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Genetically-Enhanced Soybeans Approved for Commercial Use

Report Categories:
Biotechnology - GE Plants and Animals
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Report Highlights:
On June 6, 2012, the Government of Mexico (GOM) announced that it had approved genetically-enhanced (GE) soybeans for commercial use in Mexico for up to 253,500 hectares (ha). GE soybeans had only previously been planted under the experimental and pilot stages in Mexico (since 1995). The approval of GE soybeans for commercial use comes at a politically-sensitive time with upcoming presidential elections and at a time that anti-biotech groups have ramped up media attacks to block progress on this front.

General Information:
Mexico Approves Genetically-Enhanced Soybeans for Commercial Use

On June 6, 2012, the Government of Mexico (GOM) announced that it had approved genetically-enhanced (GE) soybeans for commercial use in Mexico for up to 253,500 hectares (ha). GE soybeans had only previously been planted under the experimental and pilot stages in Mexico (since 1995). Moreover, up to this point only GE cotton had been approved for commercial use in Mexico (see 2011 GAIN report MX1056 "*Mexico Authorizes First Commercial Biotech Cultivation"*). It is important to note that the approval of GE soybeans for commercial use comes at a politically-sensitive time with upcoming presidential elections and at a time that anti-biotech groups have ramped up media attacks to block progress on this front. For example, this announcement was met with articles questioning whether this decision would impair honey exports to the European Union.
On June 6, 2012, the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA) through the National Service of Health, Food Safety, and Food Quality (SENASICA) published updated information on the status of 2012 requests for environmental release of genetically-enhanced crops. Based on Mexico's Biosafety Law, any transgenic seed has to go through three different testing phases: experimental, pilot, and commercial. According to the Biosafety Law, it is in the best interests of biotechnology developers to complete experimental testing as soon as possible in order to begin the pilot testing and, afterwards, the commercial testing.

Permits for GE soybeans were granted for seven Mexican states which currently comprise the productive area: Campeche, Quintana Roo, Yucatan, San Luis Potosi, Tamaulipas, Veracruz and Chiapas and covers an area of 253,500 hectares. The approved soybean event is MON-04032-6 with tolerance to glifosate herbicide. The municipalities where it has been approved are:

- Champotón, Hecelchakán, Hopelchén, Tenabo, Calkiní, Escárcega, Carmen and Palizada in Campeche;
- Othón Pompeyo Blanco, José María Morelos and Felipe Carrillo Puerto in Quintana Roo;
- Santa Elena, Ticul, Oxkutzcab, Tekax, Tzucacab, Peto and Tizimín in Yucatán;
- Aldama, Altamira, El Mante, González, Xicoténcatl and Tampico in Tamaulipas;
- Ébano, Tamuín and San Vicente Tancuayalab in San Luis Potosí;
- Acacoyagua, Acapetahua, Cacahoatán, Escuintla, Frontera Hidalgo, Huehuetán, Huixtla, Mazatán, Metapa, Suchiapa, Suchiate, Tapachula, Tuxtla Chico, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Tuzantán, Villa Comaltitlán and Villaflores in Chiapas and
- Pánuco in Veracruz

These municipalities correspond to the regions of Yucatan Peninsula, Huasteca and Chiapas.

From 1995 to 2005, the GOM has granted 50 environmental release permits for experimental testing under the previous legal framework (NOM-FITO056). From 2005 to 2009, under the Bio-safety Law and its Implementation Rules (Reglamento), an additional 30 experimental testing permits have been approved. But it was not until 2010 that the GOM granted the first pilot testing of GM soybean (see Table 1).

Mexico. Table 1. Permits and Area Approved for Environmental Release of GM Soybeans		
Year	**Permits**	**Area Granted (has)**
2005	7 Experimental	17,523
2006	4 Experimental	25,715
2007	6 Experimental	42,000
2008	11 Experimental	70,000
2009	2 Experimental	9
2010	3 Pilot	26,500
2011	1 Experimental	0.34
	4 Pilot	46,000
2012	1 Commercial	253,500

Source: SENASICA at the National Information System for Bio-safety and biotechnology: http://www.cibiogem.gob.mx/OGMs/Paginas/Permisos.aspx and http://www.senasica.gob.mx/?id=4443. Information as of June, 2012.

Official GOM information regarding requests and permits for environmental release of experimental, pilot and commercial stages of biotech crops (from 1988 to present) is available at the Inter-Ministerial Commission for Bio-safety of Genetically Modified Organisms (CIBIOGEM) website.

FAS/MEXICO Comments:
On average, Mexico has 165,000 hectares of soybeans planted in a given year, so this decision gives some room for further growth. Moreover, domestic soybean production represents only 5 percent of total domestic consumption as imports have displaced much domestic oilseed production. Roughly 90 percent of soybeans consumed in Mexico are imported from abroad (mostly from the United States). Domestic yields are expected to increase substantially with the use of GE soybean seeds which should lead to an expansion of soybean planted area in Mexico.

The GOM has continued moving forward on biotechnology despite the strong opposition and the media campaign of several anti-biotech organizations. There is big pressure to get other GE crops currently in the experimental and pilot pipeline (corn and wheat) approved for commercial use. Corn remains the most sensitive, due to Mexico being the center of origin, and there is question whether the outgoing administration will make this decision or leave it for the next one.

For More Information
FAS/Mexico Web Site: We are available at www.mexico-usda.com or visit the FAS headquarters' home page at www.fas.usda.gov for a complete selection of FAS worldwide agricultural reporting.

Other Relevant Reports Submitted by FAS/Mexico:

Report Number	**Subject**	**Date Submitted**
MX2017	Mexico Approves 4 Additional GE Corn Pilot Tests	3/25/2012
MX2001	GE Corn Pilot Tests Approved	1/6/2012
MX1100	Mapping Mexican Corn and Implications for Biotech	12/21/2011

	Development	
MX1086	Biotech Corn Permits Being Reviewed-November Update	11/18/2011
MX1070	2011 Biotech Corn Permits Being Reviewed	9/20/2011
MX1056	2011 Biotech Annual: Mexico Authorizes First Commercial Biotech Cultivation	7/15/2011
MX1054	June Cotton Update	6/30/2011
MX1102	2010 Biotech Corn Permits Issued	1/26/2011

Useful Mexican Web Sites: Mexico's equivalent to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (SAGARPA) can be found at www.sagarpa.gob.mx , equivalent to the U.S. Department of Commerce (SE) can be found at www.economia.gob.mx and equivalent to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (SALUD) can be found at www.salud.gob.mx. The inter-secretarial commission for biosafety of GMO, that maintain the National Information System www.cibiogem.gob.mx These web sites are mentioned for the readers' convenience but USDA does NOT in any way endorse, guarantee the accuracy of, or necessarily concur with, the information contained on the mentioned sites.