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MEMORANDUM

To: Reporters and Editors
Re: European Union agricultural biotech policies
Da: Monday, Jan. 14, 2008

Sen. Chuck Grassley, ranking member of the Finance Committee, with jurisdiction over international trade, today made the following comment on the failure of the European Union to comply with the findings of the panel of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the challenge brought by the United States against the European Union over its agricultural biotech policies. The WTO panel, established in March 2004, published its final report in September 2006. The United States and the European Union had agreed on a deadline of Friday, Jan. 11, at midnight for the European Union to come into compliance. An original deadline, set for Nov. 21, 2007, was extended upon agreement of the two parties. Grassley played a major role in the decision of the United States to challenge the European Union's biotech policies.

“It's up to the WTO to determine whether the European Union is complying, but it's obvious the EU is not in compliance. The European Union drags its feet on biotech approval. The failure to approve these products is based on politics, not science. EU member states continue to ban biotech commodities, although their own scientists and others insist that they're perfectly safe. Unfortunately, the situation appears to be going from bad to worse. France is likely to ban the cultivation of an approved biotech corn variety pretty soon. That would bring yet another EU member state into violation of WTO rules.

“While the European Union ignores science and hides from its WTO obligations, U.S. farmers pay the price, year after year. One of the world's largest markets is closed to a lot of biotech commodities produced in the United States. This is unfair. That's especially true as the products U.S. farmers are seeking to ship are deemed safe by EU scientists, have been grown safely in the United States for years, and in the case of the corn variety that France is seeking to ban, has been grown safely in France and other EU countries for years.

“I met just last week with Spanish and Czech Republic officials on the European Union's biotech policies. I came away knowing that at least some in the European Union are open-minded on biotechnology. But reasonable views aren't enough. We need action. The European Union has to base its biotech policies on science. If so, it'll comply with its WTO obligations. I hope the European Union will come into compliance soon. If that's the case, we won't need to respond with trade sanctions. But I urge U.S. Trade Representative Schwab to be prepared to act on short notice. The current situation can't continue.”

