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## **Public Citizen Denounces WTO Tribunal Decision on Genetically Modified Foods**

### ***Statement of Lori Wallach, Director, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch***

Unfortunately, today's decision by a World Trade Organization (WTO) tribunal in favor of the U.S. challenge against European policies on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is not very surprising given the many outrageous WTO rules limiting how countries can regulate a wide array of non-trade issues, even including what sort of food will be found in people's homes.

The WTO's invasion of such a hyper-sensitive, value-laden policy about something as intimate as the very nature of food on every European dinner table is certain to throw even more doubt on the already-shaky Doha Round WTO expansion talks. If the WTO can meddle with domestic policies about what food comes into our homes, it makes very clear that the last thing anyone needs is to expand the power or scope of this unaccountable, corporate-controlled body.

This ruling against Europe's right to set its own GMO policies is the WTO's Valentine's Day love letter to one of its favorites – giant agribusiness – by using the WTO's retrograde rules to attempt to force Frankenfoods on the rest of the world regardless of what consumers and their elected representatives say.

Nothing does more to promote the demise of the global trading system than these U.S.-European battles over non-trade issues that expose how the WTO invades our democratic rights to set our own domestic policies. The more the two biggest backers of the WTO keep shooting at each other using the WTO, the more tattered the WTO flag becomes and the clearer it is to consumers that the democratic policies protecting our families' health and safety are among the biggest casualties at WTO.

The United States has already lost the fight for GMOs in Europe. No WTO suit will force a savvy European consumer who enjoys mandatory labeling to eat any product they don't want. Thus, it is clear that the WTO GMO suit is a bald-faced attempt by the United States to frighten other nations away from following Europe's example and regulating these products to protect the environment and public health.

The United States may have won this battle, but it is rapidly losing the GMO war. This WTO ruling will only increase consumer suspicion of genetically modified foods and of a global trading system that subsumes the public interest to the interests of DuPont, Dow, Monsanto and other

agribusiness giants eager to force feed consumers products about which consumers have deep concerns.

Today half the world's population lives in countries that require pre-market approval of GMOs. Even in the United States, where agribusiness has secured a deregulated market for GMOs and is conducting an open GMO experiment on the U.S. environment and U.S. consumers, there are three counties in California that ban all GMO crops. In the developing world, South Korea was once the number-two buyer of U.S. corn but now buys GMO-free corn elsewhere. China now looks to Brazil for GMO-free soy. These are market losses for U.S. GMO producers based on choices by U.S. agribusiness to pursue the GMO strategy, which makes resorting to the WTO, a body allegedly promoting free markets, a perverse way to try to remedy bad market choices by some players.

Scientific evidence of environmental harms caused by genetically engineered crops and the threat to human health posed by pharmaceuticals grown in food crops will not dissipate, and neither will concentrate efforts by concerned government officials to regulate these crops to protect biodiversity, ecosystems and human health. Trying to use the WTO to reverse this trend will only boomerang on the WTO.

Get ready Dow, DuPont and Monsanto: You will reap what you sow. The WTO's declaration that national bans on specific GMO products are WTO-illegal will send shock waves around the world. From California to Saudi Arabia, there are hundreds of declared GMO-free zones. This attack on democracy will not get your Bt-corn tortillas on supermarket shelves any faster, but will prompt more and more consumers around the globe to enact policies declaring their regional and national governments GMO-free and to campaign against the WTO.

Forcing unwanted GMOs on unwilling nations is not just stupid politics: It is a violation of international law. The Biosafety Protocol protects the right of nations to regulate these products in the public interest. The best way for nations to greet this news from the WTO is to stand their ground and implement much-needed pre-market approval, safety testing, traceability and labeling programs.

For more information, visit  
<http://www.citizen.org/trade/wto/agriculture/gmo/articles.cfm?ID=14898>

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*Public Citizen is a national, nonprofit consumer advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C.  
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