USDA Foreign Agricultural Service
GAIN Report
Global Agricultural Information Network

Required Report - public distribution

Date: 12/9/2012

GAIN Report Number: UAE 2012 Biotech

United Arab Emirates

AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY ANNUAL

GCC - 5 Biotechnology Policies

Approved By:
Jude Akhidenor
Prepared By:
Mohamed Taha

Report Highlights:
Although the six countries comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) allow the importation of food that contains ingredients that are of biotechnology, they have developed several Technical Regulations to address the detection and labeling of both raw and further processed food, and feed that may contain biotechnology products. However, these regulations are yet to be enforced.

Section I. Executive Summary:

Commercial agriculture in the five Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC-5) countries- Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE covered by the Office of Agricultural Affairs (OAA) Dubai, is limited due to the harsh desert climate and limited water resources. Consequently, the GCC-5 is reliant on imports of raw, semi and fully processed foods to meet an estimated 90 percent of its domestic food needs. The U.S. food exports to the region have grown rapidly over the years. Consequently, the U.S. is now one of the major food suppliers to the GCC-5. Imports from the U.S. vary from grains and intermediate, to a

wide range of consumer ready products. Based on the recommendations of the GCC biotech subcommittee, the GCC governments passed several technical regulations in 2011aimed at addressing several GE food issues, such as detection, risk analysis, traceability, and general requirements. Although the technical regulations were officially approved by each member country, they are yet to be implemented.

Section II. Plant Biotechnology Trade and Production:

In view of the limited agricultural production in the GCC-5 countries, there are no biotech-enhanced crops under commercial production for either local consumption or export. Yet, there is growing interest among research institutes to utilize biotechnology to address issues such as soil salinity and pest infestation, particularly in date palms. Currently, there are no biotech crops under development. The GCC-5 countries import large volumes of biotech crops such as corn, soybeans and their products from a number of countries including the United States.

Section III. Plant Biotechnology Policy:

No biotechnology crops are produced in the GCC-5 countries. Consequently, there are no established procedures in place to address environmental issues related to the production of biotech crops.

Since the GCC's inception, the group has pursued a policy objective to harmonize the food laws and regulations of member states. With the GCC countries moving towards customs unification to facilitate trade flows among members, more emphasis is being placed on the harmonization of other factors such as technical regulations, standards and import procedures for food and food labeling. As per the recommendations of the GCC Standards Organization (GSO) biotechnology subcommittee which was formed in 2008, the GCC countries developed the following technical regulations to closely monitor the developments, tracing, importation and testing of imported raw and processed foods, for biotechnology ingredients:

1. *GSO ISO 21570: 2009 (ISO 21570:2005)*

"Foodstuffs—Methods of analysis for the detection of genetically modified organisms and derived products—Quantitative nucleic acid based methods"

1. *GSO ISO 21098: 2009 (ISO 21570:2005)*

"Foodstuff-- Nucleic acid based method of analysis of genetically modified organisms and derived products – Information to be supplied and procedure for the addition of methods to ISO 21569, ISO 21570, ISO 21571"

1. *GSO CAC/GL 44:2009*

CAC/GL 44:2003

"Principles for the risk analysis of foods derived from modern biotechnology"

1. *GSO 2141/2011*

"General requirements for genetically modified unprocessed agricultural products"

1. *GSO 2142/2011*

General requirements for genetically modified processed food and feed"

1. *GSO 2143/2011*

General Requirements for risk assessment and traceability for genetically modified products.

This standard provides details on the labeling requirements for processed food and feed. The following is a text from the technical regulation describing the labeling requirement:

- **4/2** LABELLING REQUIREMENTS

Without prejudice to what is stated in GSO mentioned in item 2.1, and the requirements stated in the GSO Standards for each product. The following requirements shall be clearly identified on the labeling:

- **4/2/1** If the product consists of more than one ingredient, the words (genetically modified) or (produced from genetically modified, name of the ingredient) shall appear clearly and easily to be read in the list of ingredients in parentheses immediately following the ingredient concerned with same font size and different color.

- **4/2/2** If the ingredient is designated by the name of a category, the words (contains genetically modified, name of organism) or (contains, name of ingredient, produced from genetically modified, name of organism) shall appear clearly and easily to be read in the list of ingredients with same font size and different color.

- **4/2/3** If there is no list of ingredients, the words (genetically modified) or (produced from genetically modified, name of organism) shall appear clearly and easily to be on the labeling.

- **4/2/4** Labeling must not mislead the purchaser as to the characteristics of the foodstuff and among other things, in particular, as to its nature, identity, properties, composition, method of production and manufacturing.

- **4/2/5** The indications referred to in (4/2/1 and 4/2/2) may appear in a footnote to the list of ingredients and in this case they must be printed in a font at least the same size as the list of ingredients. If there is no list of ingredients, they must appear clearly and easily to be read on the labeling.

- **4/2/6** If the food is offered for sale to the final consumer as non-pre-packaged food or as prepackaged food in small containers of which the largest surface has an area of less than 10 cm square, the information required in (4/2/1 and 4/2/2) must be permanently and visibly displayed either on the food display or immediately next to it, or on the packaging material, in font sufficiently large for it to be easily identified and read.

The consumer's right to know was the reason stated by the regulators for developing this standard.

While the above mentioned technical regulations and standards have been officially adopted by the GCC member states, they have not yet been officially enforced. The application of these regulations could negatively affect U.S. food exports to the GCC states.

Oman and Kuwait have conducted limited research on the use of biotechnology to enhance production of citrus and dates while the UAE is studying its use with drought resistant varieties of various plants and citrus. The Biotechnology Department of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research has done some preliminary research on using biotechnology to produce date palm trees that are resistant to the red weevil which is causing serious damage to the date crop and threatens the future of the industry.

Oman and Qatar are the only signatories to the Cartagena protocol and both have formed biosafety committees. However, the role of the committee in both countries is still being developed. Also, all GCC-5 countries are members of the OIE, IPPC and the Codex Alimentarius.

Section IV. Plant Biotechnology Marketing Issues:

In general, there seems to be support and acknowledgment for the potential benefits of biotechnology. However, consumers typically express a desire to be better informed about biotechnology, whether by local officials and scientists or through the labeling of food products. Regulatory officials in nearly all GCC-5 countries have highlighted the need for better education of consumers about the safety and benefits of biotech crops, while further developing regulatory capacity for the testing of foods.

Section V. Plant Biotechnology Capacity Building and Outreach:

This year, FAS/USDA sponsored a visit of GCC health officials to the United States.
The purpose of the visit was for the officials to meet with U.S. food regulators, relevant industry partners in order to gain better understanding of the U.S. food safety systems, as well as how food safety standards and regulations are developed, implemented and enforced. Plant biotechnology was a key component of the issues addressed during the visit.

Over the past few years, the United States Government led by USDA supported biotech capacity building activities in the GCC, to highlight acceptable international norms governing the development of biotech commodities. These activities have included seminars, meetings with regulatory officials and briefings by industry experts.

Section VI. Animal Biotechnology:

No animal biotechnology activities are currently being conducted in the GCC-5 countries. There are no technical regulations or standards that govern animal biotechnology. However, animal biotechnology will be more closely scrutinized due to the fact that genes from animals that are banned by Islamic rules could be used.