

TAFTA: Corporations Express Fear of Democracy

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The [Trans-Atlantic Free Trade Agreement \(TAFTA\)](#) negotiations have [only just begun](#), but already hundreds of corporations are weighing in to let negotiators know what they hope to get out of the agreement. In many cases, multinational corporations submit their views to both sides, and one shudders to imagine teams of European and U.S. negotiators lining up with identical talking points representing the views of “their” corporations, and speedily agreeing on “uncontroversial” sections that [favor the interests of corporations over consumers](#).

Many of the large corporations use their comments to signal their support of “science-based regulation” over “political” considerations (read: support for a weakening of safeguards, such as labels for genetically-modified food, over [popular backing for those safeguards](#)). Here is a selection of some official corporate statements to that effect on TAFTA and food and product safety, submitted either to [the U.S. Trade Representative](#) or the [Joint EU-U.S. Solicitation on Regulatory Issues](#):

Food Safety

- “**Science-based** risk assessment, as the foundation for regulatory decisions, must not be overruled by an incorrect (and **politically** driven) application of the precautionary principle, as currently applied by the EU” (*Croplife America*, a lobbying group of U.S. pesticide corporations that includes genetically-modified-organism (GMO) giant [Monsanto](#))
- “Finally, the EU’s **political** approach in regulating crops enhanced with traits achieved through modern biotechnology procedures is a concern to U.S. wheat producers. The EU biotechnology approval process is slow and often influenced more by **politics** than **science**, creating uncertainty and deterring new investment in wheat research... **Science** and market preferences, not **politics**, should be the determinants.” (*U.S. Wheat Associates*)
- “The current 'asynchronous approval' situation is caused by many factors, including risk assessment guidelines that are not aligned and increasing **politically**-motivated delays in product approvals.” (*National Grain & Feed Association and North American Export Grain Association*, lobbying groups comprised of the largest U.S. agribusinesses, such as [Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland](#))
- “International trade rules fully support trade in products of biotechnology for planting, processing and marketing, subject to **science**-based regulation... **Politically** motivated bans or moratoria by WTO member states are not consistent with members’ WTO obligations.” (*National Corn Growers Association*)
- “The implementation of production standards based on **politics** or popular thought instead of **science** will do nothing more than eliminate family operations and drive up costs to consumers.” (*National Cattlemen's Beef Association*, [a factory-farm-supporting lobbying group for the beef industry](#))

- “What is deeply concerning about the EU’s overall approach to SPS [sanitary and phytosanitary] issues, however, is that its **political** body is frequently given the ability to override the EU’s own **scientific** authority’s findings to instead establish restrictions on products based typically on animal welfare or consumer preferences.” (*National Milk Producers Federation & U.S. Dairy Export Council*)

Product Safety

- “Significant barriers to further alignment, namely **politics** and differences in regulatory approach, remain on both sides of the Atlantic. Our experience has also shown that **politics** and differences in regulatory philosophy are fundamentally the root causes for differences in toy safety standards... Frequently, standards that are stricter than their international counterparts are promulgated due to **political** influence or the (often unstated) desire to erect technical barriers to trade, and not predicated by **science** or risk factors.” (*Toy Industry Association and Toy Industries of Europe*)
- “We would like to highlight the fact that these regulatory differences are often **politically** motivated... We regret that the differences in regulations in the EU and US are often caused by the result of **politics** rather than a different approach to ensuring safety.” (*Toy Industries of Europe*)
- “Such discussions need to take place between technical, not **political** or administrative, entities and need to make business sense for the organizations involved.” (*ASME*, a lobbying group for engineers -- the first U.S. "non-profit" entity convicted for violating antitrust laws)

But what do these corporations mean when they use the word “political?” One possibility is anything they happen to disagree with.

But let’s give them slightly more credit than that -- what happens if we substitute the words democracy/democratic for politics/political? After all, the "political" bodies the corporations fear are the democratically elected representatives of the people.

Now we see:

- Croplife (i.e. Monsanto) complaining about the European Commission’s **democratically** driven application of the precautionary principle, which restricts GMOs.
- U.S. agribusinesses decrying **democratically**-motivated delays in approving GMOs and other products that raise food safety concerns.
- The beef industry worrying about production standards based on **democracy** or "popular thought."
- Big Dairy concerned that the EU’s **democratic** body prioritizes "animal welfare [and]consumer preferences."
- Toy corporations fearing that **democratically** motivated regulations will lead to stricter "toy safety standards."
- ASME wanting to keep **democratic** entities out of the room so that regulation “makes business sense for the organizations involved."

The idea that we can choose science over democracy when making our regulations is, of course, nonsense. Science doesn't tell us how we should decide between safer toys and cheaper toys (or larger profits for toy companies). Science doesn't tell us how cautious we should be about eating food that has been genetically modified to increase farm industry profits. Science doesn't tell us how to value cheaper meat and milk versus safeguards that limit the use of antibiotics or acidic carcass cleaning and that allow animals to live in a cage large enough to turn around in.

Science can inform the unavoidable trade-offs in our policy choices. But in the end we, the people, not they, the unelected trade negotiators and their corporate advisors, must decide how to strike the balance.

As the TAFTA negotiations get underway, this attempt by industry insiders to concoct an argument that they should be involved in writing regulation, but our democratically elected bodies should not, is yet another reminder of the danger of allowing an agreement to be negotiated behind closed doors, with hundreds of corporate "advisors," and without transparency to the public or even our democratically elected representatives.