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## Codex moves forward with GMO labelling

*An important step in ensuring worldwide GMO labelling has just been taken.*

The US reportedly suffered a serious setback on 29 April, 2008 regarding labelling genetically engineered foods. On the second day of the annual Codex Committee on Food Labeling (CCFL) meeting in Ottawa, the US was unable to block the committee from moving forward on labelling recommendations for genetically engineered foods.

For the second time in a row, other nations refused to heed the US call to stop work on recommendations for labelling of genetically engineered food. A document drafted at a Working Group in Ghana last January, that endorses the rights of countries to require mandatory labelling of genetically engineered food, was adopted in Ottawa at Step 3 of the Codex process. It must now go through two more rounds of review before it becomes an official Codex standard. Because Codex standards must be 'consensus' standards, with near unanimous consent, difficult negotiations lie ahead before Codex can adopt these recommendations. Consumer groups noted that a new US administration may be more flexible on this issue.

The African countries were especially adamant that the committee

should adopt a Codex GM labelling standard, with more than a dozen speaking in favour of it on the floor of the meeting. The European Union, India and most Asian nations also supported a standard. It was opposed by the United States, Canada, Argentina, and several other Latin American countries.

'Today's decision at CCFL is a major victory for consumers all over the world, who have lobbied their governments on every continent to support a Codex GMO labelling standard,' said Samuel Ochieng, head of the Kenyan Consumers Association and President of Consumers International. 'We look forward to the day in the near future when Codex will adopt this recommendation, and small countries will not have to worry about the United States challenging their GMO labelling rules at the World Trade Organization.'

Any standard or recommendation adopted by Codex is considered 'legal' at the World Trade Organization. A country that follows Codex recommendations is thus immune from a WTO challenge. ■

*Source: Consumers International*

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