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Report Highlights:

While commercial production remains relatively small, FAS/San José expects area planted to genetically engineered crops in Costa Rica to grow modestly in 2022. Neither livestock nor other animal producers in Costa Rica appear interested in animal biotechnology applications at this time, though a regulatory structure has been established.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transgenic seed varieties have been grown in Costa Rica since 1992. All the seeds are exported to the United States. Costa Rica has implemented legislation to regulate the import and cultivation of genetically engineered (GE) crops. There is currently no requirement that foods containing GE components be labeled. The Costa Rican National Technical Biosafety Commission (NTBC) has met regularly this year and has approved several cotton events for seed reproduction.

Total area planted of GE crops dropped from 1,697 hectares (ha.) at the peak of production in 2009, to less than 300 ha. in 2019. Legal challenges to GE cultivation have continued. In 2018, a member of the NTBC challenged the approval of a cotton event and took the case to the Constitutional Court. Although the Court did not cancel the approval of the event, it ruled that in the future, requests for approval must be made public so that the public is aware that the event is under review by the NTBC.

The NTBC has been meeting regularly and approved a total of four cotton events in 2019 and 2020. The NTBC began evaluation of five cotton events in 2020 and approved them in May of 2021. As a result of the approval of new cotton events and the arrival of a new player in the seed reproduction business (Nutrient), GE cotton for seed reproduction area planted could increase in the next few years. However, local planting of seeds for reproduction depends on the demand for cotton seeds in the United States, and therefore, area planted to seeds for reproduction varies year to year.

Costa Rica signed the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in May 2000 and it became law in November 2006. Since then, Costa Rica has been working on the national regulatory framework necessary to implement the Protocol. According to local sources, Costa Rica is currently working on regulations related to the Cartagena Protocol that would require certain specific information and attestations on imported products derived from biotechnology that are used as animal feed or for human consumption. Animal feed producers and other grain users have expressed concerns about potential effects of the final regulation on soybean and corn imports.

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CHAPTER 1: PLANT BIOTECHNOLOGY

PART A: PRODUCTION AND TRADE

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Costa Rican researchers are working on the development of drought resistant rice as well as ‘pink’ pineapples with higher antioxidant levels. The genetically engineered (GE) pineapples obtained FDA approval at the end of 2016 and relatively small volumes are produced exclusively for export; industry sources expect production and exports to expand in 2022.

COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION

Costa Rica produces GE cottonseeds entirely for export to the United States. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG) Biotechnology Department, area planted with GE crops reached 296.5 hectares (ha.) in 2020/2021 up to June of 2021 as compared to 229.5 ha. in 2019/2020, including area planted to pineapple production. Total area planted is expected to increase in 2021-2022 due to the approval of new events and new investment.

The events approved for seed production include – Roundup Ready, Roundup Ready Flex, Bollgard, Bollgard II, WideStrike, Cry 1F, Bomoxinil, Liberty Link, Vip 3A, and some combinations of approved events for cotton. For soybeans, only Roundup Ready events have been planted in the past. The Costa Rican Government (CRG) has not received any requests to date for approval to plant transgenic varieties for human or animal consumption in Costa Rica. According to industry sources, the procedures to obtain

permissions from the CRG to plant GE varieties are straightforward and do not represent an obstacle to production. A list of approved events can be found [here](#) (Spanish only).

EXPORTS

Costa Rica exports cottonseeds propagated for the specific purpose of exporting them back to the companies that supplied them. Costa Rica also exports relatively small volumes of GE pineapples, mostly to the United States.

IMPORTS

Costa Rica imports GE corn and soybeans from the United States for animal feed production, and a small volume of cotton for processing. Imports of GE organisms are limited to those indicated above from the United States. The same products (corn and soybeans) have been imported from Brazil and Argentina. In 2020, Costa Rica imported \$262.2 million of biotech commodities from the United States, based on the value of corn and soybean imports.

FOOD AID

The country is neither a recipient nor a donor of food aid.

TRADE BARRIERS

There are no biotechnology trade barriers affecting U.S. exports at this time. Costa Rica is a large importer of GE soybeans and corn (primarily yellow corn for animal feed production). Imports of processed products that may contain products of biotechnology are also an important segment of total agricultural imports from the United States.

PART B: POLICY

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

In 1990, Costa Rica created the National Technical Biosafety Commission (NTBC), which is attached to MAG by the 1997 [Plant Health Protection Law](#) (Spanish only). The law confers upon the NTBC power to regulate imports, exports, research, testing, movement, propagation, industrial production, marketing and use of transgenic and other “genetically modified organisms” for agricultural use.

Article 117 of the implementing regulations – [Reglamento a la Ley de Protección Fitosanitaria No. 26921-MAG](#) – covers imports and release of GE materials for use in agriculture. The regulation indicates that a “phytosanitary certificate of release to the environment” is required for importation, as well as compliance with the phytosanitary import requirements. To move the product within the country, the interested party must inform the MAG Biotechnology Department using Form BIO-02. The International Phytosanitary Services Department, in coordination with the NTBC, establishes the import requirements and the biosafety measures for GE material.

Article 118 discusses the process to obtain the certificate for release into the environment of GE materials. The interested party must submit a request to the Biotechnology Department, using Form

BIO-02, for NTBC review and approval. Other articles of the regulation (119 through 134) discuss different aspects related to GE materials, such as record keeping, storage, packaging, labeling, movement, accidental release, and others.

The current NTBC is made up of one representative of the Ministry of Science and Technology, two representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, two representatives from the Ministry of the Environment and Energy, one representative from the National Seeds Office, two representatives from the National Academy of Sciences, two representatives from the Ministry of Health, and two representatives from civil society organizations that generally oppose biotechnology – one representative each from the Federation for Environmental Conservation, and the Biodiversity Conservation Network.

In 2013, in response to a Monsanto request for approval to plant a new variety of GE corn (production would be for propagation and re-export of the seeds, rather than for commercial production), environmental groups – including the Federation for Environmental Conservation and the Biodiversity Conservation Network – actively opposed the request. Although the NTBC eventually approved Monsanto’s request to plant the new corn variety, the environmental groups raised the issue to the Constitutional Court. And though the Constitutional Court upheld the NTBC approval, Monsanto decided not to propagate the variety in Costa Rica.

In 2014-2015, two Constitutional Court cases brought agricultural biotechnology research, production activities, and development plans to a halt. An additional issue of concern, although with unclear legal results, has been the large number of local governments (74 out of a total of 81) that have declared themselves “free of transgenics.”

Several bills seeking a moratorium on biotechnology cultivation were introduced in the national legislature during the 2014-2018 session. Although the bills were supported by the Solis Administration (2014-2018), they did not become law.

Costa Rica has specific legislation in place for the approval of plant biotechnology events for cultivation, import, and export. At this time there is no specific legislation requiring approval of products of biotechnology for food consumption, feed or processing. Imports of U.S. grains and soybeans for animal feed production enter Costa Rica under procedures identical to the importation of any other agricultural product.

APPROVALS / AUTHORIZATIONS

Requests to obtain approval to plant a biotechnology crop (to be grown commercially, as a field trial, or to be grown for export purposes only) are evaluated by the NTBC. During 2021 the NTBC has reviewed and approved five cotton events, with different characteristics, including tolerance to glyphosate, and resistance to lepidoptera insects. A list of approved events can be found [here](#) (Spanish only).

STACKED or PYRAMIDED EVENT APPROVALS / AUTHORIZATIONS

Cases that present stacked events (plants that combine two or more already approved traits, such as herbicide and insect tolerance) need to undergo the same risk evaluation process as individual events.

FIELD TESTING

The country allows field tests of GE crops following appropriate risk analysis and approval from the NTBC. Currently, field testing is limited to a few hectares of pineapples separate from the commercial production area.

INNOVATIVE BIOTECHNOLOGIES

Costa Rica has not developed regulations for innovative biotechnologies, in part because the Government of Costa Rica has not yet received applications for innovative biotechnology approval.

COEXISTENCE

[Executive Decree 29782](#), establishing regulations for organic production, indicates in Chapter III Article 24, “Genetically Modified Organisms or those obtained through genetic engineering and the products derived from such organisms, are not compatible with the principles of organic production (understood as production, processing, manufacture or marketing), and their use in organic agriculture is not allowed.” The same regulations also indicate, “any person who plants transgenic products, will have to obtain permission from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, without which, the person will not be allowed to initiate the activity. The permit will be granted if there is a previous study proving that there is no organic production within a reasonable distance, which may be affected by wind or proximity. The procedure to grant the permit will include consultations by the authorities with the organic producer organizations present in the area.”

LABELING AND TRACEABILITY

There is currently no law regarding the use of terms such as “biotech free,” “non-biotech,” “gmo-free,” or “non-gmo” on food package labeling. Anti-biotech as well as consumer protection groups are pushing for mandatory labeling of food products derived from biotechnology.

At this time labeling is required to commercially introduce (either locally produced or imported) plant products or other “genetically modified organisms” for use in agriculture in Costa Rica. In this case the product must be identified as such on a label where the consumer can identify its characteristics. To date, this requirement has been applied only to labeling of planting seeds. Environmentalists continue to call for legislation banning the import of transgenic crops and establishing a labeling system for transgenic foods.

In 2020, Costa Rica imported an estimated \$262.2 million of biotech commodities from the United States, based on the value of corn and soybean imports. Processed food imports, many of which contain ingredients derived from biotech commodities, have also increased over time.

MONITORING AND TESTING

The country does not have a monitoring program for GE products and does not actively test for GE products.

LOW LEVEL PRESENCE POLICY

Costa Rica does not have a low level presence policy at this time.

ADDITIONAL REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

There are no additional requirements beyond approval by the NTBC for plant biotechnology events.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR)

Costa Rica has intellectual property rights legislation that protects GE crop intellectual property.

CARTAGENA PROTOCOL RATIFICATION

Costa Rica signed the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in 2000. It was published in the official gazette and became law in November 2006. Costa Rica has been working on the national regulatory framework necessary for the implementation of the Protocol. MAG has taken steps to reach agreements with importers and grain users in order to comply with the protocol. As part of this process, MAG has approached Post in the past to request a list of all agricultural biotechnology events approved by the United States. According to local authorities, the proposed regulation to evaluate the safety of GE organisms discussed in the regulatory framework section, is based on the requirements set forth in the Cartagena Protocol.

INTERNATIONAL TREATIES / FORA

Costa Rica is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the International Plant Protection Convention, and the CODEX Alimentarius. In general, Costa Rica has been an active participant in international fora, such as Codex Alimentarius. At times, Costa Rica has shared or supported U.S. positions on issues related to biotechnology. Costa Rica has also participated in the meetings of the parties to the Cartagena Protocol after the country ratified the agreement.

RELATED ISSUES

The Ministry of Environment's National Commission for Management of Biodiversity (CONAGEBIO) requires researchers to register any research project that involves access to Costa Rica's biodiversity and any research project that involves genetic manipulation with the Commission. This requirement has not been an impediment to plant biotechnology activities in Costa Rica.

PART C: MARKETING

PUBLIC/PRIVATE OPINIONS

Public relations campaigns against biotechnology – launched over the years by different groups under the Federation for Environmental Conservation and the Biodiversity Conservation Network – have not

generally been effective. However, due to a general lack of public scientific knowledge, especially in rural areas where educational attainment is lower, consumer perceptions are susceptible to misinformation from opposition groups. Scientists, government officials, and the press have generally provided accurate information in support of biotechnology and science in response to past biotechnology misinformation campaigns.

Groups advocating for legislation banning biotechnology have brought several high-profile speakers to Costa Rica to assist in their efforts. In March 2016, an organization called “Pax Natura” brought anti-biotech writer Steven M. Drucker to Costa Rica, where he met with legislators in support of a moratorium. In addition, a left-wing party organized an event at the Legislative Assembly in June 2015 with the participation of Dr. Ray Siedler, a former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency researcher and vocal opponent to biotechnology. However, the number of highly visible activities organized by opponents of biotechnology has declined in recent years.

MARKET ACCEPTANCE/STUDIES

Costa Rica is an importer of corn and soybeans from the United States. There seems to be little concern regarding the process from which these products are derived, whether among users (primarily animal feed producers) or among consumers in the country. The majority of the population is not aware that almost all the yellow corn and soybeans imported into the country for animal feed production are derived from biotech varieties. However, anti-biotech groups are trying to build a negative perception of such products among the public, mostly through fear and misinformation.

CHAPTER 2: ANIMAL BIOTECHNOLOGY

PART D: PRODUCTION AND TRADE

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

There are no GE animals or clones of animals under development in Costa Rica at this time.

COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION

Costa Rica does not commercially produce any livestock clones or GE animals or products derived from GE animals.

EXPORTS

The country does not export any GE animals, livestock clones, or products from these animals at this time.

IMPORTS

Costa Rica has not imported GE animals, livestock clones or products from these animals.

TRADE BARRIERS

There are no specific trade barriers to imports of GE animals, livestock clones, or products from these animals. Imports of any such animals or products would have to go through the established evaluation and approval processes.

PART E: POLICY

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Animal biotechnology regulations are, generally, not as well-developed as plant biotechnology. MAG has yet to develop specific regulations for animal biotechnology, even though Law 8495 (General Law of the National Animal Health Service) gives the National Animal Health Service (SENASA) legal authority to regulate animal biotechnology in Costa Rica; the text of Law 8495 is available [here](#) (Spanish only). SENASA also regulates issues related to food safety for animals and animal products, and animal welfare. Environmental safety issues are regulated by the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE).

According to SENASA, the regulatory process would involve different Ministries depending on the final use of the product. For example, any animal product would first have to be registered at SENASA. Then if it is going to be released into the environment (e.g., a GE mosquito), it would have to be registered with MINAE as well. If the product could influence human health, it would have to be registered with the Ministry of Health. Also, an animal intended to be used for research purposes would have to be registered with the Ministry of Science and Technology to comply with animal welfare regulations.

APPROVALS / AUTHORIZATIONS

There are no approved or authorized GE animals, livestock clones or products of from these animals at this time

INNOVATIVE BIOTECHNOLOGIES

Costa Rica has not developed regulations for innovative biotechnologies in animals, in part because the Government of Costa Rica has not yet received applications for innovative biotechnology approval. However, government officials have been working on a comprehensive update and modernization of the national biotechnology regulatory framework that would include provisions for innovative biotechnologies, including gene editing. There is currently no timeline for completion of this review.

LABELING AND TRACEABILITY

Labeling regulations have not been developed for products of animal biotechnology. However, Article 69 of [Law 8495](#) indicates that any establishment that produces, imports, stores, transports or sells genetic or biotechnology materials of animal origin for human or animal consumption, must have those materials or animals properly identified, must identify the product using appropriate identification materials, must keep the information related to the origin of the animal or product, and must provide the information to SENASA for the operation of the traceability system. The country has traceability

regulations in place for live animals, which would apply to GE animals in the eventual case of introduction into the country.

ADDITIONAL REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

FAS/San José is not aware of any additional requirements.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR)

Although Costa Rica currently does not raise or import GE animals, livestock clones or products from those animals, national intellectual property regulations would protect animal biotechnology intellectual property as well.

INTERNATIONAL TREATIES / FORA

FAS/San José is not aware of specific interventions by Costa Rican officials on the subject of animal biotechnology in international fora. The local Codex Alimentarius Committee is under the Ministry of Economy. According to government representatives, local officials have not participated in animal biotechnology discussions under Codex or the OIE recently.

RELATED ISSUES: None at this time.

PART F: MARKETING

PUBLIC/PRIVATE OPINIONS

Public relations campaigns against biotechnology – launched over the years by different groups under the Federation for Environmental Conservation and the Biodiversity Conservation Network – have not generally been effective. However, due to a general lack of public scientific knowledge, especially in rural areas where educational attainment is lower, consumer perceptions are susceptible to misinformation from opposition groups. Scientists, government officials, and the press have generally provided accurate information in support of biotechnology and science in response to past biotechnology misinformation campaigns.

MARKET ACCEPTANCE/STUDIES

The information provided above about acceptance of plant biotechnology generally applies to animal biotechnology. While the issue of animal biotechnology has not received much attention in the local press over the last few years, FAS/San José expects, based on broader cultural attitudes, the issue could be controversial if it became a public topic.

CHAPTER 3: MICROBIAL BIOTECHNOLOGY

PART G: PRODUCTION AND TRADE

COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION

FAS/San José is not aware of commercial production of food ingredients derived from microbial biotechnology in Costa Rica.

EXPORTS

Costa Rica does not export GE microbes and or products that contain microbial biotech-derived food ingredients to the United States.

IMPORTS

Costa Rica imports food ingredients such as enzymes and additives for different food processing activities. However, the volume or value of these imports, and whether the products are derived from microbial biotechnology could not be determined.

TRADE BARRIERS

There are no trade barriers to the importation of microbial biotech-derived food ingredients and/or processed food products containing microbial biotech-derived food ingredients.

PART H: POLICY

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Costa Rica does not have a specific regulatory framework for biotech-derived microbes or microbial biotech-derived food ingredients. The Ministry of Health administers regulations for additives and food ingredients, including a mandatory notification process. There is no legislation or regulation pending or under discussion related to microbial biotech at this time.

APPROVALS / AUTHORIZATIONS

There is no database or listing of biotech microbes and/or microbial biotech-derived food ingredients approved or registered for use in the country.

LABELING AND TRACEABILITY

There are no current or anticipated policies regarding the traceability and labeling of microbial biotech-derived food ingredients in Costa Rica.

MONITORING AND TESTING

The country does not actively test for evidence of genetic engineering in imports or exports of processed products. Rice importers implement a voluntary testing regime for presence of GE rice varieties; testing is conducted in the exporting country of origin.

ADDITIONAL REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

FAS/San José is not aware of any additional requirements affecting imports and/or utilization of microbial biotechnology.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR)

FAS/San José expects Costa Rican IPR regulations would protect microbial biotechnology IPR as well.

RELATED ISSUES

None at this time.

PART I: MARKETING

PUBLIC PRIVATE OPINIONS

There is very limited knowledge or awareness of microbial biotech among the general public. The information/knowledge about the subject is more prevalent among scientists at academic institutions, such as Costa Rica's Technological Institute (TEC), and the University of Costa Rica (UCR), where the general perception among scientists and researchers is generally positive.

MARKET ACCEPTANCE/STUDIES

Even though products of microbial biotechnology are being imported and used in research activities in the country, FAS/San José is not aware of any studies on the acceptance (positive or negative) of these products among the general public.

Attachments:

No Attachments