

and others have called for stiffer penalties.

The settlement also calls for the abolition of the Tobacco Institute, the industry's chief lobbying and propaganda arm in Washington, and its sister scientific organization, the Council for Tobacco Research U.S.A. But critics have called this provision meaningless, and at least one official at the institute ridiculed it. "All we're going to do is change the name on the door," said the institute's vice-presi-

dent Walker Merryman. He said that the deal, with some stipulations, allows the formation of a new industry trade association after the old one has been dismantled. "We must really be good if they want to get rid of us. We're going to continue to do what we've always done."

But supporters of the deal said that critics had set standards that are entirely unrealistic, and stressed that the industry had been forced into making huge concessions.

State attorneys general from 40 US states, including chief negotiator Mississippi Attorney General Mike Moore, have argued that, despite its imperfections, the agreement is a watershed that will change the course and the way society views and deals with tobacco. To sink the deal because of its flaws would be a public health tragedy, they argue.

MARLENE CIMONS
Washington, D.C.

Disputed survey adds froth to European ferment over biotechnology

An international row over genetically modified organisms showed no sign of abating this summer as fresh disagreements over public attitudes to biotechnology added heat to a looming trade war between the European Union and the US.

Europeans are perceived to be more worried about the uses of biotechnology than their counterparts in the US. Dan Glickman, the US Agriculture Secretary, told the Senate Agriculture Committee in June that Europeans have deep-seated fears that genetically modified products are not safe, even if the evidence strongly suggests they are. And a recent Commentary in *Nature* (387, 845-847, 1997) by researchers in London and colleagues elsewhere, appeared to confirm Glickman's views. From an analysis of a Europe-wide survey of public attitudes, it concluded that Europeans are ambivalent about biotechnology and that morality has more influence than objective risk assessment in shaping their approval. But these conclusions are now being contested by others in the field.

Andreas Klepsch of the biotechnology unit at the European Commission, which funded the survey, says that "the London team's interpretation is "not the only one possible". Indeed, a consultancy commissioned to analyse the survey data for his unit has concluded that Europeans "tend to be optimistic" about the possible future uses of biotechnology.

George Gaskell and Martin Bauer of the London School of Economics and John Durant from the Science Museum in London led a pan-European team that conducted a survey of European at-

titudes to the applications of biotechnology in medicine, agriculture and research. Their conclusions — that, for most Europeans, moral judgments outweigh objective assessment of the risks — have annoyed others within Europe.

The European Commission survey approached more than 16,000 people, drawing more than 1,000 from each member state of the European Union. They were asked about their attitudes to the role of biotechnology in genetic testing and medicine — for example in diagnostics and vaccine production — in crop plants, food production, animal research and xenotransplantation. The survey participants saw genetic testing and medicine as moral and useful applications for biotechnology that should be encouraged. In food production, animal research and xenotransplantation, however, their views were more negative. They tended to view these uses of biotechnology as comparatively less "moral", more risky, and not to be encouraged.

The conclusions of Gaskell, Bauer and Durant surprised Mark Cantley, head of the biotechnology unit at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris. "I was exceedingly unhappy when I saw the Commentary," he told *Nature Medicine*. He disagrees with the three London researchers' interpretation of the survey findings, and he believes their work should have been refereed, rather than submitted as a Commentary, a format that *Nature* does not usually require to be refereed.

Durant counters that the team has ambitious plans for publishing its analyses in peer-reviewed journals. However, he says, the team wanted to

get the findings into the public domain quickly and saw a *Nature* Commentary as a suitable way to do this. "We stand strongly by our interpretation," says Durant. "It is important that the biotechnology community look at the reality of its position."

On the surface, divisions between the US and Europe over one of the most troublesome issues — the labeling of genetically modified products — appear to support the view that Europeans fear at least some aspects of biotechnology. For example, in February, Austria, and more recently Italy and Luxembourg, banned the sale of genetically modified corn, even though the European Commission had agreed to allow imports of the corn into Europe. Austria is demanding strict labeling on products which US officials say would be impractical and would create barriers to trade. As *Nature Medicine* went to press, the president of the European Commission, Jacques Santer, was expected to produce a Europe-wide policy document on labeling of genetically modified products, from foods to medicines, but no one expected it to bow to all of Austria's demands.

HELEN GAVAGHAN
London

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S ANALYSIS OF THE GASKELL/DURANT SURVEY, AS WELL AS A LIST OF THE QUESTIONS ASKED AND THE RAW DATA, CAN BE ORDERED BY FAX FROM THE BIOTECHNOLOGY UNIT OF DG XII (FAX NUMBER: +322 299 1860). ASK FOR EUROBAROMETER 46.1 - BIOTECHNOLOGY. THE FRENCH VERSION IS AVAILABLE NOW; THE ENGLISH VERSION SHOULD BE AVAILABLE SOON.