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## U.S. discouraging mandatory food labelling, groups say

### Milk from cows fed synthetic growth hormone spilled

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OTTAWA — The U.S. government is pushing its major trading partners, including Canada, to discourage mandatory labelling of genetically engineered foods, a coalition of U.S. food groups charged yesterday.

To press their point, protesters spilled a small quantity of U.S. milk, produced from cows fed synthetic growth hormones, outside an Ottawa conference centre where United Nations health officials were meeting yesterday.

"We believe that every consumer has the right to know what's in their food," Jeremy Rifkin, a spokesman for the International Network on Genetically Engineered Foods, told reporters. "We believe that every government has the right to regulate

foods within the sovereign borders of their nation."

The groups are angry about a draft discussion paper which officials of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration were slated to present to the meeting today. Among other proposals, the paper suggests that special labelling of milk coming from cows fed synthetic bovine somatotropin, a growth hormone known as rbST, is unnecessary because the drug does not affect the quality or makeup of the milk.

The paper is one of several to be studied at this week's food-labelling conference of the 34 member nations of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Codex is a spinoff of two UN bodies — the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization — and sets voluntary

world food standards.

Mr. Rifkin charged that the U.S. government, under pressure from drug and biotechnology companies, is pushing hard for its proposed Codex standard to be adopted by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, soon to be renamed the World Trade Organization.

"The United States government is more interested in the profits of transnational chemical, pharmaceutical and biotech companies than they are in the public health and safety of consumers in the United States, Canada and other countries around the world," he said.

The growth hormone is at the leading edge of a "brave new world" of genetically engineered foods that have not been adequately tested on humans, Mr. Rifkin said. He fears that without proper labelling, people suffering from allergies or those objecting to the use of hormones on moral or religious grounds won't be able to distinguish what they consume.

The rbST hormone has not yet been approved for sale in Canada. The federal government adopted a voluntary one-year moratorium against the product's use on Canadian dairy farms at the urging of the House of Commons agriculture committee. The moratorium expires next July.

The growth hormone, which is said to boost a cow's milk production by 10 to 15 per cent, has been widely available in the U.S. for six months.

But a spreading boycott has led dozens of school boards, supermarket chains and producers to stop using milk made with the growth hormone, and some dairy farmers to stop using it.

Federal Trade Minister Roy MacLaren said nothing prevents Canada from setting its own rules on the hormone.

"Broadly speaking, there is nothing in either NAFTA [the North American free-trade agreement] or the GATT that prevents Canada from pursuing its own health standards and requirements," Mr. MacLaren told reporters.

Canadian dairy farmers are divided on use of the growth hormone. Many worry that the controversy over its use will hurt milk sales.

Critics suggest the hormone causes stress in cows, leading to udder diseases, various limb ailments and, ultimately, greater use of antibiotics.

The U.S. is among 13 countries to have approved rbST, whose leading producer is chemical and fertilizer giant Monsanto Co. of St. Louis. Mexico, India, South Africa and some Eastern European countries are also using the product.

# NATIONAL AFFAIRS

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Jeremy Rifkin (centre) of the International Network on Genetically Engineered Foods pours milk into can held by Tony Clarke of the Council of Canadians and costumed protester in Ottawa yesterday. *(Canadian Press)*