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Biotechnology Annual

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Report Highlights:

Uzbekistan does not commercially produce any transgenic crops nor does it have any regulations in place affecting their import. There are no regulations concerning labeling of food or feed derived from transgenic crops.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Annual Report
Ankara [TU1]
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Executive Summary

Uzbekistan does not commercially grow any transgenic crops nor does it have any regulations in place affecting imports of these products. There are no regulations concerning biotechnology-related labeling of processed food products. As a major cotton producer Uzbekistan could benefit from planting Bt cotton.

U.S. Trade

U.S. agricultural trade to Uzbekistan is hampered by Uzbekistan's complex trade regime based on an import-substitution policy and aided by high tariffs and transportation costs to this doubly-landlocked country. U.S. agricultural exports have averaged \$4 million over the past three calendar years (2004-2006), mostly food assistance in oilseeds, rice, vegetable oil and poultry meat. These assistance programs ceased in 2004. Uzbekistan's major imported commodities includes sugar, wheat and flour, butter and some consumer foods.

Biotechnology Trade and Production

- Uzbekistan does not commercially produce any biotech crops.
- The Uzbek Institute of Genetics and Plant Experimental Biology is doing some research on biotechnology. However, there are no published results from this research and there are no plans for any bio-engineered crops to be produced commercially in Uzbekistan in the foreseeable future.
- Up until FY 2005 Uzbekistan had been a food aid recipient. Transgenic U.S. soybeans and soybean oil had no problems entering the country.

Regulations

Currently, Uzbekistan has no laws or regulations governing the approval, production, importation or labeling of bio-engineered agricultural products, including processed foods, animal feed or seed. According to the Ministry for Foreign Economic Relations, Investments and Trade (MFERIT) and the State Committee for Protection of Nature (the main governmental organizations responsible for biotech issues), a draft decree dealing with the production and import/export of genetically modified agricultural products is under development. The government has tasked the Institute of Genetics and Plant Experimental Biology to develop documents on the use and safety of biotech products. However, the draft decree is still under preliminary consideration by a number of different ministries. Based on observations of official and independent experts, the government is not expected to approve the decree in the near future. The draft is not expected to be very restrictive as is the case in the European Union. Instead, Uzbekistan is modeling its law on the existing biotechnology laws of CIS and Baltic countries.

Although Uzbekistan participates in the Convention on Biological Diversity, it is not a signatory to the Cartagena Protocol.

Labeling

Uzbekistan has no uniform system of food labeling, including biotechnology labeling. However, in accordance with Uzbek legislation on protection of consumer's rights, all products sold in the country must contain the following information in the Uzbek language:

- Name of the product;
- Manufacturer's name and contact information;
- Ingredients and 'best before' date (if applicable);
- User's manual (if needed); and cautions (if any).

In 1999-2000 USDA's Cochran Fellowship Program organized two training courses related to biotechnology for the experts from the relevant Uzbek ministries. In addition, the United Nation's Office for Environmental Protection issued grants to some Central Asian republics for biotechnology-related projects. Reportedly, only Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan did not get these grants, because their governments failed to apply. Reportedly, these funds could still available be for Uzbekistan, if the Government of Uzbekistan submits necessary application.

Testing

Uzbekistan has no testing facilities for bio-engineered products. According to the Institute of Genetics, which is working on the draft legislation, a request to fund purchases of testing equipment has been submitted to the government.

Potential Benefits

Uzbekistan is one of the world's leading cotton producers, and would benefit enormously from adoption of Bt cotton technology. Pests, including bollworm, reduce yield and quality, and pesticide spraying has had severe environmental consequences. It is impossible to quantify the potential benefits, but there is every reason to believe they could be substantial. As the cotton sector remains in state hands, a high-level policy decision could have immediate widespread effects. Unfortunately, however, a lack of transparency makes it extremely difficult to identify an appropriate channel through which to inform the government of the potential benefits.

Public Perception

There is very little information on biotechnology published in Uzbek newspapers. Over the past 10 years, only a handful of articles have been published in the popular press. In general, the media does not cover this issue. As a result, public awareness is low and attitudes unknown.