



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Template Version 2.09

Required Report - Public distribution

**Date:** 6/11/2008

**GAIN Report Number:** ES8009

## El Salvador

## Biotechnology

## Annual

## 2008

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**Report Highlights:**

El Salvador has decided to abolish Article 30 of the Planting Seed Law, effective since 9/01. This article required imported seeds to carry a phytosanitary certificate with an additional declaration from the country of origin stating that the seeds did not contain Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). El Salvador ratified the Cartagena Protocol in 12/03. The Environment Law, effective since 5/98, provides guidance on assessing the environmental impact of GMOs. However, now that there is no legal impediment to use GMOs, the Ministry of Environment is working on the regulatory framework for their safe use and commercialization.

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Includes PSD Changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
Annual Report  
San Salvador [ES1]  
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## Executive Summary

El Salvador is a net food importer. White corn, red kidney beans and rice are major staples. The U.S. is the main supplier of yellow corn for animal feed, rice, wheat, vegetable oil, tallow, soybean meal and cotton, among other products.

Currently there are no restrictions on imports of agricultural biotechnology products. The only law that regulated trade of biotech products is the Planting Seed Law that became effective in September 2001. Title IV of this law – Final and Transitory Dispositions, Chapter I, Article 30 stated that it was prohibited to import, conduct research on, produce or commercialize Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) seeds. Due to over three years of pressure from the private sector and to the rising food costs, the Government of El Salvador (GOES) has decided to abolish Article 30 (Please see Section III. Biotechnology Policy).

The other law that addresses biotechnology is the Environment Law, effective since May 1998. Article 21 literal Ñ of this law provides regulations for carrying out environmental impact studies to determine if GMOs are harmful to the environment and Article 68 provides guidance on procedures to create bio-safety norms. El Salvador also ratified the Cartagena Protocol and it has been in effect since December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

El Salvador's biotechnology regulatory system is still being developed. The Environment Ministry conducted a project financed by the Global Environment Fund (GEF) and the United Nations Environment Program from July 2002 to August 2004 to define the legal framework for a law that would provide guidance for proposals to regulate GMOs and also to define coordination among the Ministries of Agriculture, Environment and Health regarding biotechnology.

Currently the Presidential Technical Secretariat of the GOES is making observations to a proposal for a Special Ruling for the Safe Use and Commercialization of GMOs that will later be presented to the National Assembly for approval and ratification. Once this step is accomplished, a Biosecurity Committee will be created to assure the compliance with the ruling (Please see Section III. Biotechnology Policy).

The main applications for biotechnology have been in the cultivation of vegetable tissue and propagation of vegetable materials in vitro. The National Center for Agricultural and Forestry Technology (CENTA) of the Ministry of Agriculture (MAG) is the main GOES institution offering tools to develop improved crop varieties. CENTA has mainly focused on creating improved white corn, rice and red kidney bean varieties to increase productivity.

The National Food Commission composed of the Ministries of Agriculture, Environment and Health has formulated a proposal for the "Special Ruling for Food Safety of Modern Biotechnology Derived Products" with the objective of complying with Article 11 of the Cartagena Protocol.

The MAG has created an Institutional Biosafety Commission to formulate proposals for the registration of agricultural inputs derived from Biotechnology, including the creation of proposals for special rulings.

The private sector has been active in biotechnology, carrying out several activities geared to support the safe use of biotech products. (Please see Section III. Biotechnology Policy)

## Section II. Biotechnology Trade and Production

El Salvador does not produce any genetically modified crops and there are no crops under development that would be in the market in the coming year. El Salvador does not produce biotechnology crops developed outside the U.S. that have not passed through the U.S. regulatory system. El Salvador, however, does import biotechnology products mainly from the U.S.; these are yellow corn, white corn, soybean meal, cotton and corn-soy blend (CSB).

El Salvador has been a food aid recipient for the past decade and continues to receive food assistance from the U.S. and Europe. Wheat, soybean meal, yellow corn and vegetable oil are the main commodities imported to El Salvador as food assistance.

Once the proposal for the Safe Use of GMOs is approved and ratified by the National Assembly, field-testing of biotechnology crops will be conducted to study the behavior of GMO crops in the local environment and also a cost/benefit analysis will be carried out to determine the viability of these crops.

## Section III. Biotechnology Policy

As mentioned before, the regulatory framework for agricultural biotechnology is in the development stage in El Salvador. Through the GEF-funded project, the GOES has written a proposal for a regulatory framework that includes national policy for biotechnology, a national policy for bio-safety, an administrative and regulatory system for imports of GMOs, a decision making support system, and a mechanism for social participation and consultation. Public consultations have concluded and the Presidential Technical Secretariat of the GOES is making observations especially to the "Special ruling for the safe handling of GMOs", whose objective is to provide the environmental permit for any activity or project that implies genetic handling or production of GMOs. Once these observations are finalized and incorporated, the document will then be presented to the National Assembly for review, approval and ratification.

This initiative was complemented by the creation in 2003 of the National Bio-safety Commission composed of members of the Ministries of Agriculture (MAG), Environment (MARN) and Public Health (MSPAS), the National Commission for Science and Technology (CONACYT), and private sector representatives. An additional effort has been the creation of El Salvador's Biotechnology Clearing House (BCH-El Salvador), available at the MARN's web site <http://www.marn.gob.sv/>.

Under the proposed regulatory framework, the MARN would be the institution in charge of enforcing the safe handling of GMOs and coordinating with MAG and MSPAS on appropriate bio-safety applications.

Currently there is no list of approved biotechnology crops for food, processing, feed or environment.

El Salvador requires labeling for packaged foods mainly for health and consumer information. Nutrition facts and ingredient lists are part of the label. Labeling for food products that contain GMOs is required under Article 128 of the Consumer Law; however this rule is currently not being enforced. For additional information on labeling regulations please refer to [www.fas.usda.gov](http://www.fas.usda.gov) under Attaché Reports and search for El Salvador's Food and Import Regulations and Standards (FAIRS) report.

El Salvador signed and ratified the Bio-safety Protocol also known as the Cartagena Protocol on April 23, 2003, which has been in force since December 25, 2003. There is no impact on trade at this time due to the Protocol rules.

Progress towards implementing biotechnology laws and regulations has been slowed by a lack of access by the legislative branch to scientific information about biotechnology. Until recently, political party agendas affected the ability of the government to obtain approval from the National Assembly for new government policies. However, an agreement among center right political parties gave way to the abolishment of Article 30 of the Planting Seed Law which was the only impediment to begin the use of biotech crops in El Salvador.

The private sector has conformed a Biotechnology and Biosecurity Commission that is coordinated by the Agricultural Research Foundation (FIAGRO) to promote the application of biotechnology and its safe use in the local agricultural sector.

FIAGRO has also created the Biotechnology Web of El Salvador that is composed of businessmen, academia, technical experts, independent consultants and government institutions. The objective of this web is to drive agricultural biotechnology through the formulation of biotech oriented projects that assist in resolving specific problems and also provide value added as well as innovation.

This web has formulated the following projects with a biotech profile:

- Molecular characterization of Bourbon Coffee.
- Micro dissemination in vitro of cedar and mahogany trees through the germination of plantlet.
- Genetic study of "Loroco" (*Fernaldia* sp) through morphologic, biochemical and molecular markers.
- Cultivation and transformation of soy biomass for energy production.

In addition, FIAGRO is working on a Risk Analysis Guide for the release of genetically modified cotton and white corn seeds.

#### **Section IV. Marketing Issues**

There are no obstacles to marketing biotechnology products in El Salvador at this time. Being a densely populated developing nation, El Salvador must rely on imported food to satisfy local demand. The U.S. is the main trading partner for El Salvador and U.S. products are regarded as being of higher quality than others available in the market and also safe to consume.

Until recent increases in food prices, biotechnology was not a main priority of the government and consuming public, and food safety issues that could affect product marketing were more related to food borne diseases.

#### **Section V. Capacity Building and Outreach**

So far there have been no U.S. Government or USDA-funded biotechnology capacity building or outreach activities carried out in El Salvador. The 2004 Food for Progress Government-to-Government donation Agreement made funds available to finance Norman Borlaug Fellowships to train researchers, scientists, faculty members and policy and regulatory officials on agricultural topics that can include biotechnology.

El Salvador would benefit from training to raise the knowledge and capacity to apply transparent science-based regulations to agricultural biotechnology. The Ministries of Agriculture, Environment and Health could benefit from this training, as well as the standard and regulatory setting agency CONACYT, and FIAGRO. Topics such as traceability and coexistence could be included in this training.

**Section VI. Reference Material****AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY REPORT****APPENDIX A. TABLE OF APPROVED BIOTECHNOLOGY PRODUCTS**