

WTO Draft Ruling on EU-US Biotech Foods War Expected Shortly

Friends of the Earth calls for a new world trade system

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Brussels/Geneva, 7 February 2006 - Friends of the Earth Europe today called for a deep-rooted reform of the international trade system if the World Trade Organisation (WTO) over-rules European Union attempts to protect its people and environment from genetically modified (GM) foods and crops.

In a draft ruling expected shortly on the transatlantic trade dispute over GM foods, the WTO will inform the countries involved whether national bans on GM products are a barrier to free trade and should be lifted. It is also likely to show whether Europe's de facto moratorium between 1998 and 2004 on new GM foods was also a barrier to trade.

The European Commission has already today issued a memo which clearly exposes what is at stake. Should the world follow the de-regulation, business-driven approach of the US or should it follow the regulatory, safety-first approach of the European Union? The number of GM accidents in the US strongly suggests that the EU model is better to protect people and their environment. (1)

Alexandra Wandel, Friends of the Earth Europe's Trade Co-ordinator, said: "Protecting wildlife, farmers and consumers from the threat of genetically modified crops is far more important than enforcing free trade rules. The World Trade Organisation with its secretive decision-making processes is unfit to decide what we should eat or what farmers should grow. The WTO is undemocratic, and unfairly favours big business. A new global trading system is needed that protects people and the environment from the worst excesses of industry." Adrian Bebb, GM Food Campaigner for Friends of the Earth Europe, said: "Opposition to genetically modified foods is likely to increase if the WTO decides that European safeguards should be sacrificed to benefit biotech corporations. Consumers worldwide will not be bullied into eating GM foods. European governments must stand up to the WTO and protect the food chain and the environment from the threat of genetically modified crops."

Friends of the Earth points out that:

- Opposition to GM foods and crops in Europe has increased since the beginning of the trade dispute. There are now over 170 regions and 4,500 smaller areas that want to be GM-free.
- An alternative dispute settlement procedure is needed to solve trade and environmental conflicts. This could be the International Court of Justice or the Permanent Court of Arbitration. Additionally, the UN Biosafety Protocol is an international agreement already in place that deals with trade in

GMOs.

- The first ten years of GM crops have failed to deliver the benefits promised by the biotech industry and have played no role in tackling poverty and hunger (2).

An international campaign against the WTO dispute called "Bite-back - WTO: Hands off our food!" - is supported by 750 organisations representing some 60 million people (see www.bite-back.org). The coalition states that the industry-friendly WTO is not the right place to decide what food Europeans should eat. (3)

The "Bite Back" citizens' objection was initiated by Friends of the Earth International with the support of consumer, development and farmers' groups, trade unions, research institutes and citizens from over 100 countries.

[1] European Commission Press Release:

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/06/61&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

[2] A special media briefing on the GM trade dispute is available at :

www.foeeurope.org/publications/2006/GMO_and_WTO_interim_briefing_Feb2006.pdf

as well as a fact sheet on GMOs and the WTO, see:

www.foeeurope.org/publications/2006/GMO_and_WTO_QA_Feb2006.pdf

En Français:

Briefing pour la presse sur le conflit commercial transatlantique sur les aliments modifiés génétiquement:

www.foeeurope.org/publications/2006/GMO_et_WTO_briefing_intermediaire_Feb2006_FR.pdf

Les OGM en Europe et l'OMC - Questions réponses

www.foeeurope.org/publications/2006/GMO_et_WTO_QR_Feb2006_FR.pdf

FOE report: Who benefits from GM crops, January 2006-02-07

http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2006/who_benefits_from_gm_crops_Jan_2006.pdf

[3] Is the WTO the only way? Safeguarding Multilateral Environmental Agreements from international trade rules and settling trade and environment disputes outside the WTO. A briefing paper by Adelphi Consult, Friends of the Earth Europe and Greenpeace. Available at:

http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2005/alternatives_wto.pdf

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