



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Template Version 2.09

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 1/30/2009

GAIN Report Number: GM9004

Germany

Biotechnology

"Without Genetech" Food Label in Germany Misunderstood by Consumers

2009

Approved by:

Bobby Richey, Jr.
U.S. Embassy

Prepared by:

Dietmar Achilles

Report Highlights:

The University of Giessen has shown that the "Without Genetech" food label in Germany is misunderstood by consumers. German consumers expect that such labeled products are free of any agricultural biotechnology during their entire production process, which is not the case with current label standards. Upon learning this, consumers indicated that they were only willing to pay a higher price for products if they were completely free of biotech components.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Annual Report
Berlin [GM1]
[GM]

Study reveals German Consumers Misinterpret “Without Genetech’ Food Label

Researchers at the University of Giessen have released the results of consumer polling on the meaning of ‘Without Genetech’ label for food and livestock products in Germany. In October 2008, an online opinion poll asked 1012 consumers in the State of Hessen how they interpret the label.

The study revealed that about 74 percent of the participants disagreed that foods derived from animals which only have been fed biotech-free for a certain required period prior to slaughter or production (milk and eggs) should be allowed to carry the ‘Without Genetech’ label. In addition, 70 percent of the respondents demanded that any animal product carrying such a label should come from a production process completely free of biotech feed ingredients and biotech processing aids. About 39 percent of the people would tolerate that the animals have been treated with biotech medicine. An experimental test also revealed that the consumers would be prepared to pay a higher price for “Without Genetech” labeled products for animal products only if the entire production process has never free biotechnology.

The study also revealed that consumers have greatest level of confidence in information about agricultural biotechnology provided by consumer protection organizations and environment groups followed by universities and other research organizations. The lowest level of confidence is attributed to political institutions. Participants were also asked about their knowledge background on biotechnology and environmental issues. Those with highest interest in environmental topics expressed the highest level of skepticism about biotechnology and application of biotechnology in food production. On the other side, people with confidence in political institutions and agricultural organizations were open about biotechnology.

Political and media reaction: The conservative party Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the party of Chancellor Merkel, released a press statement saying that the CDU supports the findings of the study and that the labeling of biotech containing or derived products should be more stringent and more truthful. However, a change of the labeling rules is not expected for the foreseeable future. Press reports about the study were found in many dailies and professional papers.

Background: Since May 2008, the German genetech law has allowed the use of a ‘Without Genetech’ label for food products. This labeling option is primarily targeted to livestock products. Under this standard, livestock products may be labeled ‘Without Genetech’ if the animals have not been fed with biotech plant feeds during a certain period before slaughter or production, see GAIN report GM8014.

At the time of its implementation, this label option was welcomed by biotech opponent groups, who said that it was an improved opportunity for consumers’ to avoid biotech foods. Contrarily, the German Food Industry Association in cooperation with various agricultural stakeholders claimed that this label is very misleading.

German food processing companies have been extremely reluctant to take advantage of the new labeling option. As of early January 2009, the Consumer Protection Office in Hamburg only reports 16 different products found on German retail shelves using the ‘Without Genetech’ label. The most prominent company is a leading dairy company, which began using the label for fresh milk in October 2008. However, this milk brand is a high-priced product and represents only a small niche of all the dairy products offered by the company. While regular milk sells at about 55 Eurocents per liter the “Without Genetech” labeled milk

was found on the retail shelf at a price of 86 Eurocents. Several producers of organic foods such as pasta also use the new label as well as a regional processor of pork.