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GENETICALLY MODIFIED CORN TRADE DISPUTE CONTINUES WITH FORMAL SUBMISSION FROM MEXICO

Mexico's submission offers strong science-based defense, supports demands of civil society to protect human health and food sovereignty

MINNEAPOLIS—On March 5, the Mexican government's [formal response](#) to the United States in the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) trade dispute was published by the USMCA secretariat. A 2023 Mexican decree called for the phaseout of the herbicide glyphosate, elimination of the use of genetically modified (GM) corn in flour and tortillas for direct human consumption, and eventual substitution of GM corn for industrial use and animal feed. Mexico's USMCA submission defends its decree, which was issued as part of a broader slate of food system reforms in response to years of concerted efforts by social movements to prevent planting of GM corn and protect the country's cultural heritage, biodiversity and food sovereignty.

The submission provides evidence to justify precautionary measures to protect consumers from potential health impacts of GM corn imported from the U.S. and residues of glyphosate. According to the submission, Mexico's policies will have minimal impacts on U.S. producers: the policies affect only 1% of U.S. corn exports, white corn used for human consumption, with the overwhelming share of exports going to livestock feed. Mexico also documents the potential health risks from GM corn and glyphosate for a population that consumes ten times the amount of corn consumed by people in the U.S.

Key elements of Mexico's submission include:

- The scientific evidence of GMO safety presented by the U.S. is out of date, much of it from industry studies not supported by peer-review. According to Mexico, the U.S. did not present any peer-reviewed study showing it safe to eat large quantities of GM corn exposed to glyphosate in minimally processed form over a lifetime. Mexico makes the case that the U.S. regulatory process is not stringent enough ensure that products are safe for Mexicans to consume at high levels.
- On public health, the submission details that GM corn, especially Bt corn engineered to kill insect pests, can have adverse impacts on non-target animals. Mammals have been shown to suffer damage to their digestive systems from a GM trait that kills its targets by attacking their guts.
- Mexican tortillas have been proven to be contaminated with GM corn and glyphosate, the latter in residues from treatments of GM corn engineered to tolerate the herbicide featured in Roundup. Mexico shows that even low-level exposures can have negative long-term health impact.

Karen Hansen-Kuhn, IATP's director of trade and international strategies, commented, "We welcome this vigorous defense of Mexico's programs to transform its food system. The science they present backs up longstanding civil society campaigns for healthy foods and biodiverse agricultural systems. There's a lot here that could contribute to more substantive debates on our food and agriculture system in the U.S., as well."

"Ever since Mexico first announced its intentions to limit GM corn and glyphosate in its tortilla chain, the U.S. government has asserted that Mexico's policies are [not based on science](#)," said IATP Senior Advisor Timothy A. Wise. "This comprehensive response refutes that claim, presenting hundreds of academic studies that show cause for concern about human health and the threat to native corn diversity."

The formal arbitration process is expected to deliver a verdict in November. Mexico's submission in the dispute is its response to the [written claim filed by the U.S.](#) in December that Mexico's prohibition of GM corn in tortillas violates the trade agreement. As a next step, civil society organizations in Mexico and the U.S., including the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, that have been invited to submit additional evidence and analysis will deliver submissions by March 15 in defense of Mexico's right to take measures to protect public health, the environment and its cultural heritage.

Learn more about the trade dispute and find resources at IATP's website [here](#).

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Based in Minneapolis with offices in Washington, D.C., and Berlin, Germany, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. To learn more, visit:

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