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## EU, US at odds over WTO beef ruling

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A long-awaited World Trade Organisation ruling concerning an EU ban on the import of hormone beef from the US and Canada has led both sides to claim victory, but the US says the EU has got it wrong.

"The EU is simply ignoring what the panel actually said," said a spokeswoman for the US Trade Department, after the EU claimed the WTO ruling of 31 March 2008 meant that American and Canadian retaliatory sanctions on EU products were illegal.

The dispute began more than a decade ago, following the EU's decision to ban imports of beef produced using growth-promoting hormones, originating in Canada and the US. The EU insisted the meat was unsafe but the WTO ruled this wrong in 1998, saying the scientific risk assessments supporting the EU restrictions were not specific enough. The multilateral trade body thus allowed the US and Canada to retaliate by slapping tariffs of up to 100% (worth more than \$100 million) on a list of EU products, ranging from Roquefort cheese to Dijon mustard.

But in 2003, the EU contested these sanctions, saying it had revised its rules, basing them on fresh scientific facts that revealed "overwhelming evidence" that one of the hormones in question "causes and promotes cancer and that it harms genes".

When the US and Canada maintained their retaliatory measures, Brussels filed its own complaints with the WTO. Today, the EU is claiming that the WTO ruling also found that the duties imposed by the US and Canada are illegal, despite the fact that the new WTO ruling reaffirms that its hormone ban is scientifically unjustified – findings the bloc says it "disagrees with".

"The panel agreed with the EU that the US and Canada have illegally maintained retaliatory measures after the EU has adopted new rules on hormone-treated imports in response to earlier US and Canadian criticism," it said in a statement. "Despite these new rules the US and Canada have unilaterally decided to maintain sanctions without testing the legality of the EU's rules at the WTO. The Panel agreed with the EU that this is a clear breach of WTO rules."

Yet the US and Canada say there is no reason for them to lift their sanctions until the EU removes its ban. Indeed, while the ruling finds they did not strictly follow WTO procedures, it also adds that since the EU is still not in compliance, they are not deemed to have violated WTO commitments.

Both states welcomed the ruling: "The panel's findings on the EU ban are an important victory for all US farmers and ranchers," said US Trade Representative Susan Schwab.

The EU can still opt to appeal the decision - a move that green NGO Friends of the Earth Europe is pushing for in a [statement](#) which claims the WTO decision amounts to "force-feeding hormones to Europe".

## Links

### EU official documents

- Commission (press release): [DISPUTE SETTLEMENT : WTO condemns US and Canadian sanctions on EU goods in hormone-treated meat dispute \[FR\] \[DE\]](#) (31 March 2008)

### International Organisations

- World Trade Organisation: [WTO issues panel reports on hormones disputes \[FR\]](#) (31 March 2008)

### Governments

- US Mission to EU: [Panel Finds EU Ban on Hormones Remains WTO-Inconsistent](#) (31 March 2008)

### NGOs

- Friends of the Earth Europe: [WTO ruling force-feeds hormones to Europe](#) (31 March 2008)

### Press articles

- Reuters: [U.S. slams EU depiction of WTO meat hormone ruling](#)
- International Herald Tribune: [WTO backs US, Canada in beef dispute with EU, but both sides claim victory](#)
- AFP: [WTO rejects EU beef hormone ban but also raps US, Canada](#)