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Poland

Planting Seeds

Poland Bans the Sale and Registration of Biotech Seeds

2006

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Report Highlights:

The Polish Parliament has passed legislation banning the sale and registration, but apparently not planting, of biotech seeds. The bill now goes to the President for signature, which is expected. The ban will likely violate EU regulations and many Polish scientists spoke out against it.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Warsaw [PL1]
[PL]

On April 28, 2006, the Polish Parliament approved legislation banning the sale and registration of biotech seeds in Poland. According to a Polish government contact, the legislation does not ban the planting of biotech seed varieties registered in the EU seed catalogue and purchased outside Poland. But, future legislation is likely to do so. The new legislation is the result of changes made by Parliament to draft legislation submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture that would have brought Polish regulations into compliance with EU biotech regulations. Ironically, the new legislation will likely violate EU regulations.

The ban was first proposed in the Sejm (lower house of Parliament) during a late night session. It was later approved and sent it to the Senate for consideration, despite a ruling by the European Integration Committee Office (an independent office within the Polish government) that the ban would violate EU regulations.

Prior to the Senate vote, a small group discussed the draft legislation during what reportedly was a very turbulent meeting. In addition to nine senators, Under Secretary of Agriculture Chrapek, who holds the biotech portfolio at the Ministry of Agriculture, participated in these discussions. U/S Chrapek, Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Chroscikowski and one other senator supported the ban. The remaining senators were opposed, arguing that biotech products were not less safe than traditional or organic products that the ban would be a step back for Polish scientific research and that this was clearly politics over science. They also noted that the Ministry of Environment would soon introduce comprehensive biotech legislation for Parliamentary review. During this meeting, Senator Chroscikowski asked in whose interest was it to introduce GM seeds into Poland. He then answered that it was obviously in the United States' best interest since high-level U.S. officials, including U.S. Congressional delegations and the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, had raised the issue several times during visits.

The opinion of the Senate's legal office that the legislation would violate EU regulations raised some concerns, but not enough to prevent Senate approval. Due to some minor changes to other parts of the legislation, the draft was returned to the Sejm for final approval. A public appeal to defeat the ban by several leading Polish scientists, which was published in a major daily newspaper, reportedly generated some late concern among Sejm members, but not enough to prevent final passage. The bill now goes to the President for signature, which is expected. This will be the fifth time the Polish government has implemented legislation that violates EU regulations.

Comment: Polish farmers are currently not planting biotech seeds, primarily because of government opposition to biotechnology and the lack of economically advantageous varieties. While the new legislation will not ban planting biotech varieties, it obviously could dissuade farmers from doing so. We believe, however, that many local farmers would use biotech seeds, if economically advantageous varieties were available. A high-level Ministry of Agriculture contact agrees, especially if biotech seed use expands in neighboring countries. According to trade contacts, several Bt corn varieties of potential interest to Polish farmers have recently become available. Finally, it is not clear, despite U/S Chrapek's assurances to senators, how government officials will enforce the new legislation.
End Comment