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## United Arab Emirates

### Biotechnology

### Annual Report

### 2005

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**Report Highlights:**

While regulation of biotechnology in agriculture has been discussed, no laws have propagated within the GCC-5 countries to control bioengineered crops. To date GCC-5 officials have refrained from taking any official measure to curb, control, or regulate the production or import of crops or food products that contain ingredients derived through biotechnology (such as corn or soybeans). Further, GCC-5 officials have stated publicly that they espouse a position of waiting for Codex to issue a standard that addresses the biotechnology issue. Therefore, more programs with broader reach are needed to educate public officials, media and consumers on this issue.

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....3**

**SECTION II: BIOTECHNOLOGY TRADE & PRODUCTION .....3**

**SECTION III: BIOTECHNOLOGY POLICY.....3**

**SECTION IV: MARKETING ISSUES .....3**

**SECTION V: CAPACITY BUILDING & OUTREACH.....4**

## Section I: Executive Summary

Commercial agriculture in the five Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC-5) countries administered to by the ATO Dubai (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE) is all but non-existent due to the harsh desert climate, limited water resource and insufficient top soil. Except for limited production of certain vegetables and citrus fruits, the commercial agricultural sector does not exist and comprises no more than 6 percent of GDP in the five countries. Thus the GCC-5 remains reliant on imports of raw, semi- and fully-processed foods to meet requirements of an expanding population base, importing between 80-90 percent of its food requirements.

## Section II: Biotechnology Trade & Production

- a) No GCC-5 country has any biotech enhanced crop under commercial production for either local consumption or export.
- b) No GCC-5 country has any biotech enhanced crop under development therefore will not have any biotech enhanced crop on the market in the coming year.
- c) The GCC-5 countries do import biotech enhanced corn and soybeans and their derivatives products from the U.S. and other countries that commercially produce biotech enhanced crops.
- d) No GCC-5 country is a food aid recipient.
- e) See a)

## Section III: Biotechnology Policy

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is composed of the GCC-5 plus Saudi Arabia. Since the GCC's inception the group has pursued loosely its policy objective to harmonize food laws and regulations of member states. While regulation of biotechnology in agriculture has been discussed, no laws have propagated within the GCC-5 countries to control bioengineered crops. To date GCC-5 officials have refrained from taking any official measure to curb, control, or regulate the production or import of crops or food products that contain ingredients derived through biotechnology (such as corn or soybeans). Further, GCC-5 officials have stated publicly that they espouse a position of waiting for Codex to issue a standard that addresses the biotechnology issue.

Organizations responsible for regulation of food laws are different in each state but in general the responsibility will fall either to the Standards and Metrology or the Public Health authority.

Politically, GCC member countries state that they are pursuing a joint unified measure to maintain their Gulf unity and to uphold the image of the organization. However, GCC-5 officials have noted that member states would not follow an unilateral decision made by any member state with regards to regulation of biotech enhanced crops or food. In their view the CODEX offers the best legal avenue for resolution of the biotech issue.

## Section IV: Marketing Issues

GCC-5 member countries allow import of all food products, whether bioengineered or not. Organic food products are imported in limited quantity, but are expensive. Media has raised the issue of safeness of biotech enhanced foods on several occasions but the impact on consumption was minimal. Consumer education programs should be undertaken now to avoid any negative impressions when biotech laws are developed, debated and eventually adopted.

## Section V: Capacity Building & Outreach

ATO Dubai, independently using the Cochran program and jointly with the US Grain Council and American Soybean Association (ASA), has conducted several seminars in recent years to educate public health and standards officials on the Biotech issue. More programs with broader reach are needed to educate public officials, media and consumers on this issue. As these countries have yet to settle on a long-term policy towards this technology, education now is critical to building acceptance for the technology by the population.