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Sri Lanka

Biotechnology

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Report Highlights:
Biotechnology in Sri Lanka is at a nascent stage; biotechnology policy and regulations are still evolving. Sri Lanka drafted a National Policy for Biosafety, which is open for public comments. Key Sri Lankan stakeholders, including government officials, scientists, and environmental groups have yet to be convinced regarding the safety aspects of biotech food and the advantages of biotechnology to achieve food security.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Biotechnology in Sri Lanka is at a nascent stage; biotechnology policy and regulations are still evolving. There is no biotechnology regulatory system at present. A National Biosafety Framework for Sri Lanka (NBFSL) has been established to regulate the import of biotech foods and to ensure the safe utilization of modern biotechnology in domestic agriculture. However, officials responsible for the development of the framework are unsure if/when the draft policy framed under the NBFSL will be implemented, due to a lack of attention by relevant government agencies and a shortage of trained personnel. Major US agricultural trade interests in the country include wheat, processed cheese, apples, oranges, vegetable seeds, un-manufactured tobacco, feed, and a limited volume of packaged products.

SECTION II: BIOTECHNOLOGY TRADE AND PRODUCTION

There is no commercial production of biotechnology crops in Sri Lanka, nor are any biotechnology crops under development in the country. Sri Lanka imports soybeans, corn flour, planting seeds, lentils, cotton, and tobacco, some of which may be bioengineered, but no mechanism exists to test for this. Sri Lanka is a food aid recipient country (including from the United States), receiving mostly wheat under the aid program.

SECTION III: BIOTECHNOLOGY POLICY

There is no regulatory framework in Sri Lanka for agricultural biotechnology. The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MENR) has constituted the National Biosafety Framework for Sri Lanka (NBFSL) to regulate the import of bioengineered food and the application of biotechnology in domestic agriculture. The NBFSL drafted a National Policy for Biosafety (www.biosafety.lk/pub/policy/policy.doc), which is currently open for public comments. The NBFSL website, www.biosafety.lk, contains various draft proposals pertaining to biotechnology such as the Legal Report on Biotechnology and Biosafety; Technical and Technology Aspects of Biosafety; and Institutional Aspects of a National Biosafety Framework.

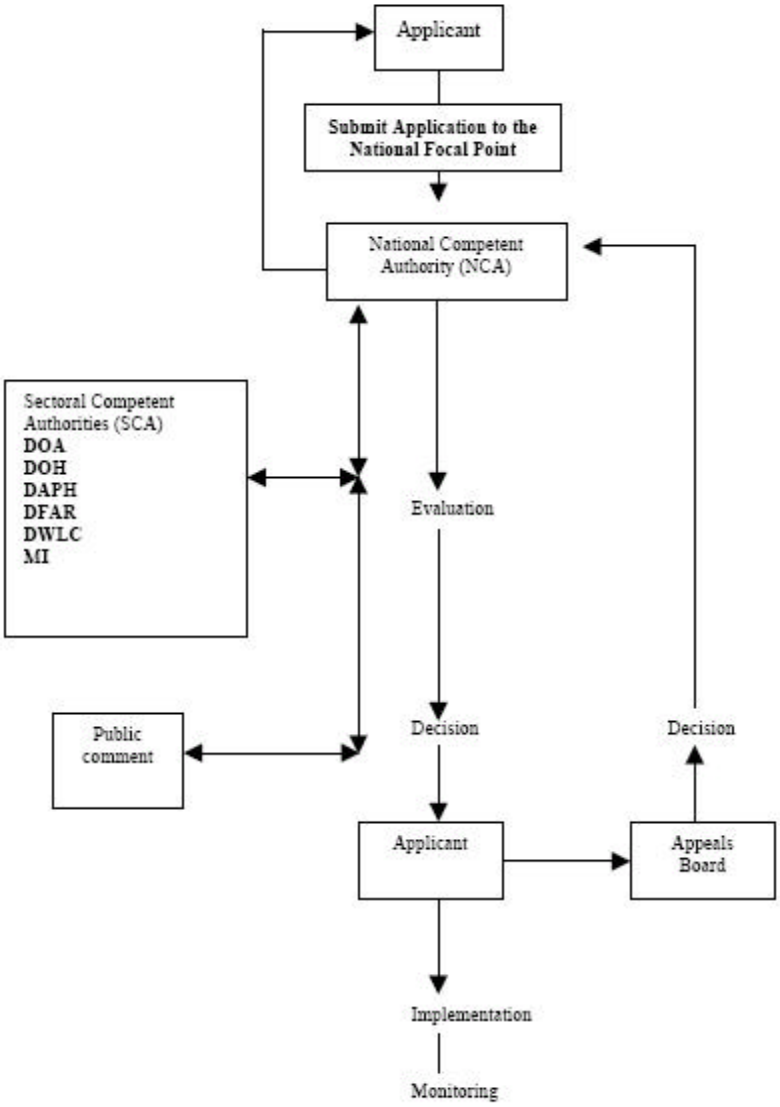
Currently, there is no single regulatory authority that handles biotechnology products. The MENR was designated to establish the NBFSL and to liaise with the Cartegena Protocol (CP) Secretariat. The NBFSL has recommended the formation of a National Council for Biosafety (NCB) as the apex body on biotechnology. The NCB, comprised of representatives of various concerned Ministries and civil society, will be tasked with a wide range of responsibilities, such as developing research & development-industry linkages to promote biotech industries, and establishing legislation, protocols, and guidelines. The NCB must be established by a framework law or an Act of Parliament.

The NCB will be required to: (a) screen applications and forward them to the relevant Sectoral Competent Authorities (SCA) and (b) make them available for public comment. The SCA's are required to have their own mechanism of carrying out risk assessments and reporting back to the NCB. SCA's may involve the following agencies:

Department of Agriculture (DOA):	Agricultural and non-agricultural (e.g. forest species, ornamentals) plants, planting material
Department of Health Service (DOH):	Biotech food and pharmaceuticals
Department of Animal Production & Health (DAPH) Veterinary Drug	Domestic animals including fish, birds, bees, and any other domesticated or wild animals

Control Authority:	kept in captivity. Biotech fish and/or veterinary pharmaceuticals. Animal feed including biotech feed ingredients.
Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWLC):	Wild animals and tropical aquarium fish.
Department of Fisheries & Aquatic Resources:	All aquatic animals and aquatic plants.

Following is the NBFSL's proposed flow chart for the evaluation of biotech applications:



Labeling of packaged food is required under the "Food (Labeling & Advertising) Regulations 2005" for consumer awareness, health, safety, and nutrition reasons. A labeling regulation with regard to biotech food product imports is pending. The proposed legislation, even if implemented, is unlikely to have a significant impact on consumption and trade of such

products, as the general public is not familiar with the pros and perceived cons of biotechnology.

Sri Lanka has signed and ratified the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol, which so far has not impacted trade. Although Sri Lanka at present does not have the capability (personnel and facilities) to test for biotech food, under the proposed monitoring and enforcement criteria of the NBFSL, approval of biotech products for import and use in Sri Lanka will be subject to rigorous testing and risk assessments by qualified laboratories and institutions.

SECTION IV: MARKETING ISSUES

At present, market acceptance for agricultural biotechnology products is not an issue, mainly due to the consumers' lack of awareness.

SECTION V: CAPACITY BUILDING

USDA has trained a Sri Lankan agricultural scientist and two media persons on biotechnology using the Cochran Fellowship Program. Under a scientific exchange program with the Sri Lankan Department of Agriculture, USDA is also funding programs aimed at a) developing rice varieties that are resistant to pests, diseases, and abiotic stress; b) DNA marker-based selection of tomatoes for bacterial wilt resistance and heat tolerance; and c) developing virus-free planting material.

Key Sri Lankan stakeholders, including government officials, scientists, and environmental groups, all of whom influence policy, have yet to be convinced regarding the safety aspects of biotech food and the advantages of biotechnology to achieve food security. An increased biotechnology outreach effort from the United States would be helpful in achieving this objective. Assistance is also needed with institutional capacity building, including human resource development, to support and implement the biotechnology policy and an effective regulatory system.

SECTION VI: REFERENCE MATERIAL

National policy on Biosafety draft available at NBFSL website - www.biosafety.lk