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Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) Analysis, opportunities and risks from the German perspective

Free trade is one of the major drivers of growth for the world economy. Both consumers and enterprises can derive great benefit from it - the history of the European Union shows this. The Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) therefore supports the efforts of the EU to negotiate comprehensive free trade agreements in the context of association, partnership and cooperation agreements.

The trade between the US and Europe is mainly characterised by trade with industrial products and services. However, the US are also one of the three most important third-country markets - the others being Switzerland and Russia - for goods from the agri-food sector.

The European agricultural sector is still very much protected by tariffs. A complete liberalisation would have a greater impact on Europe than on the US with its relatively open markets. A model analysis illustrates and assesses the effects of the worst-case scenario.

The German agri-food sector is prepared for competition. The German retail food trade is pushing for efficient production with top quality. Critical consumers punish quality management errors mercilessly. With this wealth of experience the German agri-food sector is also well prepared for competition with the US.

In the public debate, consumer-protection issues play a more important role than the possible impact on competition in the agricultural markets. Genetic engineering, hormone-treated beef or chlorine-washed chickens dominate the press reports. Many of these issues are not even due to be part of the free trade agreement. The Federal Government also has - as does the European Commission - a clear position regarding consumer-protection issues: The high level of consumer protection in Germany and Europe, and the freedom of consumer choice, must not be jeopardized. They are major achievements and the result of many decades of hard work.

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Cornelia Berns has been Head of Division „International Trade Policy“ at the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture since August 2011. She was working on Trade Policy Issues already from 2003 until 2009. She started her carrier at the Ministry in 1992 and worked for different departments since then. Between 1995 and 1998 she was delegated as Agricultural Attaché to the German Embassy in Beijing. Mrs. Berns has a degree in Agricultural Science from Bonn University and has got a state examination by the Gouvernement of Münster-Region to be a senior agricultural official.