USDA Foreign Agricultural Service
GAIN Report
Global Agricultural Information Network

Required Report - public distribution

Date: 11/17/2016

GAIN Report Number:

Venezuela

Agricultural Biotechnology Annual

2016

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Office of Agricultural Affairs

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Report Highlights:
Continued interest expressed by farmers and agricultural scientists to improve agricultural output via biotechnology has not resulted in a legal framework for either testing or commercializing biotech seeds and other products. On December 28 the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (GBRV) published a new Seed Law banning the use and research of modern biotechnology in agriculture.

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Section I. Executive Summary:

Despite interest in biotechnology by Venezuelan researchers and farmers to meet growing food demand, there is no commercial adoption of the technology. All domestic production of corn is with conventional seed. A Seed Law from December 2015 bans biotechnology seed in agricultural production, hindering any real technological progress and improvements in productivity.

Section II. PLANT AND ANIMAL BIOTECHNOLOGY

CHAPTER 1: PLANT BIOTECHNOLOGY

PART A: PRODUCTION AND TRADE

a) PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT: Not applicable

b) COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION:

There are officially no commercial biotechnology crops cultivated or under research and development in Venezuela. The GBRV has banned planting of transgenic crops despite significant interest from academic institutes and universities in developing agricultural biotechnology research. The only ongoing biotechnology research is in molecular genetics and tissue culture conducted by universities with minimal private sector and/or government involvement. Given there is no production of agricultural biotechnology, there are no exports of biotech-derived products.

c) EXPORTS: Not applicable.

d) IMPORTS: Venezuela is a significant importer of biotech-derived soybeans, soybean meal, soybean and vegetable oil, and corn.

e) FOOD AID: Not applicable.

f) TRADE BARRIERS:

On December 28 2015, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (GBRV) published the new Seed Law banning the use and research of modern biotechnology in agriculture. This law also prohibits the production, import, use, release and multiplication of transgenic or genetically engineered seeds. Prohibits the granting of copyright protection and patents on any type of seed. Violators of this law can be subject to sanctions ranging from fines to imprisonment.

PART B: POLICY

a) REGULATORY FRAMEWORK:

Agricultural biotechnology policy and regulations are managed by Venezuela's Ministry of Eco-Socialism and Water (MINEA). MINEA's Directorate of Bio-security and Bio-commerce is responsible for administering and regulating genetic resources, bio-security, and encouraging related activities that enhance the use of biodiversity. Among the specific functions of the office are:

- Evaluate all issues related to biotechnology and bio-security as well as traditional knowledge associated to biological diversity;
- Enter into contracts to provide access to genetic resources.

Research and investigation for non-agricultural biotechnology do not involve gene insertion or modification. The Seed Law of December 2015 effectively bans any transgenic research in agriculture. The Seed Law was created by the National Seed Commission (CONASEM), under the authority of INIA (National Institute of Agricultural Research), which has among its functions the registration and certification of seeds allowed by law.

Specifically, the Seed Law prohibits the use, application and research in modern agricultural biotechnology. According to the law, the following techniques are prohibited:

- In vitro nucleic acid techniques, including the recombinant DNA technique and the direct injection of nucleic acids into cells or organelles.
- The fusion of cells of species beyond the taxonomic family, which exceed the natural barriers of reproduction or recombination and are not techniques used in traditional reproduction and selection.

This Seed Law also prohibits the production, import, use, release and multiplication of transgenic or genetically engineered (GE) seeds. And, the law prohibits the granting of copyright protection and patents on any type of biotechnology seed. Violators of this law can be subject to a variety of sanctions ranging from fines to imprisonment.

Venezuela has signed and ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and a Reference Laboratory for the Detection of Genetically Modified Organisms located in the city of Maracay is not yet operational.

Venezuela is a member of Codex Alimentarius. The GBRV representation to Codex is through the

Ministry of Production and Commerce's National Autonomous Service for Norms, Quality, Metrology and Technical Regulations.

b) APPROVALS:

There are no approved plants or crops for cultivation or exports in Venezuela. Imports of GE crops or processed products are not restricted.

c) STACKED or PYRAMIDED EVENT APPROVALS: Not applicable.

d) FIELD TESTING: Not applicable

e) INNOVATIVE BIOTECHNOLOGIES: Not applicable.

f) COEXISTANCE: Not applicable.

g) LABELING: Not applicable

h) MONITORING AND TESTING: No testing at this time.

i) LOW LEVEL PRESENCE (LLP) POLICY: No LLP policy.

j) ADDITIONAL REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS: Not applicable.

k) INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR): Not applicable.

l) CARTAGENA PROTOCOL RATIFICATION:

Venezuela signed the Cartagena Protocol on May 24, 2000, and ratified on September 11, 2003. There is no impact on trade at this time because of Protocol rules.

m) INTERNATIONAL TREATIES/FORA:
Venezuela is a member of Codex Alimentarius. The GBRV representation to Codex is through the Ministry of Production and Commerce's National Autonomous Service for Norms, Quality, Metrology and Technical Regulations.

Venezuela is a member of The International Plant Protection Convention. The GBRV representation to IPPC is through Ministry of Agriculture and Land's National Institute of Agricultural Health.

n) RELATED ISSUES:

PART C: MARKETING

a) PUBLIC/PRIVATE OPINIONS:

The government maintains public campaigns in traditional and social media against GMOs and the "dangers" of its use for the environment and as food. Private entities as The Venezuelan Federation of Agricultural Producers and the Venezuelan Cattlemen Federation constantly perform public appearances and opinions favoring the use of agricultural biotechnologies in order to enhance their production levels and capabilities.

b) MARKET ACCEPTANCE/STUDIES:

Despite the GBRV's prohibition of marketing or development of agricultural biotechnology, Venezuelan producers continue to express the need for, and acceptance of, biotech-derived products. The Venezuelan Federation of Agricultural Producers forecasts that domestic production could double in two years if a regulatory framework for agricultural biotechnology allowed the use of biotech-derived seeds. Other producer groups have criticized the government for not allowing the use of agricultural biotechnology to the detriment of domestic production. Consumers have not voiced any significant concerns about biotechnology or products containing biotechnology raw materials. Venezuela imports significant volumes of biotech-derived soybeans, soybean meal, soybean and vegetable oil, and corn from primarily the United States, Brazil, and Argentina.

CHAPTER 2: ANIMAL BIOTECHNOLOGY

PART D: PRODUCTION AND TRADE

a) PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

There are no animal biotechnology events under development in Venezuela, and the government has not granted approval for animal biotechnology from any source. There is significant interest by research centers and universities in developing animal biotechnology to improve the quality of cattle and hogs in Venezuela. Currently, the biotechnology technique applied in genetic improvement of cattle is in-vitro fertilization. This technique is offered commercially by several companies that use Brazilian biotechnology.

The use of modern animal biotechnology techniques is less developed. Applying modern animal biotechnology has been restricted almost exclusively to the diagnosis of diseases, mainly viral in nature. To date, the information obtained has been based on vaccine produced abroad, not domestically.

b) COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION: Not applicable.

c) EXPORTS: Not applicable.

d) IMPORTS: Not applicable.

e) TRADE BARRIERS: Not applicable.

PART E: POLICY

a) REGULATORY FRAMEWORK:
There is no policy regulating animal biotechnology, therefore no government entities are responsible for regulating GE animals or livestock clones, food safety, animal welfare and environmental safety issues. Animal biotechnology is referred to in the 2002 Law for Seed, Animal Reproductive Material, and Biological Inputs; however, no regulations were implemented to address research and commercial development of the technology.

b) INNOVATIVE BIOTECHNOLOGIES: No regulation at this time.

c) LABELING AND TRACEABILITY: Not applicable.

d) INTELECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR): Not applicable.

e) INTERNATIONAL TREATIES/FOR A: Not applicable.

PART F: MARKETING

a) PUBLIC/PRIVATE OPINIONS:
There is no information about public or private sector opinions on the use of livestock cloning, GE and/or genome edited animals.

a) MARKET ACCEPTANCE/STUDIES:
The livestock sector of Venezuela maintains a favorable attitude to any technological innovations that help to improve production and operations.