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Report Highlights:
This report describes the trade and production of genetically engineered (GE) plant products, the use of GE animals for research purposes, and related government policies in Belgium. An EU-wide overview is provided by the EU Consolidated Biotechnology Annual drafted by FAS Paris.

General Information:
Belgium has a federal political structure with a high level of complexity with some responsibilities belonging to the federal level and others to the regional state level. Food safety is a Belgian Federal Government responsibility while agriculture was given to the regions in 2002. Since then the Regions of Flanders and Wallonia have drifted apart on agricultural policy. With 80 percent of food processing in Flanders and three important ports, Flanders is very pro-trade and pro-innovation and research and development, while Wallonia tends to adopt agricultural policies that are similar to France and Luxembourg. The Flemish regional government and agricultural sector have a pragmatic approach towards the import of genetically engineered (GE) agricultural products, while the Walloon government and agricultural sector have a more negative approach towards agricultural biotechnology. However, the different governments mutually agreed to follow the opinion of the Belgian Biosafety Advisory Council (ARB), hopefully leading to more positive votes in the future since Belgium usually abstains from almost every vote related to biotechnology. The Flemish livestock sector depends on feed imports from third countries, mainly soybean meal, which for a major part is genetically engineered. The Belgian livestock sector does not keep GE animals nor do agricultural research institutes keep them for research purposes.

Plant Biotechnology

Plant Biotechnology Production and Trade

a) Product Development
The Belgian Region of Flanders has a small but innovative plant breeding sector that has focused on New Breeding Technologies (NBTs) because of the cumbersome regulations for developing and approving GE crops. A consortium consisting of three different institutions (Flemish Institute of Biotechnology, the university of Ghent and the institute for agricultural and fisheries research) are developing cisgenic late blight resistant Bintje potatoes, which may be ready for market within a period of five years.

b) Commercial Production
There is no commercial production of GE crops in Belgium, nor is it expected that GE crops will be commercially planted in the next five years due to the cumbersome regulations for GE approval and coexistence as well as limited producer interest. GE crop varieties currently in the EU approval process are primarily suitable for the cultivation in the Southern European countries, although herbicide tolerant corn and sugar beet may be of interest to Belgian farmers.

c) Exports
Belgium does not produce or export domestically produced GE crops or products. However, Belgium transships imported GE crops and products to other EU Member States and re-exports GE materials to non-EU countries. The transshipped and exported GE materials are documented and labeled as required by the EU legislation.

d) Imports
Belgium imports large quantities of GE crops and derived products. Cultivation of GE crops is not

allowed, thus Belgium does not import any GE seeds. Only one supermarket in Flanders sells a small amount of GE labeled consumer products.

The vast majority of animal feed for poultry is GE labeled and sold all over Belgium, also to non-professional livestock holders. Imported GE crops and derived products are mainly soybeans from Canada and Brazil and soybean meal from Argentina and Brazil. The share of shipments that contains GE material is not registered, but it is estimated to be higher than 75 percent.

Imports of Soybeans and Meal, Belgium (1,000 MT)							
	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Soybeans							
-Canada	157	123	157	219	112	129	175
-Brazil	242	27	180	59	0	16	0
Soybean meal							
-Argentina	391	232	201	246	48	124	216
-Brazil	180	26	62	125	20	27	99

Source: Global Trade Atlas (GTA)

e) Food Aid Recipient
Belgium is not a food aid recipient.

Plant Biotechnology Policy

a) Regulatory Framework
Belgium normally "abstains" its vote in the Committee of the Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States to the European Union (COREPER) and Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (PAFF) because Flanders and Wallonia fail to reach a compromised position that gives the Federal Belgian Government the mandate to vote in favor or against. Furthermore, Wallonia is one of the regions (along with Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the UK) that have opted-out of GE cultivation of GE seeds or GE crops (Directive (EU) 2015/412 of March 11, 2015 as regards the possibility for the Member States to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in their territory).

Belgium has implemented harmonized legislation regarding agricultural biotechnology. The following authorities are responsible for implementation and enforcement of the regulatory framework for agricultural biotechnology:

The Federal Cabinets
An important part of the decision-making power lies with the Cabinets, which directly advise the Federal Ministers.

The Federal Government Department for Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment (VVL)
VVL is the coordinating Belgian Federal Government Department in the policy-making process in the field of medical and agricultural biotechnology. VVL is responsible for the enforcement of legislation regarding experimental releases in co-decision with the Department of Environment and Infrastructure

of the Flemish Government, the General Directorate of Natural Resources and Environment of the Walloon Government, and the Environmental department of the Brussels Capital Region, depending on where the experimental release takes place. The regions have a veto-right, but it is the relevant region that co-decides with the Federal authorities about the specific release.

The Biosafety Advisory Council (ARB) and the Service of Biosafety and Biotechnology (SBB)
ARB and SBB advise VVL about the safety of activities involving GE animals and plants.

The Belgian Food Agency (FAVV)
FAVV is responsible for document and physical controls of food and feed. The FAVV implements and enforces the EU traceability and labeling legislation (Regulation (EC) No 1830/2003 concerning the traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the traceability of food and feed products produced from GMOs).

b) Approvals
When deciding on a Belgian position on a GE plant variety, the Federal Belgian Government reviews The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)'s opinion on the specific GE event, the advice of ARB and SBB, and other risk management criteria such as the availability of reference materials and detection methods and the quality of monitoring. In cases when the technical review of ARB is not in line with EFSA's opinion, the Federal Belgian Government starts bilateral discussions with EFSA in order the resolve the diverging issues. However, if they cannot be resolved, the Belgian Government may decide to vote against it or to abstain on the particular GE event. When the EFSA opinion is positive, which it has always been the case, and the advice of the ARB are in line, the Belgian Government may decide to vote in favor of the particular GE event if the other risk management criteria are fulfilled.

c) Field Testing
Field trials have been approved without delays following the correct procedures of the legislation, which correctly implements Directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release of GMOs into the environment. A field trial with GE potatoes was vandalized in 2011, but there no new incidents have been reported since then.

- A field trial with GE potatoes (late blight resistant) was conducted in 2011 and 2012.
- A field experiment with GE corn (increased energy content) in 2012 and 2013. A second GE corn trial was performed in 2015 and 2016 with plants that had larger leaves and more biomass.
- A field trial with GE poplar trees ended at the beginning of 2016. A new trial with poplars was planted in 2014 and will continue until 2020. The GE poplar tree variety is developed for the purpose of bioethanol production.

d) Stacked Event Approvals
Belgium implemented Regulation (EC) No 1829/2003 on genetically modified food and feed, for more information please see the EU Report.

e) Additional Requirements
Belgium implemented EU legislation, for more information please see the EU Report.

f) Coexistence
The two Belgian Regions, Flanders and Wallonia, are responsible for formulating and implementing coexistence policies. In March 2007, the Flemish Government decided upon a framework for the coexistence regulations, which was enforced in May 2009, including specific requirements for corn and potato.

The regulations reportedly guarantee free choice for the farmer to plant GE crops, and include a liability fund. In February 2006, the Walloon government approved coexistence regulations, which came into force in August 2008. According to the Walloon government, the regulations on cultivating GE crops are as restrictive as possible within the scope of the harmonized EU regulations. The regulations contain possibilities to impose "biotech free" zones, and a liability fund paid by the farmer planting GE crops. In addition, Wallonia is one of the regions that has opted-out of GE cultivation of GE seeds or GE crops following Directive (EU) 2015/412 (see above).

g) Labeling
Belgium implemented Regulation (EC) No 1830/2003 concerning the traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the traceability of food and feed products produced from GMOs, for more information please see the EU Report.

h) Trade Barriers
The slow approval process of new GE events by the European Union has significantly affected U.S. exports to Belgium in particular corn, corn gluten feed (CGF) and Distillers Dried Grains (DDGs). Despite U.S. rice industry efforts, the impracticable EU regulations for the Low Level Presence (LLP) of GE materials have permanently affected imports of U.S. long grain rice, following the unintended contamination of the commercial supply of U.S. long grain rice with the Liberty Link 601GE trait in 2016. Furthermore, mandatory labeling of the presence of GE ingredients in food caused processors to avoid crops of which GE varieties are planted.

i) Intellectual Property Rights
Not applicable, domestic planting of GE crops is absent.

j) Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety Ratification (CPB)
The Federal Government Department for Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment (VVL) is responsible for the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB).

k) International Treaties
In general, the Federal Belgian Government has the opinion that the regulations related to the trade and processing of GE crops must be workable for the private industry and enforceable by the authorities.

l) Related Issues
The Belgian Government has not formulated its position on New Breeding Technologies (NBTs), but a decision from the Federal authorities is expected on certain specific genome edited events in the coming months. Recently, Flanders authorities decided that for certain types of genome edited organisms (the ones that are made using DNA-free CRISPR method) do not need a contained use GE permit.

m) Monitoring and Testing
The Belgian Food Safety Agency (FAVV) is actively testing feed and food imports on the presence of GE materials. The Belgian regulations for labeling, Low Level Presence (LLP) of GE events, and sampling and testing are based on EU legislation. For more information please see the EU Report.

n) Low Level Presence Policy
The Federal Belgian Government supported the EC legislation for a tolerance for a Low Level Presence (LLP) of unapproved GE varieties in feed, but will likely be unwilling to support it for food. The federal authorities explained that even gaining support for LLP in feed was difficult as Wallonia opposed and Flanders supported it. In the end, the federal authorities made the decision as it was within their competence, and they found that there was no food safety issue.

Plant Biotechnology Marketing

a) Market Acceptance
The Flemish Farmers Organization (Boerenbond) is pragmatic and in favor of planting biotech crops, but has also the position that biological material protected by patent rights should be freely available for the development of new varieties. On the one hand, there is reportedly resistance from retailers and consumers to accept food products containing biotech ingredients, in particular in export markets such as Germany. On the other hand, the Belgian livestock sector depends largely on feed imports from third countries, mainly soybean meal, which for a major part is GE. However, there is no resistance by consumers as meat produced with biotech feed does not have to be labeled (for more information, see Regulation (EC) No 1830/2003 concerning the traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the traceability of food and feed products produced from GMOs as well as the EU Report).

b) Public/Private Opinion
In general, Wallonia holds a more negative perception to agricultural biotechnology and innovation than Flanders for various reasons, so it is difficult to say that all Belgian consumers would prefer to avoid GE foods.

Plant Biotechnology Capacity Building and Outreach

a) Activities
No USDA funds have been allocated for capacity building or outreach activities.

b) Strategies and Needs
FAS Brussels has identified the following strategy for plant biotechnology capacity building and outreach:

- Nominate appropriate host country specialists for the International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP), and utilize other Public Diplomacy programs, and other opportunities to reach out to the general public.
- Serve as a source of unbiased and scientific information to government officials in the Brussels regions and Wallonia and to the general public.

Animal Biotechnology

Animal Biotechnology Production and Trade

a) Biotechnology Product Development
There are no genetically engineered (GE) animals under development that will be on the market in the coming five years.

b) Commercial Production
There are no GE or cloned animals used for commercial use. GE animals are authorized for use as laboratory animals for medical research at universities and academic hospitals.

c) Biotechnology Exports
As domestic production of GE and cloned animals does not exist, Belgium does not export domestically produced GE or cloned animals or their reproductive materials.

d) Biotechnology Imports
Belgium has likely imported semen and embryos from cloned animals. The specific quantity of these imports is not available.

Animal Biotechnology Policy

a) Regulation
The federal government has a joint responsibility with the three Belgian Regions, Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital region, for authorization of the use of GE animals. The Service of Biosafety and Biotechnology has a coordinating role and advises the government about the safety of using GE animals.

b) Labeling and Traceability
The Belgian Government will likely support an EU ban on food products derived from clones, but is not opposed to products produced from the prodigy of clones. However, the Belgian Government has the opinion that labeling should be required for any product derived from a clone's progeny as it is the consumers right to know. At the same time Belgian officials acknowledge labeling will be hard to impose as the origin of the product is difficult to trace.

c) Trade Barriers
Currently there are no trade barriers related to animal biotechnology. Future legislation could, however, introduce barriers.

d) Intellectual Property Rights
Belgium implemented EU legislation, for more information please see the EU Report.

c) International Treaties
Belgium implemented EU legislation, for more information please see the EU Report.

Animal Biotechnology Marketing

a) Market Acceptance
Belgian citizens and consumers do not support the use of cloning and genetic engineering technologies by the agricultural sector. These practices are also not accepted by the majority of the Belgian livestock, dairy farmers and breeders.

b) Public/Private Opinions
For the public acceptance of cloned and GE animals see under paragraph a. Government and livestock sector representatives are in general educated on the subject, but do not support the use of cloning.

Animal Biotechnology Capacity Building and Outreach

a) Activities
No USDA funds have been allocated for capacity building or outreach activities.

b) Strategies and Needs
FAS Brussels believes that more education of all the involved stakeholders is necessary. Education should focus on the benefits of the technique but in particular on the negative implications resulting from enforcing restrictive measures. This would be best achieved creating an alliance with other countries that use the technique of cloning in livestock farming.