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Political spending soars on both sides of GMO issue

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By Rick Daysog, Reporter [CONNECT](#)

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - The battle over genetically modified crops is turning into one of the most expensive political debates in Hawaii's history.

Hawaii News Now analyzed campaign contributions and lobbying expenses by both pro- and anti-GMO organizations. We found that large seed companies and their employees spent more than half a million dollars on either one or both of those efforts during the past eight years.

Anti-GMO groups spent nearly \$270,000, mostly during the 2016 election season.

Those numbers don't include the nearly \$9 million that was spent by both sides on the 2014 ballot initiative that sought to place a moratorium on GMO's grown in Maui County.

"Look anyone who spends that kind of money gets a lot of access," said University of Hawaii Political Science Professor Colin Moore. "They also have a lot of jobs behind them."

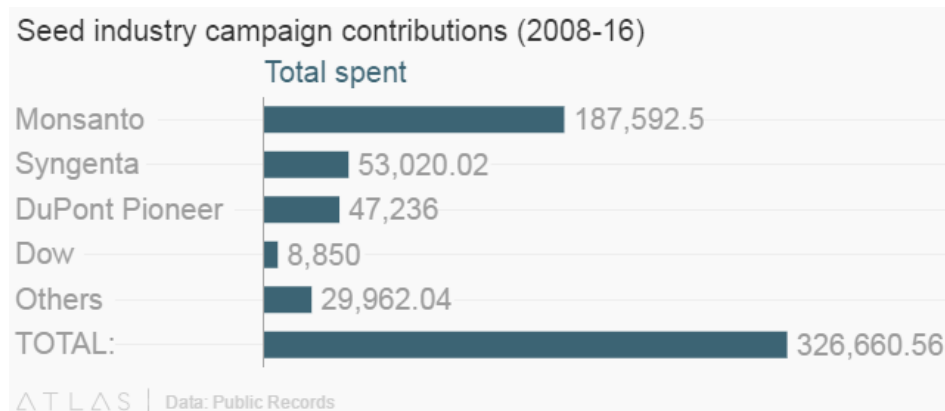
The fact that both sides feel the need to spend large sums of money worries some campaign watchdogs.

"People with the most money are going to have the loudest voice, and it's going to be corrupting the entire system," said former state Campaign Spending Commission Director Bob Watada.

Public records show that Monsanto Hawaii was the state's largest GMO donor, giving more than \$187,000. Syngenta was next, at \$53,000, followed by Dupont Pioneer, which gave \$47,000.

Hawaii News Now found no evidence that any of the campaign spending was illegal.

"We participate in the political process, as public policy decisions can impact our farms and employees," said Dan Clegg, Monsanto's Hawaii Business Operations Lead. "Monsanto is committed to being constructive and transparent in the political process."



Anti-GMO forces are well funded as well. Political action committees Sustainable Action Fund for the Environment and the Hawaii Center for Food Safety spent more than \$200,000 over the past two years.

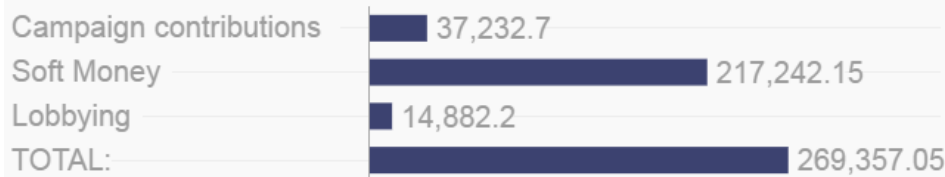
"They've used that money to build a coalition. They've used that money to poll folks. They've used the money to engage in training," said Moore. "They're really politicizing voters who might not otherwise participate."

Former Kauai council member Gary Hooser, a GMO opponent, lost his re-election bid in November. He says the money raised by anti-GMO groups are minimal compared to the large corporations.

"I think the money the chemical industry is spending around the state makes a huge difference. They're marshaling forces, they have their own PR companies. They have high-level paid lobbyists," Hooser said.

"There's no question the four GMO pesticide companies on Kauai got together to beat me."

Anti-GMO Political Spending



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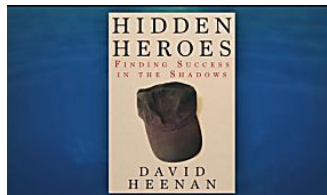
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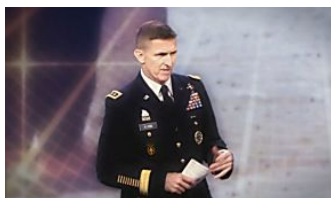
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