

Gene Altered Foods Will Remain a Losing Proposition for U.S. Farmers, Despite WTO Decision

A Joint Statement on the Forthcoming WTO Decision in the U.S.--E.U. Gene Food Dispute

Early in 2006, the World Trade Organization (WTO) is expected to rule on a Bush Administration challenge to European delays in approving new varieties of genetically engineered (GE) foods and on EU member state bans on certain GE varieties. In anticipation of this ruling, the undersigned U.S. organizations condemn the Bush Administration's aggressive tactics in attempting to force-feed unwanted gene altered varieties to consumers around the world.

The Bush Administration claims that European Union delays in granting new GE crop approvals has resulted in lost markets for American farmers. But clearly consumers' preference for non-GE food, and not regulatory issues, are the true engine of the market collapse for American crops. Even before new GE approvals began to slow in the late 1990's, the advent of GE corn resulted in a drop of U.S. corn sales to Europe of more than 50%.

Consumers in Europe or elsewhere cannot be forced to buy and eat food that they do not want. Since the United States has no real hope of boosting sales of GE foods to unwilling Europeans, the WTO suit is clearly an effort to chill other nations from pursuing *any* regulations on GE foods. But increasing scientific study is showing the necessity of rules to guard against the public health and environmental hazards associated with these inadequately tested foods.

We support global regulations of GE foods, mandatory labeling, and the right to restrict where GE crops are grown. We support right of nations to regulate GE foods for the welfare of the public and the environment. We note that even in the United States, many counties and states have enacted or are developing regulations of these products in the absence of leadership from the federal government.

Regardless of the outcome of the WTO case, consumers in Europe and in much of the world will continue to prefer non-GE food. Indeed a WTO ruling in favor of the United States is sure to generate even more hostility against GE foods. Ultimately American farmers will suffer the most as the Bush Administration's arrogant stance on GE food increasingly alienates our food trading partners. South Korea was once the number two buyer of U.S. corn but now buys non-GE corn elsewhere, and China looks to Brazil for non-GE soy.

While Europe and much of the rest of the world, including Australia, Japan, Korea, China and several other countries have mandatory safety assessment rules for approval of GE food, and mandatory labeling to insure consumer choice, in the U.S. deregulated GE foods are sold without labels to unwitting Americans. The Bush Administration should stop threatening free choice and food safety through contentious international trade disputes, and instead start working to provide Americans with the same protections for safe food choices that European and other governments around the world have established.

In a similar WTO case, the U.S. prevailed against Europe's ban on hormone-treated U.S. beef. Yet while the U.S. "won" the beef-hormone dispute in 1999, Europe has still not opened its markets to U.S. beef. The beef hormone and GE food cases show that in a global market, the U.S. will have more success selling its agricultural products by focusing on providing food that global consumers want to buy, rather than trying to shove whatever farmers produce down foreign throats regardless of consumer demand.

We regret the course the Administration has taken in pursuing this global food fight, and suggest that the interests of Monsanto and other GE crop producers should no longer dictate our policies on food trade or food production. Instead, policy should be aimed toward providing Americans and our export customers with the kind of safe, healthy, sustainably-produced food that they want to eat. Regardless of the outcome of the decision of the U.S. case at the WTO, the global battle over GE food will only end when the Administration learns the basic economic lesson, “the customer is always right.”

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