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Likely Compromise on Restrictive GE Labeling Requirements

Report Categories:

Biotechnology - GE Plants and Animals

Grain and Feed

Oilseeds and Products

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Report Highlights:

Taiwan's Food and Drug Administration (TFDA) held "expert meetings" with stakeholders to discuss proposed GE labeling requirements. The most significant development from these meetings was a compromise to limit the scope of the GE labeling requirement to those products directly derived from GE raw material (i.e. soy oil, corn starch) with secondary product (i.e. soda containing corn syrup) exempt. In addition, draft labeling implementation timeline will be push back and a discrimination bigger font size label will be removed. TFDA also held its first ever GE Advisory Committee on April 27.

General Information:

In response to many concerns from local industries regarding the proposed changes for GE labeling requirements as notified to the WTO as G/TBT/N/TPKM/168 Rev. 1, on March 17, 2015, TFDA decided to hold an “expert meeting” with stakeholders on April 14, 2015. TFDA invited an equal numbers of GE proponents and opponents to participate in the April 14 meeting. Meeting participants consisted of industry representatives, NGOs, and academics. TFDA Food Safety Division Director Jyh-Quan Pan cohosted the meeting with Legislator Tien Chiu-Chin. The allotted meeting time ran out without covering all agenda items, therefore a second meeting was scheduled on April 21 for continuing discussion.

One day prior to the April 21 expert meeting, local industry group met with TFDA and reached consensus on the following items, which were then discussed and agreed to in the April 21 meeting with Legislator Tien and NGOs.

Unofficial Consensus:

- Draft change for labeling highly processed food products: The draft requirement will be revised to focus on products directly diverted from GE raw materials, such as soybean oil, corn starch and syrup, and soy sauce; whereas “secondary” products, or foods prepared with soybean oil, corn syrup etc., will be exempted. TFDA will publish industry guideline at a later date.
- Draft change for mandatory non-GE labeling: This requirement will only apply to products which have GE alternatives in commercial chains. For instance, coffee is not eligible for non-GE labeling because there is not GE coffee being developed and commercialized.
- Draft change for labeling font: Industry group were opposed using bigger font size label, or the proposed 5 mm. TFDA in the meeting accepted industries’ proposal to label with the same font size requirements, with length and width no less than 2 mm. However, industry compromised to accept an EU labeling fashion with different color or a * mark and a note or any other labeling methods to differentiate GE and non-GE instead of bigger font size. The industry proposal was accepted.
- Draft change for labeling implementation timeline: The meeting concluded the new proposed implantation date on December 31, 2015 for packaged products and food additives after industry provided a loss estimate. However, implementation dates for unpackaged products, or products sold in bulk pack, are not be able to push back.

Unpackaged or sold in bulk pack food products phased-in: The draft regulation mandates labeling of unpackaged food products containing GE materials. Under the draft text, TFDA seeks to a three-part staged implementation.

- a. June 1, 2015: Mandatory labeling of all GE raw materials (e.g. corn and soybeans) sold by registered commercial companies or market chain stores.
- b. October 1, 2015: Mandatory labeling of processed GE food products (soybean milk, tofu, etc.) sold by registered commercial companies and market chain stores, and mandatory

labeling of all GE raw materials (e.g. corn and soybeans) sold by vendors or retailers who are not required to be registered (i.e., other than registered commercial companies or market chain stores).

- c. December 31, 2015: Mandatory labeling of GE unpacked or in bulk pack products, whether are in forms of raw material or processed and regardless who or where the products are sold, including small retail outlets, wet markets, street vendors etc.

TFDA GE Advisory Committee:

TFDA also held its first ever GE Advisory Committee on April 27 to discuss the expert meeting results. The GE Advisory Committee was established and held in accordance to the Act Governing Food Sanitation and Safety of February 5, 2014. Committee members questioned TFDA for not meeting with them before the April 14 and 21 stakeholder discussions. Still, the Committee also advised TFDA to exempt labeling requirements for highly processed food products.

NOTE:

Post has not received written or otherwise official notice of these changes nor have we reviewed actual implementation text. While messaging from contacts is consistent, we would caution against assuming this position is final. This is a positive development, though far from final or perfectly clear.