



CENTER FOR
FOOD SAFETY



TAFTA Could Make You Sick: A Backdoor for Food Contamination

The safety standards on which we rely daily for our food, medicines and cars. The energy and climate policies needed to save our planet. The new financial regulations designed to prevent banks from gambling with our money and creating another crisis. These are policies that should be determined in open, democratic venues where we have a say. But a group of the largest U.S. and European corporations want to rewrite these safeguards behind closed doors. For over a decade, they have pushed for a new U.S. “trade” deal with Europe – [the Trans-Atlantic Free Trade Agreement \(TAFTA\)](#), which corporate proponents have tried to rebrand as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) – a deal that would roll back consumer protections on both sides of the Atlantic. European Union (EU) and U.S. negotiators launched TAFTA negotiations in July 2013 and plan to finish the sweeping deal by 2014.

A “trade” deal only in name, TAFTA would require the United States and EU to conform domestic financial laws and regulations, climate policies, food and product safety standards, data privacy protections and other non-trade policies to TAFTA rules. This could include obligations for products and services that do not meet domestic standards to be allowed under processes called “equivalence” and “mutual recognition,” or obligations to actually alter domestic U.S. and EU policies to conform to existing international standards or to new trans-Atlantic standards negotiated to be more convenient to business. These constraints on policy space would be binding. Failure to comply with TAFTA rules could result in trade sanctions. The pact could also newly empower foreign corporations, including the world’s largest agribusinesses, to directly challenge public interest policies and demand taxpayer compensation in extrajudicial tribunals.

The EU/U.S. TAFTA Agenda: Deregulation in Disguise

U.S. and EU TAFTA negotiators, advised by the world’s largest agribusinesses, have used coded language in pushing for TAFTA rules that could roll back food safety standards. A leaked EU position paper reveals that EU negotiators are pushing for TAFTA to impose sweeping restrictions on food safety policies by mandating that such measures “must be applied [only to the extent necessary](#) to protect human, animal, or plant life or health.” Such terms would enable foreign governments to second-guess the “necessity” of domestic safety standards. U.S. negotiators have [called](#) for parallel TAFTA restrictions. Some members of Congress have even openly called for TAFTA to do away with “spurious” sanitary regulations, [asking](#) that TAFTA-created tribunals be empowered to rule on the validity of domestic food safety standards challenged by foreign governments.

Food Corporations’ TAFTA Agenda: Deregulation without Disguise

European and U.S. food corporations, in their [formal demands](#) issued to TAFTA negotiators, have been remarkably candid in naming the specific U.S. and EU safety regulations that they would like to see dismantled via TAFTA. Here is their wishlist for food safety rollbacks, as stated by the corporations themselves:

- **Contaminated food:** BusinessEurope, Europe’s largest corporate group, states, “Key non-tariff barriers affecting EU exports to the US include the US Food Safety Modernization Act.” The landmark 2011 law authorizes the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to recall contaminated food, a prerogative that European corporations would apparently like to see removed via TAFTA.
- **Questionable meat:** The EU corporations in BusinessEurope also state consternation with U.S. “import restrictions on uncooked meat products.” The loosening of such restrictions would allow more European meat to

enter the United States at a time when many European countries are eliminating regular meat inspections – a fact that likely contributed to the 2013 scandal in which [meat exported by the United Kingdom as “beef” was found to be horse meat](#).

- **Chlorinated chicken:** The U.S. meat industry has stated its annoyance that EU consumers and regulators do not wish to eat meat products treated with “hyperchlorination and organic acids,” as spelled out by the North American Meat Association. Europe’s stronger safety standards limit poultry products’ *exposure* to contaminants during slaughter and processing. U.S. rules allow for more possibility of contamination, and then for chicken to be treated with antimicrobial chemicals such as chlorine to kill *E. coli* and other microbes afterward. The corporate group laments that “only the application of water and steam are permitted for use on meat carcasses by the EU.” Yum! Restaurants International, the owner of Kentucky Fried Chicken, has seconded this concern, asking that TAFTA be used to change EU food safety standards so that the company can sell Europeans chlorinated chicken.
- **Weaker U.S. Grade A dairy safety standards:** The U.S. safety standards for Grade A milk have been listed as a TAFTA target by EU agribusinesses. The European Association of Dairy Trade acknowledges that the standards “were devised as a means of addressing the risk of food borne illnesses...” But the industry group then complains that complying with the standards “is both highly cumbersome and expensive.”
- **Ractopamine growth-drug-fed pork:** The American Meat Institute protests that “the EU continues to maintain its unjustified ban on meat produced with beta-agonist technologies, such as Ractopamine Hydrochloride.” Ractopamine is a drug approved in the United States to increase beef, turkey and pork muscle mass. It has been [banned or limited in 160 nations](#) (including EU member countries, Russia, and China) due to potential risks to human and animal health. The National Pork Producers Council has made clear that TAFTA should be the vehicle for erasing the EU ractopamine ban: “U.S. pork producers will not accept any outcome other than the elimination of the EU ban on the use of ractopamine in the production process...”
- **Fruits with higher pesticide residue:** The California Table Grape Commission “is also [concerned about European pesticide maximum residue levels](#) (MRLs)...many of the MRLs established are at levels significantly lower than corresponding U.S. MRLs.” CropLife America, an agribusiness conglomerate that includes [Monsanto](#), [similarly complains](#) that the EU does not allow as much pesticide residue on food as the United States permits – a “trade barrier” to be dismantled via TAFTA. The corporate alliance takes issue with European limits on pesticides that contain “endocrine disrupters” – a type of chemical linked with cancer and birth defects – complaining that European restrictions on such toxins “prevent U.S. agricultural and food products from entering the EU.”

Investor Privileges: Agribusinesses Empowered to Attack Food Safety Laws Directly

U.S. and EU corporations and officials have called for TAFTA to grant foreign firms the power to skirt domestic courts, drag the U.S. and EU governments before extrajudicial tribunals, and directly challenge food safety laws that they view as violations of TAFTA-created foreign investor “rights.” The tribunals, comprised of three private attorneys, would be authorized to order unlimited taxpayer compensation for domestic policies perceived as undermining agribusiness firms’ “expected future profits.” Such [extreme “investor-state” rules](#) have already been included in U.S. “free trade” agreements, forcing taxpayers to pay firms more than \$400 million for toxics bans, land-use rules, regulatory permits, water and timber policies and more. Just under U.S. pacts, more than \$14 billion remains pending in corporate claims against medicine patent policies, pollution cleanup requirements, climate and energy laws, and other public interest policies. The EU is proposing an even more radical version of these rules for TAFTA, offering firms a new tool to roll back food safety rules.

Fast Track: Railroading Democracy to Railroad Safeguards?

How could a deal like TAFTA get past Congress? With a democracy-undermining procedure known as [Fast Track](#) – an extreme and rarely-used maneuver that empowered executive branch negotiators, advised by large corporations, to ram through unfair “trade” deals by unilaterally negotiating and signing the deals before sending them to Congress for an expedited, no-amendments, limited-debate vote. As a candidate, President Obama said he would replace this expired, anti-democratic process. But now he is asking Congress to grant him Fast Track’s extraordinary authority – in part to sidestep growing public and congressional concern about pacts like TAFTA. We must ensure that Fast Track never again takes effect and instead create an open, inclusive process for negotiating and enacting trade agreements in the public interest.

For more information, visit stop-tafta.org