Why Europe, US went different ways on GMO regulation

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Why have EU and US consumers and policymakers taken such different routes on GMOs? A look at recent history can help explain why.

Take recombinant bovine somatotrophin (BST), a growth hormone used to extend the lactation cycle in dairy cows. Recombinant BST caused an uproar.

Agencies in Canada and Europe ruled against rBST on animal health grounds. In the US, rBST went through an extraordinarily drawn-out approval process at the FDA, a special review by Congress, and a labeling controversy. After which the US was primed for a political environment that was pro-biotechnology and hostile to demands for regulation or labeling on any but the strictest of health-based claims.

In the US there is no mandatory review of GMO foods, but the FDA does treat any gene product, that is not itself from a source on the Generally Recognized as Safe list as an additive, giving the agency strong authority over truly novel introductions into food.

One important feature that is often overlooked in comparing the US regulatory approach with others is the litigious nature of American society and the ready supply of lawyers anxious to sue any rich company that markets an unsafe food.

But during GMOs early days in Europe, a series of food safety debacles undercut Europeans' confidence in the food and agricultural industry. Mad cow disease and the radioactive contamination of European fields after Chernobyl led Europeans to be leery of bad scientific decisions made elsewhere.

When the US biotechnology industry insisted Europeans simply accept the GMO safety assessments made byUS regulatory agencies, the Europeans were not having any of it.

Read full, original post: How we got to now: why the US and Europe went different ways on GMOs