The cases discussed in this volume offer a number of lessons with regard to transatlantic trade conflict over matters of risk. They help build understanding of the characteristics of trade conflict in addition to elucidating how science is an important variable in these moments. Through looking at both informal and formalised trade conflict, it is possible to build on contributions that characterise the politics of transatlantic trade conflict more clearly. I proffer six immediate lessons on trade conflict from the cases considered here. These contribute to the five lessons that Pollack and Shaffer (2009: 281–92) advance after their comprehensive analysis on the GM food dispute. They note that the trade dispute over GM food does not represent a continental divide between the US and the EU but is real and entrenched (Pollack and Shaffer, 2009: 281); deliberative decision-making where state actors come together did not work in the GM food context, and therefore expectations for this sort of approach should be tempered (Pollack and Shaffer, 2009: 282); multilateral institutions can help states cooperate, but are hampered when the conflict is more about advancing a state’s particular regulatory principles (Pollack and Shaffer, 2009: 284–6); international pressures from markets and multilateral institutions have a limited impact on domestic regulatory environments which can reinforce trade conflict over things like GM food (Pollack and Shaffer, 2009: 286–8); and, finally, the WTO’s dispute settlement system is ill-suited to resolve risk-based issues, but can help manage the conflict (Pollack and Shaffer, 2009: 289). These are important lessons that also are apparent in the cases examined here. But
Lesson 1: The ‘pre-dispute process’ followed by states maintains a number of different tools and stages to help resolve trade conflict. These are largely effective at achieving informal resolution and can sometimes assist in resolving internal regulatory discord.

It is clear that Canada, the US, and the EU all maintain a pre-dispute process, which includes bilateral and multilateral mechanisms, and contains important opportunities for signalling discontent and negotiating around an offending risk regulation. In particular, multilateral mechanisms can be effective at helping to resolve conflict when bilateral options do not work. Maintaining a number of different steps and venues for information exchange and negotiation can facilitate the informal resolution of trade conflict in a more timely manner than formal trade disputes. Indeed, it appears that formal trade disputes occur after the informal pre-dispute process has been exhausted. The cases here highlight that state actors are willing to commit a great deal of time and resources to resolving issues informally rather than through legalistic methods. The pre-dispute process can also be helpful in resolving internal regulatory discord within jurisdictions, as international standard-setting institutions can lay out clear thresholds for regulating risk over particular issues.

Lesson 2: The WTO’s SPS committee maintains a number of trade conflict resolution mechanisms that are effective tools in dealing with risk-based trade conflict.

It is clear that there are numerous options for the resolution of trade conflict prior to requesting consultations under the WTO dispute settlement system. Whilst resolving differences over risk regulation via the WTO is not ideal (Pollack and Shaffer, 2009: 289), mechanisms embedded within the WTO’s SPS Committee are helpful at creating the space for states to come together to find a resolution. In particular, the Specific Trade Concern function acts as an important public signal of discontent and appears to be treated very seriously when used by member states. In effect, raising an STC is a first opportunity for the issue to be raised in a WTO setting and almost always comes prior to formally requesting consultations via the dispute settlement system. The SPS committee also plays an important role in helping the three sister organisations to monitor and engage with risk-based trade issues that may be possible to solve through the development of an international standard, or through expert consultation. The fact that there have been over 350 STCs and only