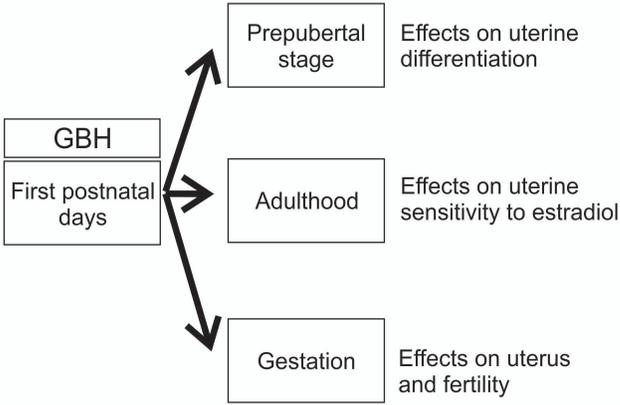
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**Table 2:** Similarities and divergences between the effects of pure glyphosate and those of glyphosate-based herbicides (GBHs)\*.

| <b>Study</b>           | <b>Glyphosate</b>  | <b>GBHs</b>   |
|------------------------|--|---|
| <b><i>In vitro</i></b> | Reduction in cell viability at concentrations of 10 and 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ .   | Reduction in cell viability at concentrations of 10 and 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ .  |
|                        | No effects on the number of granulosa cells or estrogen and progesterone production.   | Roundup® decreases the number of granulosa cells and estrogen and progesterone production.  |
|                        | No decreased cell viability at 500 $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ ; initial toxicity at 1000 $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ .  | No decreased cell viability at 500 $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ ; initial toxicity in cell viability at 800 $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$ .        |
|                        | Glyphosate is more genotoxic than Wipeout® formulation and has a genotoxic effect similar to that of Roundup® in the HEC1A cell line.  | Roundup® has a genotoxicity similar to that of glyphosate, and Wipeout® formulation is less genotoxic than glyphosate.                  |
|                        | In human ovarian and prostate cancer cells, it inhibits proliferation and promotes apoptosis.  | In human blood mononuclear cells, the cytotoxicity of Roundup® is 30 times higher than that of glyphosate alone.                        |
|                        | It increases oxytocin and decreases progesterone secretion from luteal cells.  | Increased oxytocin and decreased progesterone secretion from luteal cells.  |
|                        | Estrogenic effects via ER $\alpha$ at higher doses compared to estrogen. The estrogenic effects may be ligand-independent.   | GBH did not show ER $\alpha$ -activity at a concentration equivalent to that of glyphosate.   |
| <b><i>In vivo</i></b>  | Mice exposed <i>in utero</i> to glyphosate show decreased ovarian weight and histopathological alterations, increased atretic follicles and interstitial fibrosis, and decreased mature follicles on gestational day 19. | In female rats, GBH exposure during the first days of pregnancy induces lower weight ovaries and decreases the number of corpora lutea. |
|                        | Glyphosate has low effects on microbiome disruption.   | GBHs contribute to microbiome disruption.   |
|                        | In mice, prenatal exposure influenced the sex ratio of litters.<br>In rats, the exposure did not alter litter characteristics such as length, weight, and sex ratio.   | In rats, the exposure did not alter litter characteristics such as length, weight, and sex ratio.                                       |

\* Data were obtained from Almeida et al. 2017; Davoren and Schiestl 2018; De Almeida et al. 2018; Dechartres et al. 2019; Gasnier et al. 2009; Gigante et al. 2018; Li et al. 2013; Martinez et al. 2007; Mesnage et al. 2017; Perego et al. 2017a & b; Ren et al. 2018; Santovito et al. 2018; and Wrobel 2018.

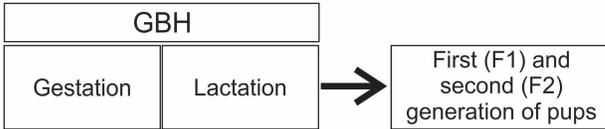
# Rats



↑ incidence of Luminal epithelial hyperplasia and cell proliferation  
 Alteration of  $ER\alpha$ , PR, Wnt7a and  $\beta$ -catenin protein expression in the uterus

↑  $E2$ -induced cell proliferation and  $ER\alpha$  and  $ER\beta$  protein uterine expression

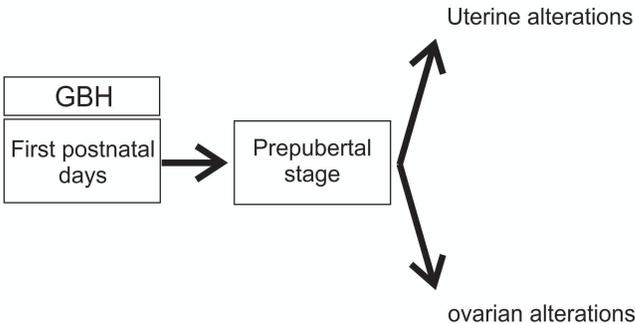
↑ post-implantation losses  
 Alteration of  $ER\alpha$ , PR, Wnt5a and Wnt7a protein expression in the decidua



Effects in fertility in F1 generation

Morphological fetal alterations in F2 generation

# Ewe lambs



↓ proliferation  
 protein expression of p27, and  
 ↑ mRNA expression of IGFBP-3 (unpublished)  
 ↓ protein expression of  $ER\alpha$ , PR, Wnt5a, Wnt7a,  $\beta$ -catenin, Hoxa10 and Foxa2 (unpublished)

↓ ovarian FSH and GDF9 mRNA expression  
 ↓ percentage of primordial follicles  
 ↑ percentage of transitional and primary follicles  
 ↑ percentage of antral atretic follicles  
 ↑ proliferation of granulosa and theca cells  
 ↓ response to oFSH stimulation  
 ↓ (unpublished)

