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United States opposes environmental trade treaty

CARTAGENA, Colombia (AP) — Opposing an accord approved by more than 125 nations, the United States and five other countries scuttled efforts Wednesday to forge an environmental protection treaty on trade in genetically modified plants and animals.

Washington said it was protecting the world's food trade from potentially crippling regulatory burdens.

But critics said it was doing the bidding of multinational businesses, whose laboratory-produced crops could one day sow ecological catastrophe.

The breakdown after 10 days of talks marked the first time in more than 20 years that a major international environmental negotiation has concluded in disarray, Michael Williams, spokesperson for the U.N. Environmental Program, said.

The negotiations are to resume within 16 months at an undetermined time and place.

The European Union and more than 110 other nations at the U.N.-initiated talks agreed late Tuesday to forge a so-called Biosafety Protocol, an outgrowth of the 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil.

But the United States, Australia, Canada, Uruguay,

Argentina and Chile blocked the proposed compromise.

The treaty would have permitted nations to restrict imports not only of experimental organisms but also of genetically altered crops such as soy, corn, cotton and potatoes.

"The United States has dominated these negotiations and they've now sabotaged them," charged Louise Gale, a spokesperson for the environmental group Greenpeace. "They're obviously trying to force genetically modified food down the throats of consumers."

The United States, the world's main biotech exporter, wanted a narrowly focused treaty that "protected the environment and yet avoided unduly restraining international trade" in a rapidly growing multibillion-dollar industry, said U.S. delegation chief Melinda Kimble.

Biotech products such as insect-resistant crops and vaccines born of gene-splicing are touted by proponents as guarantors of future global food security.

They produce higher yields than traditionally crossbred hybrids with fewer chemical insecticides and herbicides.

Their patents are mostly owned by a handful of com-

panies — from Monsanto of St. Louis to Novartis of Basel, Switzerland, who insist the products are rigorously tested and safe.

Critics, however, worry about the possibility of still unfathomable and possibly catastrophic consequences if the products go awry.

Developing countries want international safeguards to protect themselves against potential biogenetic disaster.

They want biotech companies legally liable for any damage to biodiversity or human health — another provision opposed by the United States.

Many Europeans also distrust genetically engineered products.

Although genetic engineering experimentation began two decades ago, development of biotech foods, vaccines and byproducts has only recently taken off.

Worldwide, more than 67 million acres of genetically altered crops were sown in 1998, up from about 2 million in 1996.

In the United States, between 25 percent and 45 percent of some major crops are already genetically modified.

Industry officials expect some 90 percent of U.S. agricultural exports to be biogenetic within a decade.

Course to study use of insects in solving crimes

BY SAMEH FAHMY
The Battalion

Estimating time of death and determining involvement in crimes are two factors forensic entomologists study. The Texas A&M University offers a new course in forensic entomology, a field that uses insects to solve crimes.

Dr. Jim Olson, professor of entomology, said the course will be offered during the summer, and students will learn how to collect, sample, preserve and rear insects.

Students will also learn how to use entomological data for use in legal proceedings. Olson said the course will be offered during the summer, and students will learn how to collect, sample, preserve and rear insects.

The most common application of forensic entomology is estimating time of death. Blowflies are one of the many insects that feed on dead animals. Female blowflies lay eggs on corpses, and the eggs hatch into larvae.

Forensic entomologists take into account factors such as temperature and season to determine the age of the insects. By knowing the age of the insects, forensic entomologists can determine the time of death.

"Temperature is the driving force in the development of insects," Olson said. "The higher the temperature, the faster the insects develop."

In addition to estimating time of death, forensic entomology can be used to determine if drugs have been involved in a crime.

Said traces of narcotics can be detected in insects. Forensic entomology has also been used to convict drug traffickers.

"When [police in New Zealand] found native insects in marijuana," Olson said, "they were able to convict on trafficking charges." Olson said entomological evidence held a fairly good record in court.

"The strongest evidence is based on information," he said. "Local environmental development in insects"

Off-campus housing fair offers students advice

BY RACHEL HOLLAND
The Battalion

Representatives from community apartment complexes offered information on prices and amenities to A&M students yesterday at the 15th annual Housing Fair.

More than 50 property owners, representing 80 apartment complexes, took part in the fair at the MSC Flagroom.

The Department of Student Life, Off-Campus Student Services and Off-Campus Aggies sponsored the fair.

Tracey Forman, assistant coordinator for Adult, Graduate and Off-Campus Student Services, said the purpose of the Housing Fair was to provide students with information on a variety of off-campus housing options in a convenient location.

"Often, students will not start thinking about housing until the summer, and by then it is too late," she said. "The Housing Fair gives students the information they need to get started early."

The 1999 Texas A&M University Off Campus Living Survival Manual was available at the fair and includes an updated price list and information on roommates, leases and utilities.

Tina Weatherford, manager of East Gate Apartments and Anderson Place, said looking for apartments can be overwhelming. She said the Housing Fair is a good way for students to get focused.

"The best thing for students to do is get the Off Campus Living Survival Manual," she said. "This will tell them what to look for and what questions to ask."

"From there, students should visit apartments and discuss the lease with the apartment manager to be sure they know what they are signing."

Lindsey Morgan, a leasing agent at Tahoe Apartments, said apartments in the community fill up quickly after the Housing Fair.

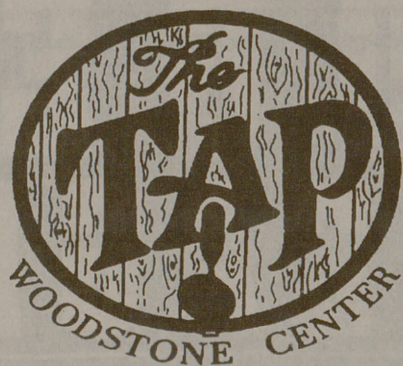
"There is enough stress about starting class during the fall semester," she said. "Students can take



Shanna McMillian, a representative with The Grove apartments, talks to Jennifer Baggett, a sophomore marketing major, about living options at the Housing Fair Wednesday.

care of housing now, so they will have one less thing to worry about."

Thirty-three thousand students live off campus.



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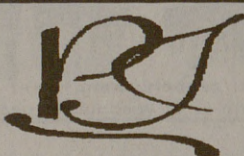
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