

Viewpoint: Europe's trade and agricultural biotech policy is held hostage by environmental activists, hurting farmers and consumers

[Recently,] two more shiny new regulatory appliances started to roll off the EU's legislative assembly line: a due diligence law making companies liable for environmental and human rights abuses in their supply chains and new rules for recycling plastic packaging.

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Traditionally, the US and other frustrated agricultural exporters such as Australia and New Zealand have decried such rules — including on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) for soyabean and maize, growth hormone for beef and chemical washes for chicken meat — as protectionism driven by European producer interests. Many low and middle-income countries have also said provisions on labour and environmental standards in EU preferential trade agreements are disguised protectionism.

But over the decades it seems to be the preferences of the European public — particularly on food and the environment — that have often become the main driver for stricter EU rules, frequently opposed by European businesses and farmers.

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The European parliament has recently voted to relax the rules on genome editing, which involves modifying crops' DNA without introducing genes from other species. The move was resisted by green campaigners and small organic farmers but strongly supported by Copa-Cogeca.

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European public and consumer sentiment, or at least campaigners' influence, is now one of the most powerful forces determining swaths of EU trade policy and hence global regulation. It is potentially a force for good, but its sometimes arbitrary demands and the counterproductive regulatory burdens they create have the potential to do substantial damage.

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here**](#)