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## US uses GM foods in first assault of EU trade battle

Heather Stewart and Charlotte Denny

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Washington is coming under mounting pressure from big business to use the transatlantic trade spat over GM crops as a test case for an all-out assault on EU health and safety rules, environmental campaigners warn.

They fear EU rules on recycling, animal testing and chemicals will all be targeted by the Bush administration.

After the administration caused consternation at the EU last week by launching a dispute over Europe's moratorium on GM foods at the World Trade Organisation, Friends of the Earth accused them of caving in to the powerful business lobby group, **the National Foreign Trade Council.**

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"These are not obscure laws, they're about the food we eat - something that Europeans really care about; and it looks as if there's a hit list out there for them," said Liana Stupples, the policy and campaigns director at FoE.

**The NFTC has a list of regulations it would like Europe to abandon.**

**The US state department website prominently displays a paper titled "Looking Behind the Curtain: The Growth of Trade Barriers that Ignore Sound Science", published by the NFTC, whose members include Halliburton, the energy firm once run by vice-president**

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Dick Cheney.

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The report criticises Europe's practice of banning imports it believes may be risky, deriding this "precautionary principle" as "an inherently unscientific touchstone".

It calls Europe's restrictions on GM crops a "disguised trade barrier".

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**The NFTC also singles out other rules it would like to see struck down - including Japanese restrictions on apple imports and Korean rules on nuts.**

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**The list of products that could be affected includes a wide range of foods and other consumer goods, from cars to toiletries.**

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**US firms are concerned that "burdensome national standards and technical regulations are increasingly being used by foreign countries to protect ailing industries and block market access to US exports", the report says.**

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**Ms Stupples said the NFTA appeared to want the US to use the GM foods case as a "show of strength" to force the EU into relaxing a much wider range of trade rules.**

The drawn-out nature of WTO disputes means the GM foods row will be coming to the boil just as ministers meet in Cancun, Mexico, in September to try to make progress on the Doha round of trade negotiations. Those talks are intended to tilt trade rules to benefit developing countries.

"Unless the EU fights back hard and stops further expansion of WTO rules in Cancun in September, much of what Europe holds dear will be systematically attacked," said Ms Stupples.

A spokesman for the US trade representative's office said the document did not represent government policy.