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## **In the food sector, concentration through the increase of market share is losing steam**

In an article published in early 2022 [\[read\]](#), we analysed the new forms of private economic power in food systems.

One of the aspects through which we approached this issue was to consider **market shares** of various companies, what we called "the horizontal dimension" of the concentration of private economic power.

We then referred to a very comprehensive study published in September 2020 by a group of US researchers [\[read\]](#).

This article, in fact, revisited a question already addressed in 2014 [\[read\]](#) based on data going back to 2007 for the seed sector and 2011 for the pesticide, fertiliser, and veterinary product sectors of activity.

With the release in June 2025 of the ETC report on agribusiness giants [\[read\]](#), it now becomes possible to analyse the merger/concentration processes that have taken place there over a relatively long period (12 to 16 years).



## Is increasing market share still the main driver of concentration?

When summarising the data gathered in **table 1**, it is clear that the level of concentration observed is highest in agrochemicals, followed by veterinary products and seeds, which, in all three cases, see the four largest companies consistently representing for more than half of the sector's turnover.

The farm machinery sector experiences a slightly lower level of concentration, while the fertiliser sector is much less concentrated (the top 4 corporations weighing only 1/4 to 1/3 of the total turnover of the sector).

**Table 1: Weight of the 4 largest firms in the turnover of a particular sector of activity (in %)**

	2007	2009	2011	2020	2023
<b>Agrochemicals (pesticides)</b>			62	65	61
<b>Veterinary products</b>			55	58	50
<b>Seeds</b>	53	58	58	52	56
<b>Farm machinery</b>				45	41
<b>Fertiliser</b>			22	33	24

Sources: ETC and Hendrickson et al.

Contrary to what one might have expected, the available data **do not show a clear trend towards increased concentration** in the 5 sectors concerned, as claimed by the recent ETC report.

It can be seen that the merger of major operators does not necessarily lead to effective concentration – for various reasons. This is particularly true in the case of the merger of the two giants Dow and DuPont in 2018 to form Corteva:

- in the seed sector, while DuPont and Dow respectively represented 18% and 3% of sector turnover in 2011, Corteva, post-merger, weighed only 19% in 2020 and 2023.
- worse even, in the area of pesticides and agrochemicals, the same merger of DuPont and Dow (7% and 10% respectively) ultimately resulted in Corteva having a market share limited to 11% in 2020 and 10% in 2023.

One might, therefore, be surprised that a serious research group diagnoses an increased concentration based on a description at a given moment, whereas the available historical data series obviously do not confirm this view.

Except that, in reality, as we have seen in our 2022 article [\[read\]](#), in the 21st century, the issue of **concentration no longer mainly revolves around the size of the market share**, and private economic power has taken on **new forms**.

The ETC report acknowledges this by emphasising the importance of “**corporate investment in new technologies, like digital platforms, artificial intelligence (AI)**”

and gene editing”, as well as by “forging alliances with Big Tech companies and other corporations in the food sector to expand their dominance from seeds to supermarkets”.

To this, acquisitions should be added that allow a firm to be present in two or more areas of activity within the food system (for example, the acquisition of Monsanto by BASF, which enables the latter to strengthen its activities in agrochemistry – its traditional main field – and to enter the seed sector, thus creating synergies and having a direct access to strategic information) and

- the development and implementation of norms and standards – a way to control market access and therefore exert pressure resulting in profit generation – through the collection and analysis of data generated by operators acting at all levels of agricultural and food supply chains [[read](#)].

## To conclude

In the area of food, the concentration in its various forms still has a bright future ahead, as long as regulations are limited to a **single sector of activity** and do not take into consideration the **potential synergies and complementarities that exist among different levels of agricultural and food systems**.

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To know more:

- ETC, [Top 10 agribusiness giants – Corporate concentration in food & farming in 2025](#), 2025.
- Hendrickson M.K., P. H. Howard, E. M. Miller et D. H. Constance, [The Food System: Concentration and its impacts](#), A Special Report to the Family Farm Action Alliance, 2020.
- ETC, [Putting the Cartel before the Horse ...and Farm, Seeds, Soil, Peasants, etc – Who Will Control Agricultural Inputs?](#), 2013.

Selection of earlier articles published on [hungerexplained](#) related to this topic

- [Private economic power in food systems and its new forms](#), 2022.
- [The digital revolution in food and agriculture – Exciting promises, mixed results and risky bet](#), 2021.
- [Large manoeuvres in the global food system: concentration et financialisation consolidate its industrial nature](#), 2017.
- [The large corporations in charge of our agrofood system...: agrochemical corporations](#), 2014.