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Agricultural Biotechnology Annual

GCC-4 Annual Agricultural Biotechnology Report

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Report Highlights:
Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (GCC-4), covered by Office of Agricultural Affairs in Dubai, allow the importation of genetically engineered food products of plant origin. The GCC countries has developed several technical regulations including labeling for both raw and further processed food and feed that may contain genetically engineered plant products. These regulations are yet to be enforced. Animal genetic engineering and its products are not allowed in the GCC.

Section I. Executive Summary:
Due to the harsh climate and limited water resources, commercial agriculture in the GCC-4 is limited. As a result, the GCC-4 is heavily dependent on imports of raw, semi, and fully processed foods to meet almost 90 percent of its food needs. U.S. food exports to the GCC-4 reached $1,866 million in 2014 while exports to the Gulf region grew by 57 percent between 2010 and 2014 to reach $3.3 billion, making the region the 9th largest market for U.S. food exports for the second consecutive year. Food products imported from the US include grains, intermediate and a wide range of consumer ready

products which represents more than 60 percent of the total exports. The GCC governments passed several technical regulations in 2011aimed at addressing several genetically engineered (GE) food related 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. Genetically engineered animal products are not permitted.

Lack of consumer awareness about GE products could negatively impact U.S. food exports to the GCC states, if GE labeling is enforced.

Section II. Author Defined:
CHAPTER 1: PLANT BIOTECHNOLOGY
PART A: PRODUCTION AND TRADE

a. PRODCUTION DEVELOPMENT: The agricultural sector is limited to a few varieties of vegetables and fruits grown seasonally. There is no commercial production of GE products in the GCC-4. 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. Consequently, exports of GE products do not exist.
b. COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION: See above
c. EXPORTS: No exports of GE crops/products
d. IMPORTS of GE crops and foods that contain GE ingredient are allowed either directly or through transshipments.
e. FOOD AID RECEPIENT COUNTRIES: GCC countries are not food aid recipient.

PART B: POLICY

a. REGULATORY FRAME WORK: No biotechnology crops are produced in the GCC-4 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, it 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 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, GCC countries developed the following technical regulations to closely monitor, trace and test 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.

a. APPROVALS: Not applicable
b. FIELD TESTING: Not applicable
c. STACKED EVENT APPROVALS: Not applicable
d. ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS: Not applicable
e. COEXISTENCE: Not applicable
f. LABELING

Technical Regulation *GSO 2143/2011* 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 label:
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 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 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.

a. TRADE BARRIERS: Not applicable
b. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR): Not applicable
c. CARTAGENA PROTOCOL RATIFICATION: Among the 4 GCC countries covered by OAA Dubai, Oman and Qatar are the only countries that have ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. In view of the limited agricultural production in these countries, they formed bio-safety committees. However, the role of the committee in each country is still being developed.

a. INTERNATIONAL TREATIES/FORA: Other than the described position in *Part B;* the GCC-4 has not taken any other position regarding GE. GCC-4 is members of IPPC and Codex Alimentarius.
b. RELATED ISSUES: NA
c. MONITORING AND TESTING: Until now, GE monitoring program don't exist.
d. LOW LEVEL PRESENCE POLICY: Other than the requirements described in PART B, policies describing Low Level Presence (LLP) don't exist.

PART C: MARKETING

a. MARKET ACCEPTANCE: GE rules are not currently enforced. In view of the current lack of awareness about the safety of GE products, GE products could face consumer rejection. Regulatory officials in nearly all GCC-4 countries have highlighted the need for better education of consumers about the safety and benefits of biotech crops, while developing regulatory capacity for the testing of foods.
b. PUBLIC/PRIVATE OPENION: See above

c. MARKETING STUDIES: NA.

PART D: CAPACITY BUILDING AND OUTREACH

a. In 2012, FAS/USDA sponsored a visit of GCC food safety officials to the United States.

The purpose 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.

a. STRATEGIES AND NEEDS: Further capacity building activities that would enhance the awareness and acceptance of both the government regulators and consumers would help boost better understanding and acceptance of the safety of GE products.

CHAPTER 2: ANIMAL BIOTECHNOLOGY

No animal biotechnology activities are currently being conducted in the GCC-4 countries. There are no technical regulations or standards that govern animal biotechnology. However, animal biotechnology will be more closely scrutinized due to concerns that genes from animals that are banned by Islamic rules could be used.

PART E: PRODUCTION AND TRADE

a. BIOTECHNOLOGY PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT: NA
b. COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION: NA
c. BIOTECHNOLOGY EXPORTS: NA
d. BIOTECHNOLOGY IMPORTS: NA

PART F: POLICY

REGULATIONS; LABELING AND TRACEABILITY; TRADE BARRIER; INTELLECTUAL PROPOERTY RIGHTS; AND INTERNATIONAL TREATIES: NA

PART G: MARKETING

a. MARKETING ACCEPTANCE: NA
b. PUBLIC/PRIVATE OPINIONS: NA

c. MARKET STUDIES: NA

PART H: CAPACITY BUILDING AND OUTREACH

a. ACTIVITIES: NA
b. STRATEGIES AND NEEDS: NA