

From agrochemicals to Syngenta

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

Alongside dyes and pharmaceuticals, the Basel companies developed agricultural chemicals: insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and seed treatments. Geigy's discovery of DDT in 1939 was the most famous product of this branch, but Geigy, Ciba and Sandoz all built significant agrochemical businesses in the twentieth century. The growth of world agriculture, the green revolution and the industrialisation of farming created a large market for these products.¹

The agrochemical businesses of the Basel companies were later separated from their pharmaceutical businesses. After the merger of Ciba-Geigy and Sandoz into Novartis in 1996, Novartis combined its agribusiness with that of the British-Swedish AstraZeneca to form Syngenta in 2000, a company with its headquarters in Basel. In 2017, Syngenta was acquired by ChemChina, the Chinese state-owned chemical company, for some forty-three billion dollars, one of the largest Chinese acquisitions abroad.² The acquisition raised questions about foreign ownership of strategic companies, which Switzerland has addressed in its debate on investment screening. It also connected Basel with the Chinese economy. Part G returns to it.

1 Notes

1. On the agrochemical businesses of Geigy, Ciba and Sandoz in the twentieth century, see the histories of the companies. To be verified.



From agrochemicals to Syngenta

2. On the formation of Syngenta in 2000 from the agribusinesses of Novartis and AstraZeneca, with headquarters in Basel, and its acquisition by ChemChina in 2017 (about USD 43 billion), later part of the Syngenta Group, see the company publications. To be verified. ↩

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/basel-from-agrochemicals-to-syngenta