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Biotech Barriers Hurt Poor, Says NFTC

Regulatory barriers over biotechnology are affecting the poorest countries, says [National Foreign Trade Council](#) President Bill Reinsch. "One of the most alarming trends that our analysis identifies is the apparently targeted application of these restrictions to the most promising areas of technology where we expect to have significant future economic growth potential. As damaging as this may be to the U.S. and other developed economies, it is even more threatening to the poorest nations for whom these technologies may make the difference between simply surviving and thriving," Reinsch says. The US trade lobbying body presents its view of "a deliberate strategy to invoke the need for 'precaution' in order to protect ailing or lagging industries and block market access" in a report: Looking Behind the Curtain: The Growth of Trade Barriers that Ignore Sound Science (<http://www.nftc.org/default/white%20paper/TR2%20final.pdf>).

The report criticizes what it sees as "GMO authorization rules" which would "effectively block several types of developing country trade in seed and food products. Traceability and labeling rules would impose additional costs and administrative burdens upon developing countries that already lack the institutional and technical capacity to adhere to more workable international standards on food safety. The resulting trade loss would deprive developing countries of sorely needed revenues from which to finance their balance of payment obligations and infrastructure development. Also, it would reduce the number of currently available jobs and prospects for future employment, especially within least developed countries lacking a manufacturing infrastructure."

The report continues "The new EU GMO authorization rules would deprive developing countries of a number of significant potential health benefits offered by agricultural biotechnology, and thereby deny their citizens the ability to sustain and possibly improve their lives. As noted by African scientist, Dr. John Wafula, of the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), "Biotechnology in Africa hinges on averting mass starvation and alleviating rampant poverty." The technical, administrative and economic burdens that will be borne by developing country governments as the result of the EU's new GMO regulatory regime would only worsen their ability to satisfy international food safety standards." The NFTC criticizes the EU regulatory requirement that "biotech food and feed must not present a risk for animal health, human health or the environment" as imposing "an insurmountable evidentiary burden upon exporters of such products." The NFTC says that, "as the

U.S. Government has noted, "this level of assurance is wholly unobtainable for any food or feed product, regardless of production method, as the absence of risk can never be proven." The regulation may also be discriminatory and a disguised trade barrier to the extent this standard differs from any other applied by the EU to non-biotech food and feed safety standards or standards established for food additives or pesticide residues."

In addition to criticizing the EU moratorium on GM foods, the report takes issue with the developing Biosafety Protocol. "It creates a precedent for genetically modified crops to be treated differently from hybridized crops, even when there is no scientific evidence that they represent a threat to anything," says the NFTC's report. "As such, these crops are being judged on the basis of the process used to produce them rather than on the level of risk represented by the product itself. Given the Biosafety Protocol's inclination towards precaution, it is not surprising that the EU has chosen an approach to assessing and managing hazards that approximates the Protocol's approach to risk analysis. This approach favours processes over products and non-science over science, and as a result is in conflict with the hard fought scientific and objective principles contained within the WTO Agreements, which seek to establish a stable, clear, predictable and consistent regulatory approach."

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About BINAS

- The Biosafety Information Network and Advisory Service (BINAS) is a service of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization ([UNIDO](#)). BINAS monitors global developments in regulatory issues in biotechnology.