

1997 September 25

In Peter Cook's article in the Globe and Mail September 24, 1997, "Genetically modified food fads" he referred to an appeal launched by the European Union against a ruling in favour of Canada. Canada had filed a complaint with the World Trade organization about the European Union's banning of Canadian beef that contains hormones.

Citizens in Canada are becoming more and more outraged about what might be imposed on Canada as a result of trade agreements. Canadian citizens must be equally outraged by the government of Canada's action, in the name of trade, to undermine high standards in Europe. People still remember "safe tested" Thalidomide, DDT, CFCs, PCBs, Dioxin and others. .Peter Cook referred to European concerns about genetically engineered Canadian Canola, and hormone administered beef as being from "anxiety-ridden consumers" and that Canada will have to urge "their European counterparts to show leadership rather than constantly pandering to popular fears".

True leadership would be a willingness to act in the public good, and for Canada to accede not only to the will of the European community but also to the will of Canadians who are justifiably concerned about the safety of these processes and products.

Canada under the leadership of Sheila Copps as Minister of the Environment undertook to adhere to the "reverse onus principle" in Canada. This principle states that the proponent of an intervention into the ecosystem has to demonstrate safety rather than the opponents' having to demonstrate harm. It would appear that neither the hormone treatment nor the genetically engineered canola oil has been demonstrated to be safe. On the contrary there is sufficient evidence that the hormones could be carcinogenic and that genetically engineered foods could be detrimental to both human health and the environment in particular impacting on biodiversity. In addition, for years now the precautionary principle has become a principle of international customary law and as such is required to be integrated into state law. When applied, the precautionary principle, affirms that in the event of potential environmental harm the lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason to prevent the harm. the previous growth hormone Diethylstil Bestrol was proved to be carcinogenic; it is obvious that there is justifiable concern that any growth hormone could be potentially carcinogenic.

Given the possible carcinogenic effects of the hormone treatment and the potentially adverse environmental and health impacts of genetically modified food. the Europeans are perfectly justified in banning both processes and products.

There is sufficient evidence to justify the banning of the processes and products not only in Europe but also in Canada and in other parts of the world. It should be noted that Canada through the Rio Declaration at UNCED made a commitment to prevent the transfer to other states of substances and activities that are harmful to human health or that could cause environmental damage.

Canada's ill-conceived trade in Canadian hormone treated beef and genetically modified organisms.

Posted by Joan Russow
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It is unconscionable that the citizens in Canada are not supporting the European Community in the genuine concerns it has raised about Canadian processes and products. Europe has a right to set higher standards for food safety, and perhaps it will lead the way for changes in Canada.

Peter Cook concluded his article by warning Canadians not about the potential harm of the products and processes but about Europe's being "on the wrong side in a number of trade wars". So will all those who put health before profit.

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