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Taiwan

Biotechnology

Bioengineered Food Regulation Update

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Report Highlights:

Despite last minute concerns, Taiwan is unlikely to amend the Law Governing Food Sanitation to add clauses concerning GMO's. In addition, recent meetings held by the inspection authorities also indicate Taiwan is unlikely to change the current import inspection scheme and will not require special documentation for bioengineered grains and oilseeds. Department of Health (DOH) urges USDA cooperators and grain suppliers to encourage biotechnology companies to register all bioengineered varieties of soybeans and corn marketed on Taiwan prior to April 30, 2002. The mandatory bioengineered food labeling regulation will take effect on January 1, 2003. As of that date, bioengineered soybean and corn foods are eligible for commercialization, only if they are registered with the DOH.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Taipei[TW1], TW

Taiwan unlikely to amend Food Sanitation Law

The Legislative Yuan (LY) held a "compromise" meeting between the ruling party and all opposition parties on Tuesday, October 9 to discuss two legislative proposals to amend the Law Governing Food Sanitation. One proposed amendment would have essentially banned the importation of bioengineered foods into Taiwan by declaring foods containing more than 5 percent of biotech content to not be eligible for commercialization. The other proposed amendment would enforce mandatory labeling on food biotech ingredients with 1 percent threshold. The result of the October 9th LY compromise meeting decided that the LY will not forward these two legislative proposals to amend the Law Governing Food Sanitation. In general, the results of the LY compromise meetings represent the final decisions been made by all parties. As a consequence, the Food Sanitation Bureau (FSB) of the Department of Health (DOH) retains its regulatory authority over the bioengineered food regulation promulgated in February 2001 (see TW1007).

Taiwan unlikely to change import inspection scheme for implementation of the new bioengineered food regulation

In response to the bioengineered food regulations, Taiwan's import inspection authority at the Bureau of Standards, Metrology and Inspection (BSMI) of the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA) called an interagency meeting with the grain industry representatives on Tuesday, October 9 as preparation for implementation of the new bioengineered food regulation. There were about 25 meeting attendees from USDA cooperator offices (ASA and USGC), grain suppliers, feed and vegetable oil manufacturers' association, and official representatives of BSMI port branch offices, Council of Agriculture (COA), Bureau of Animal and Plant Inspection and Quarantine (BAPHIQ), and FSB. The meeting addressed the following two major topics:

(1) Import Documentation–Not to be changed

The grain industry suggested that the country or state of origin and the phyto certificate written declarations remain unchanged. Unless imported products are non-GMO, it is not necessary to specify "bioengineered" status on the official import documents for all imported products, for bulk commodities in particular. Consequently, the contents of bioengineered varieties are not required to be specified on official import documents because it is difficult to specify all bioengineered corn varieties. (Note: BSMI provided a list of U.S. approved bioengineered soybeans and corn from the FDA website. A total of 18 varieties are listed, 3 soybeans and 15 corn.)

(2) Import Inspection Scheme–Not to be changed

BSMI and DOH both agreed that there were "no food safety concerns on bioengineered food." Therefore, they primarily agreed to do labeling inspections on packaged food only. In addition to an uncertainty of identification methodologies for all commercial bioengineered soybean and corn varieties, identification of bioengineered soybean and corn varieties is a time and capital intensive process so that there will be no specific import inspections initiated for bioengineered variety checks at the port of entry. However, FSB does not yet know how to check raw materials and products of soybeans and corn on the Taiwan market to see if they are registered or legal bioengineered varieties. As to voluntary non-GM food labeling, FSB plans to review the non-GM certificates provided by suppliers instead of conducting expensive laboratory testings.

The above meeting results indicated that Taiwan authorities are focusing on regulating bioengineered food in an attempt to confirm consumers' right to choose and not against bioengineered food. In this regard, FSB seems to want to establish a simple traceability and labeling on non-GM food. There will be more meetings of this kind to be called by FSB or BSMI to discuss implementation of the new bioengineered food regulations.

FSB urged US cooperators and grain suppliers to encourage biotechnology companies to register.

Registration Requirement for Bioengineered Soybean and Corn Varieties

On submission for registration of genetically modified (GM) food, the applicant is required to fill out the application form and provide the following information:

- (1) Background information about the applicant.
- (2) Background information about the GM food.
- (3) Synopsis of the safety assessment on the GM food.
- (4) Safety assessment on the GM food.
- (5) A literature list of references and relevant research papers on the GM food.
- (6) Reference sample and registration fee.

Registration requires one kilogram of sample. The registration fee is NT\$164,000 or about \$4,685 per variety (\$1=NT\$35). This includes NT\$100,000 for documentation review and evaluation and NT\$64,000 for testing the validity of variety identification method(s). The DOH's National Laboratories of Foods and Drugs will conduct the testing.

The Guidance for Safety Assessment of Genetically Modified Food is available on DOH website at <http://food.doh.gov.tw> (Note: The official English language guidance will be available in November 2001.)

The application form is available on DOH website at <http://food.doh.gov.tw>. With exception (4) food safety assessment report and (5) literature list, all submitted information must be in Chinese and typed. The DOH requires submitted information both in hard copy and on diskette (s). It has to be printed in A4 size paper. If the original information for (1), (2) & (3) is in languages other than Chinese, it must then be translated into Chinese.

Contact information for registration of bioengineered varieties is below:

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