

CALIFORNIA COURT OF APPEAL, FOURTH APPELLATE DISTRICT,
DIVISION ONE

Dennis v. Monsanto Co.

Dennis v. Monsanto Co. · No. D084130 · Decided November 24, 2025

SUMMARY

The California Court of Appeal affirmed a judgment against Monsanto arising from Mike Dennis’s failure-to-warn claims concerning Roundup and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. The court held that FIFRA did not preempt the California claims because the state-law duties paralleled federal misbranding requirements. The court also upheld the trial court’s reduction of the jury’s punitive damages award from \$325 million to \$21 million against Monsanto’s due-process challenge.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	California Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division One
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Keletly, J.; McConnell, P. J.; Rubin, J.
JURISDICTION	California Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division One
DECIDED	November 24, 2025
DOCKET	D084130
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Monsanto appealed from an amended judgment entered after a jury verdict for Dennis. The trial court denied Monsanto's preemption and due-process challenges, granted Monsanto's motion for judgment notwithstanding the verdict in part, and reduced the punitive damages award from \$325 million to \$21 million.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Federal preemption is reviewed de novo. Constitutional excessiveness of punitive damages is also reviewed de novo, with deference to the jury's and trial court's factual findings.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published and certified for publication
PARTIES	Monsanto Company v. Mike Dennis

TOPICS

- products liability
- negligence
- punitive damages
- federalism
- appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

products liability

torts

federal preemption

punitive damages

appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act expressly or impliedly preempts California failure-to-warn claims concerning Roundup's alleged cancer risk.
2. Whether the reduced punitive damages award violates due process by punishing Monsanto multiple times for the same conduct.

HOLDINGS

1. FIFRA does not expressly or impliedly preempt Dennis's California negligent and strict-liability failure-to-warn claims because the state-law duties parallel FIFRA's requirements that pesticide labels contain warnings and instructions necessary to protect health.
2. The \$21 million punitive damages award did not violate due process by punishing Monsanto multiple times for the same conduct.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Here, as in Pilliod, the verdict does not impose a requirement that Monsanto include a cancer warning; rather, it enforces the parallel requirement that Monsanto include all warnings necessary to protect health and, in doing so, could serve to incentivize Monsanto to provide accurate reporting to the EPA and/or file an amended application seeking a cancer warning for Roundup." (p. 18)

"Here, by contrast, the punitive damage award was based on Monsanto's 'highly reprehensible conduct' directly related to Dennis's physical harm and suffering." (p. 23)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Mike Dennis applied Monsanto's Roundup herbicide around his home monthly throughout the year from 2000 through 2020. He was diagnosed with mycosis fungoides, a form of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, in June 2020. Dennis alleged that Roundup exposure caused his cancer and that Monsanto knew or should have known of the risk but failed to provide adequate warnings. The jury found that Roundup presented a substantial danger when used as commonly practiced, that Monsanto knew or should have known of the danger, and that the inadequate warnings substantially caused Dennis's illness.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Dennis sued Monsanto for design defect, negligent and strict-liability failure to warn, and negligence based on his alleged exposure to Roundup and subsequent diagnosis of mycosis fungoides. A jury found Monsanto liable and awarded \$7 million in compensatory damages and \$325 million in punitive damages. The trial court reduced punitive damages to \$21 million and entered an amended judgment. The Court of Appeal affirmed and awarded Dennis costs on appeal.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Pilliod v. Monsanto Co., 67 Cal. App. 5th 591 (2021)
- Bates v. Dow Agrosciences LLC, 544 U.S. 431 (2005)
- American Meat Institute v. Leeman, 180 Cal. App. 4th 728 (2009)
- The MEGA Life & Health Insurance Co. v. Superior Court, 172 Cal. App. 4th 1522 (2009)
- Schaffner v. Monsanto Corp., 113 F.4th 364 (3d Cir. 2024)
- Hardeman v. Monsanto Co., 997 F.3d 41 (9th Cir. 2021)
- Carson v. Monsanto Co., 92 F.4th 980 (11th Cir. 2024)
- Caranci v. Monsanto Co., 338 A.3d 151 (Pa. 2025)
- Simon v. San Paulo U.S. Holding Co., Inc., 35 Cal. 4th 1159 (2005)
- State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Co. v. Campbell, 538 U.S. 408 (2003)
- Vons Companies, Inc. v. Seabest Foods, Inc., 14 Cal. 4th 434 (1996)
- Guarantee Forklift, Inc. v. Capacity of Texas, Inc., 11 Cal. App. 5th 1066 (2017)

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