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Saudi Arabia

Trade Policy Monitoring

GCC Production Date Labeling

2006

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Report Highlights:

Ministers of Commerce for each of the GCC countries will meet in Riyadh on November 18, to decide, among other things, if mandatory production date labeling will be mandated as a GCC requirement.

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

Directors of Standards from each of the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) met in Riyadh during the first week of October to discuss, among other things, production date labeling for foodstuffs produced by and imported into GCC countries. Information in this report was obtained from one of ATO Riyadh's Saudi Arabian Standards Organization (SASO) contacts (please protect source) that attended the meeting:

1. Two draft standards were submitted for discussion at the meeting:
 - A. Qatar offered a draft Gulf Standard (GS) "Labeling of Pre-packaged Foodstuffs". This standard included a provision calling for voluntary production date labeling. The proposal allows manufacturers of processed foods (both local and foreign suppliers) to decide if they wish to provide production date information on the product label.
 - B. Saudi Arabia submitted for consideration SASO standard 457/2005, "Expiration Periods of Food Products". This Saudi standard was issued December 2005. It requires mandatory production date labeling information for all processed foods.
2. After, what is reported to have been, heated debate, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE voted in favor of adopting the SASO standard as a GCC standard.
3. The Omani delegate did not cast a vote for his country, requesting additional time to consult with his government on the issue. Saudi Arabia anticipates that Oman will support the proposal in the near future.
4. Bahrain's vote may have been dictated by its trade commitments under the U.S. - Bahrain free trade agreement and, according to our Saudi contact, did not reflect Bahraini non-support in principle for mandatory production date labeling.
5. Saudi Arabia anticipates that Bahrain will consider approaching the United States to grant her permission to go along with the other GCC countries on this issue.
6. Saudi Arabia insisted upon maintaining a production date requirement during its bilateral WTO negotiations with the United States. Saudi Arabia, however, did agree to make several modifications to its product shelf life regulations. These included:
 - A. The elimination of mandatory SASO-established shelf life standards for most packaged food products.
 - B. The acceptance of producer-determined use by dates.

Note: For certain "perishable" foods, Saudi Arabia did not agree to accept producer-determined use by dates. This included: fresh or chilled meat and poultry; milk and selected dairy products; margarine; pasteurized fruit juice; table eggs; and baby food. For these products, use by dates or expiration dates shown on the product label must adhere to a schedule of SASO-established time periods following the date of production.
 - C. Elimination of Saudi Arabia's import ban on processed food products having less than half of their shelf life remaining at time of importation.
6. Ministers of Commerce for each of the GCC countries are scheduled to meet in Riyadh November 18, to discuss foodstuff related standards issues. The agenda will include SASO standard 457/2005.

7. If unanimous agreement on the Saudi proposal is not reached, the Saudi standard will not be adopted as GCC-wide standard. If this should happen, individual countries will retain the right to implement their own national standard. At present, all GCC countries have production date labeling requirements. Bahrain, however, is obligated under its FTA with the United States to eliminate this requirement for U.S. food products.