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## Ireland

## Biotechnology

## Agricultural Biotechnology Report

**2005**

**Approved by:**

Peter O Kurz  
U.S. Embassy

**Prepared by:**

Michael Hanley

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**Report Highlights:**

This report gives an overview of the regulation of agricultural biotechnology in Ireland. As Ireland is a member of the European Union (EU), it applies all EU Directives and Regulations on biotechnology. Therefore it is recommended that this report is read in conjunction with the overall report on agricultural biotechnology in the EU (E35091) produced by FAS/USEU.

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Includes PSD Changes: No  
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## Executive Summary

As a member of the European Union (EU), Ireland fully applies EU regulations regarding the approval, traceability and labeling of genetically engineered products.

While the total value of Irish imports of food and agricultural products from the U.S. is just over \$300 million, the main products affected by the EU's biotechnology regime, in relation to Ireland, are grain and feedstuffs. With a temperate climate and a large livestock-based agricultural industry, Ireland needs to supplement its animal feed requirements through imports. Since the advent of biotechnology and the EU regime, Irish importers have tried to source feedstuffs from (now dwindling) suppliers of GM-free products both in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Affected to a lesser extent are imports of consumer-oriented products. However these are the products that draw media attention to biotechnology and cause consumer disquiet over this (new to the EU) technology.

This report provides an overview of the situation for genetically engineered agricultural products in Ireland. This report should be read in conjunction with the overall report for the European Union (E35091)

## Production

There are currently no genetically modified (GM) crops being commercially grown in Ireland and it is expected that this situation will not change in the foreseeable future. Early in the GM debate within the EU, there were some trials of GM sugar beets in Ireland. These attracted controversy and debate on the issue but were abandoned after less than positive results.

## Policy

### General

In the early 1980's the Irish Government grasped the then young IT sector as the technology of the future. It has now focused on biotechnology, in general, as the next step into the future and is providing its full support particularly in the area of pharmaceuticals. The Irish Agriculture Food and Food Development Authority (Teagasc) opened its new biotechnology research center in May 2005 in an effort to focus its efforts on the use of biotechnology for health benefits in food. In general however, the GOI is led in the debate for agricultural biotechnology by current EU legislation and the principle of the "right of consumers to know" i.e. labeling. However, it does recognize each biotechnology "event" on a "case-by-case" basis but tends to be cautious.

### Responsibility

Ireland falls under the EU's regulatory regime for biotechnology and like many other EU member states, biotechnology policy falls within the responsibilities of a number of government departments and agencies:

Department of Agriculture and Food (DAF). DAF primarily is focused on biotechnology in relation to seed and feed. However it does have a role in deciding specific research projects in biotechnology. Many of the currently available agricultural products for planting are more suited to countries with better climates and so DAF has only a passive interest in these products. Food production falls within the jurisdiction of DAF but the oversight of the use of biotechnology and food is with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland.

Department of Health (DOH). The primary function of DOH is to protect consumer health and as such this department has overall control of Irish policy on food issues in relation to biotechnology. The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) carries out the day-to-day activities, such as enforcement and surveillance.

Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) – this is the competent authority in Ireland for GM foods in Ireland. FSAI enforces EU and national (EU legislation transposed into Irish law) legislation. It monitors compliance with GM legislation. It also has a number of scientific advisory panels that are consulted on a regular basis.

Department of the Environment (DOE). The DOE is involved in the release (into the environment) issues of GM seeds for planting. DOE has primary responsibility for policy, which on a routine basis is monitored and enforced by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Monitors and enforces GM legislation from an environment perspective.

There are regular meetings held among these agencies to adopt common positions in relation to biotechnology.

### **International**

At EU level and other international forum, any or all of the organizations identified above may be involved depending on the topic being discussed.

### **Approvals**

No specific approvals for Ireland.

### **Research**

As noted above, Teagasc carries out research primarily in relation to biotechnology in food production. It does this in collaboration with nearby universities.

### **Traceability & Labeling**

The GOI supports the labeling of foods containing GM products as a consumer's right to know. The FSAI carries out the surveillance of foods to ensure that labeling is correct and not misleading. GM free or non-GM labels have no legal definition in Ireland and yet some manufacturers use them. Some of these claims have been found to be false and therefore misleading to the consumer.

In relation to BT10 corn, the Irish authorities have taken a pragmatic approach to the issue. At risk, from a U.S. perspective, are annual imports of three quarter of a million metric tons of corn gluten feed and dried distillers grains – products that the Irish livestock industry need. Exporters and importers have worked together to ensure that proper certification is available for all possibly affected shipments.

### **Marketing**

Since first introduced in the EU, biotechnology and food has suffered from negative publicity throughout the EU. While this also occurred in Ireland, it was to a somewhat lesser extent

than in the UK. Some retailers however were quick to use the situation to their advantage offering meat produced from animals fed with “non-GM” feed.

More recently there appears to be a more-relaxed approach to biotechnology in food. Perhaps this is as a result of the new labeling requirements and a tacit consumer acceptance of the regulatory authority’s assurances.

**Reference Material**

Food Safety Authority of Ireland: <http://www.fsai.ie/surveillance/index.asp>