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TTIP and sustainable food production: water and fire?

- **Read the report**



The currently negotiated and disputed free trade agreement (TTIP) between the EU and US could have deep impacts on how we produce our food. Even if there are not many policy areas that have a more direct impact on people and the planet, this was one of the issues that were largely left out in the TTIP-debate. That is why the Greens-Efa group in the European Parliament (EP) organised (together with a broad range of organisations: ARC2020, Compassion in World Farming, Corporate Europe Observatory, Eurocoop, European Coordination Via Campesina, European Milk Board, Friends of the Earth Europe and Slowfood) a big conference and debate "TTIP talks – What's Cooking? – Perspectives on Food and Farming" on 10 December 2014. The Greens-Efa now publish the report that summarises the presentations and discussions of this conference. This publication coincides with a crucial phase in the EP where several committees will vote on their assessment of TTIP. These reports will be taken on board by the Trade committee which is in the lead for preparing parliament's first ever opinion on TTIP, which will most likely be voted in plenary in May. One of the more important ones for food and health related issues is the vote in the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) which takes place on April 14th. The Green rapporteur MEP Bart Staes, has managed to secure a number of compromises with the support of other political groups, that do not compromise on democratic achieved regulations concerning food safety and public health. In order to be able to find a compromise and safeguard shared criticism, MEP Staes had sometimes to walk on a thin rope during negotiations. Some key compromises that the ENVI report calls for:

- Clear safeguards of our policies, principles and procedures, also specifically with regard to regulatory cooperation

- Exclusion of five areas from the negotiations (public health services, GMOS, use of hormones in the bovine sector, chemical legislation REACH and its implementation, and cloning
- A list of measures which we consider fundamental that must not be compromised,
- A list of measures where we call for cooperation, with a view to upward harmonisation
- Opposition to arbitration ISDS
- A further increase of transparency in line with recommendations by the European Ombudsman.

The report published today shows that a clear and critical stance from parliament is no luxury. It shows that is was high time to consider and discuss the main challenges and future perspectives on TTIP and its foreseeable impact on food and farming. Given the fact that the main objective of the EU – US trade deal is to remove non-tariff barriers (NTBs) to trade between the Europe and the US, this might affect producers and consumers of both sides of the Atlantic. In layman's terms these NTBs are areas standards relating to food safety, environmental and consumer protection, and public health. Therefore the TTIP project is not a traditional trade deal, because tariffs between the two trading blocks are very low on average in most sectors. Some key issues that were addressed during the conference and are described in the report:

- There are substantial differences in rules regulating food and farming in the EU and US. This relates both to specific differences in rules and regulations, and key differences in how the US and EU deal with scientific uncertainty and risk assessment;
- The precautionary principle is used in both the US and EU in practice, however Precautionary Principle is an integrated component of EU risk management and regulations, while in the USA it is not a component endorsed in policy making;
- The European model of a whole food chain approach (from farm to fork) should and will be maintained as it pertains to the EU – US trade negotiations;
- Regulatory convergence is the overarching concept of working out differences between regulatory regimes in the US and EU. The concept of regulatory convergence will put pressure on the EU regulatory framework and its implementation.
- The EU regulatory regime relating to animal welfare is significantly advanced compared to the US. No regulation or standards for protecting animal welfare for farm animals exists at federal level in the US, although some standards and protections exist at state and local levels.
- In terms of managing chemicals, and in this case in particular pesticides there are significant difference because the EU has traditionally used hazard based cut off points, instead of the US system of risk based assessment.
- Agribusiness on both sides of the Atlantic, as documented by publically available documents, see TTIP as a vehicle for changing regulations and rules in favour of "least trade restrictive" regulatory frameworks and regulation. In this sense TTIP should not be seen as merely a battle between the EU and the US, but between industrial agribusiness versus the development of sustainable agriculture and food production.;
- The EU – US trade deal also threatens fragile gains made in the US at local and state level towards more sustainable food systems i.e. using public procurement as tool to support local food economies and small and medium size producers;
- The European Commission maintains that certain "red lines" will be maintained relating to food safety standards, authorisation of GMOs and current legal bans on hormone beef, meat of cloned animals and their offspring as well as other novel foods; and
- Although several studies have looked at the impact on jobs and growth, using different economic models with very large variations in estimated impacts, few have examined impacts specifically relating to farming and food, and have not adequately addressed impacts on broader socioeconomic aspects relating to environment and public health.

The TTIP conference "TTIP talks – What's Cooking? – Perspectives on Food and Farming" demonstrated that there was broad agreement from both civil society, members of the European Parliament, citizens,

respondents from the European Commission and representatives from the US that this is an important debate that should be continued. There is also a broad consensus from civil society organisations that important standards and protections relating to consumer interests, environment and public health should not be an issue for trade to decide or merely considered as technical barriers to trade. This debate should be seen as a starting point for developing an alternative framework for trade, food and agriculture policy that respects the rights of EU and US citizens and farmers in their efforts to build more sustainable food systems.

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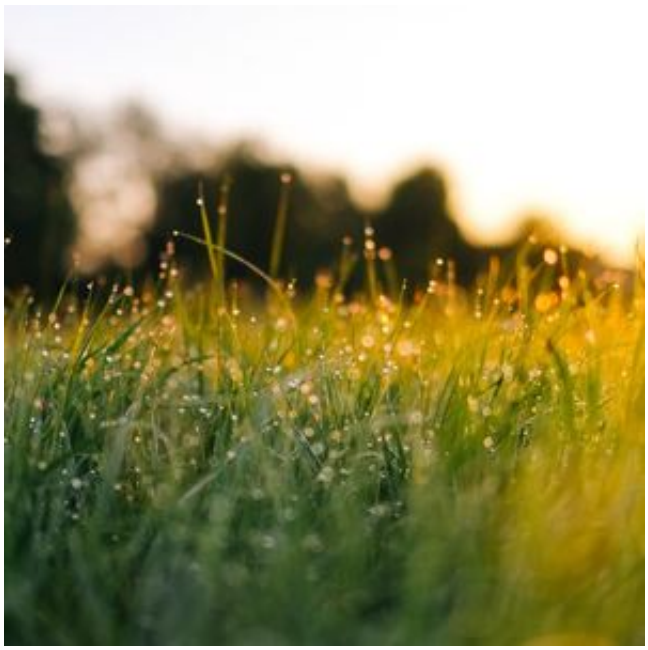
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Responsible MEPs



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