



C E N T E R F O R FOOD SAFETY

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Statement on WTO Ruling on U.S.-E.U. Biotech Food Dispute

In light of press reports that a WTO ruling released today has attacked European delays in approving genetically engineered (GE) foods, the Center for Food Safety questioned the WTO's position and condemned the trade group for usurping national sovereignty in questioning rules on GE food that have been imposed by individual European countries.

“People around the world have a right to safe food, and to their own regulatory systems for insuring safe food for their citizens,” said Joseph Mendelson, Legal Director of the Center for Food Safety (CFS). “Contrary to the Bush Administration's intent, this decision will only serve to harden attitudes against GE crops in Europe and around the world.”

In press reports on the 1,000 page decision, the WTO reportedly denounced bans that have been imposed on certain GE crops within individual E.U. countries. But CFS notes that such action asserts international trade rules over national protections, giving the WTO unchecked authority over individual food and agricultural choices. At least six E.U. countries have imposed bans on certain GE crops, and dozens of other regions and nations around the world have bans or strict regulations on certain GE varieties, often in response to local environmental or safety concerns (charts showing worldwide regulations on GE food are at <http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/geneticall5.cfm>)

CFS also notes that the U.S. WTO complaint, filed in 2003, **did not** address Europe's labeling or traceability rules, which were finalized in 2004. Regardless of the details of today's decision, European consumers retain the right to labels on GE food. The U.S. has hoped that this WTO decision will discourage other countries from adopting labeling or other rules on GE food, but clearly consumers around the world want these foods labeled and will continue to avoid buying them.

“American farms were once known as the breadbasket of the world, but since the biotech industry has been selling their gene-contaminated crops, our grain is stigmatized around the world,” said Mendelson. “Instead of attempts to force-feed consumers, our farmers would be better served by policies that give consumers the right to choose the safe, natural foods that they want to eat.”