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Saudi Arabia

Biotechnology

Update

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Report Highlights:

The Saudi Ministry of Commerce has agreed to accept health certificates issued by state departments of agriculture instead of the previous requirement that the certificates must be issued by the Federal Government agency such as USDA and FDA.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Riyadh [SA2], SA

This report is a follow up to our GAIN Report SA2008 titled "Detailed Information on Saudi Arabian GMO Testing" which was transmitted to FAS/W in March 2002.

In light of the growing concerns about the Saudi Ministry of Commerce's (MOC) stringent GMO labeling requirements that caused rejections & bans of several imported foodstuffs, the ATO recently met with a high ranking Saudi Arabian Food Quality Inspections official to clarify rules on GMO labeling and to discuss the required GMO export certificate. This report summarizes the current GMO labeling requirements and shows a sample of a GMO health certificate acceptable to the Saudi Government.

I. Current GMO Labeling Requirements:

Following is the summary of the Saudi Ministry of Commerce's GMO Labeling requirements put into effect on December 1, 2001:

1. Positive labeling: if a product contains **one or more genetically modified plant ingredients**, the information should be clearly communicated to the consumer by labeling. A triangle should be drawn and on it the text should read "Contains Genetically Modified Product (s)." **Note: Saudi Arabia does not permit imports of foodstuffs that contains genetically engineered animal products.**

2. Bilingual Labeling: The GMO statement must be clearly written in Arabic and English languages with an ink color different from that of the main product tag.

3. Health Certificate: GMO products or genetically engineered products which are exported to Saudi Arabia must have been approved in the country of origin for human consumption. Each shipment must be accompanied by a health certificate issued by a government agency stating that the GMO ingredient (s) used in the foodstuff is approved in the country of origin (United States) for human consumption.

4. PCR Real Time Method: MOC approved the PCR Real Time Method for GMO testing and set a 1 percent threshold to account for cross contamination and appointed King Faisal Specialist Hospital & Research Center (KFSH) to do the GMO testing on imported and locally produced foodstuffs. However, due to lack of trained personnel and inadequate lab equipment, the hospital subcontracted with Genetic ID a London, England based firm to do the tests until it can do it locally. Saudi importers are charged a testing fee of US\$ 480 per product sample tested. It takes 3-4 weeks for the importer to receive the test results. If the test results reveals more than 1 percent GMO ingredients, the product is either destroyed locally or re-exported.

II. Summary of GMO Test Results:

Since the GMO labeling requirement took effect on December 1, 2001, MOC has conducted random testing on hundreds of foodstuffs imported into the country. Thus far, most of the products tested passed the labeling requirements with the exception of 11 products from eight countries that have been found in violation of the GMO positive labeling requirements. The following table shows the names of supplying countries, numbers of firms that did not meet

the labeling requirements and names of products that failed the GMO free tests.

| Country | No. of Firm (s) | Name (s) of Product (s) Banned from Suppling Firm |
|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| U.S.A. | Two | Donut mix concentrates & soy protein extracts |
| The Netherlands | Two | Soybean & soy protein |
| Turkey | Two | Biscuits & Cakes |
| Italy | One | Corn starch |
| South Korea | One | Kishmi macaroni |
| Germany | One | Soy bread |
| China | One | Chicken meat |
| The Philippines | One | Rice mixture |

Note: the above 11 companies are barred from exporting the products that violated the GMO labeling requirements to Saudi Arabia as long as the positive GMO labeling is enforced. For example the U.S. firm that exported donut mix concentrates containing GMO ingredients without putting the positive GMO label, is barred from exporting that particular product to the Kingdom as long as the positive GMO label is implemented. However, the firm is allowed to export other foodstuffs to Saudi Arabia as so long as it meets the Saudi GMO and other food safety requirements.

III. GMO Health Certificate: The Saudi Ministry of Commerce has agreed to accept health certificates issued by state departments of agriculture instead of the previous requirement that the certificates must be issued by the Federal Government agency such as USDA and FDA. The Ministry has reiterated its refusal to consider any health certificate issued by exporting companies or other private organizations including the notary public. ATO provided the MOC with copies of GMO certificates issued by some departments of agriculture and asked the Ministry to evaluate if any of the certificates met the current Saudi GMO requirement. After studying copies of the certificates provided, the MOC approved the following export certificate language issued by one state department of agriculture in lieu of the previous requirements that specified the federal government agencies as the sole providers of legitimate GMO health certificates. As such, similar certificates issued by any state department of agriculture would be now accepted by the Saudi port officials:

Certificate of Health & Free Sale, Sanitary and Purity

"I, (name of state official), do hereby certify that (name of U.S. company and address) operates a food manufacturing plant which is inspected at regular intervals by full-time inspectors employed by the (name of state) Department of Agriculture. The facility's equipment and raw materials, as well as the processing and packaging procedure, meets all sanitary requirements and the operation is in good standing in every respect. We certify the following listing of products as freely, and without qualification, sold and used in the United States of America (USA).

This product may contain genetically modified organisms.

(put name of product)

This certificate shall be good for one year from the date of issue.

This certificate is not to be construed as either an expression of implied warranty of any products of said company, nor shall it be used for propaganda, advertising, or other simple purposes.

This certificate shall not be altered after the issue date, or it will be deemed void by the (name of state) Department of Agriculture and the undersigned.

(The certificate should be issued with the seal of the State Department of Agriculture, notarized, and signed by the appropriate State Department of Agriculture official)."

End of Report