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Report Highlights:

Israel currently lacks labeling requirements for imported food products containing biotech component. FAS Tel Aviv sources however reveal that the Ministry of Health aims to introduce biotech labeling requirements in early 2014. Products containing biotech components in excess of 0.9 percent will be required to declare the biotech content on the label. Although Israel at this time has no commercial production of genetically engineered (GE) crops or seeds, FAS Tel Aviv anticipates that production will be authorized within 3-5 years. Sources confirm that at present the subject of GE animals is not a key issue of discussion within Israeli policy making circles.

SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Israel does not permit commercial production of genetically engineered (GE) crops, nor seeds. FAS Tel Aviv anticipates Israel will lift its current biotech restrictions within 3-5 years. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) is currently reviewing this issue. The Plant Protection and Inspection Services (PPIS) within the MARD is a strong proponent of commercial biotech crop production in Israel. The private sector is exerting pressure on the MARD to authorize the production of biotech crops and seeds.

Israel at this time does not have regulations governing the trade and use of products of agricultural biotechnology. The country's food and livestock industries do however routinely utilize biotech raw materials (i.e., corn and soybeans) in the manufacture of food and feed.

Currently, there are no labeling requirements for imported food products containing a biotech component. FAS Tel Aviv sources however reveal that the Ministry of Health (MoH) will likely introduce biotech labeling requirements for the Israeli market in early 2014. It is anticipated that products containing biotech components in excess of 0.9 percent will be required to declare the biotech content on the label.

The Ministry of Health's Food Control Services (FCS) is poised to publish regulations on "novel foods" derived from biotechnology. The Food Control Service is in the process of compiling an initial list of biotech agricultural components and crops (e.g., corn, soybeans, and rice) that are imported for use by the local food manufacturing industry.

Biotech products included on the FCS list will not be required to seek approval as novel foods. For those products not on the initial FCS list, but still possessing a biotech component, the MoH will require that these go through the risk assessment process prior to import. Indications are that the risk assessment process may take several months.

With the Food Control Service updating its list of biotech products, FAS Tel Aviv strongly recommends that U.S. exporters of biotech seeds, U.S. crop associations, and others entities contact Post prior to export for additional guidance.

SECTION II: AUTHOR DEFINED

CHAPTER 1: PLANT BIOTECHNOLOGY

PART A: PRODUCTION AND TRADE

A) PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT: FAS Tel Aviv sources inform that Israeli agricultural biotechnology companies such as Hazera Genetics (Monsanto) and Zeraim Gedera (Syngenta) are not authorized to commercially produce biotech crops or seeds in Israel. Nonetheless some biotech research and development, as well as field testing is authorized in Israel.

B) COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION: Israel does not permit commercial production of GE crops, nor seeds. FAS Tel Aviv anticipates Israel will lift its current biotech restrictions within 3-5 years. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is currently reviewing this issue given that the PPIS backs commercial production of biotech crops in Israel. The private sector is exerting pressure on the MARD to authorize the production of biotech crops and seeds.

C) EXPORTS: Israeli food exports to the United States and other trade partners likely contain a biotech component given local industry's use of biotech raw materials. Israeli food exports to the European Union (EU) with a biotech component content of 0.9 percent or greater must be labeled according to EU biotech regulations.

D) IMPORTS: The bulk of Israel's corn and soybeans imports are biotech. In calendar year (CY) 2012, roughly 363 thousand metric tons (TMT) of soybeans were imported by Israel. About 102 TMT were imported alone from the United States with the balance originating in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. FAS Tel Aviv estimates that around 90 percent of all soybean imports are biotech. In CY 2012 roughly 1.23 million metric tons (MMT) of feed corn was imported. We believe that almost the entire amount is biotech. Similarly around 37 TMT of corn flakes were imported in CY 2012, of which almost the entire volume is likely biotech product. Until the new import regulations are implemented, it will remain difficult to accurately ascertain actual biotech import volumes. Early indications are that feed stuffs will remain exempt from the biotech labeling requirements. If the product will be used by food processing industry, the exporter and or local producer will have to declare it contains a biotech component.

E) FOOD AID RECIPIENT COUNTRIES: Israel is not a food aid recipient; it is unlikely to become a food aid recipient in the foreseeable future.

PART B: POLICY

A) REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: Israel does not permit commercial production of biotech crops, nor seeds. Nonetheless it allows the import of GE processed food and agricultural products. The Ministry of Health's Governmental New Foods Committee (GNFC) and the Ministry of Agriculture's National Committee for Transgenic Plants (NCTP) have previously been responsible for setting Israel's biotechnology regulatory framework. The Governmental New Foods Committee was responsible for the labeling of food products and the registration of food ingredients containing GE components. The National Committee for Transgenic Plants handled testing and regulation setting for biotech crops. In 2011 both committees merged to become the Novel Food Committee (NFC).

The Novel Food Committee has suggested new regulations governing biotech products in two areas: 1) the registration process of GE foods and 2) the labeling process. Both suggestions are expected to be approved by the Israeli Knesset (parliament) in 2014, becoming effective by the beginning of 2015. There is a one year delay between Knesset approval and the law going into force. Israeli regulations governing the import and experimental use of GE plant material are detailed in the hyperlinked annexes below:

Annex 1: Application for permit to experiment with transgenic plants, GMO and their import

Annex 2: Seed Regulations (Genetically Modified Plants and Organisms) - 2005

B) APPROVALS: The Food Control Services is poised to publish regulations on "novel foods" derived from biotechnology. It is in the process of compiling an initial list of biotech agricultural components and crop events (e.g., corn, soybeans, and rice) that are imported for use by the local food manufacturing industry. The import and marketing of these varieties will not require a new approval as a novel food. Only those products containing GE components not included on the initial FCS list will require a risk assessment prior to import. FAS Tel Aviv strongly recommends that U.S. exporters of biotech seeds, U.S. crop associations, and others entities contact Post prior to export for additional guidance.

C) FIELD TESTING: Israel began experimenting with GE plants two decades ago. To date, field experiments have been conducted with tomatoes, potatoes, eucalyptus, flowers, soybeans, cotton, corn, strawberries, and bananas. Field and greenhouse experiments are conducted at Israeli universities. Sources inform that Monsanto has often financed these experiments.

All biotech experiments are subject to authorization by the National Committee for Transgenic Plants. The committee will only authorize proposals that are accompanied by a detailed, properly completed application and only after consultation with recognized subject matter experts. Experiments are subject to the regulatory supervision by the PPIS staff.

Israel prohibits biotech field tests in close proximity to conventional, organic, and commercial seed fields. Applications for experimental field trials must be made to the PPIS (see annex 1). Both the Ministries of Agriculture and Health are the competent biotech authorities. The Plant Protection and Inspection Services is the lead entity within MARD regarding GE crops. Israel last issued updated regulations on GE plants in June 2005 (see annex 2).

Table 1: Field Experiments with Genetically Engineered Plants

Name	Project Title	Experimental Plot Size
Hazera Genetics	Herbicide and insect resistance in cotton.	1 ha
Evogene	Tolerance to abiotic stress (drought, salinity) and nitrogen use efficiency in tomatoes.	0.2 ha
Hazera Genetics	Improvements in tolerance to abiotic stress in tomatoes.	0.1 ha
Eucalyptop Ltd.	Increased growth rate in eucalyptus in wasp resistant varieties.	1 ha
Weizmann Institute	Mutation selection in tomatoes.	0.1 ha
Evogene	Tolerance to abiotic stress in corn.	1.6 ha
Evogene	Tolerance to abiotic stress in canola.	0.05 ha
Evogene	Improvements in tolerance to abiotic stress in tomatoes.	0.1 ha
Danziger Nursery	Study the effect of anthocyanins gene on *Gypsophila* flower color.	$5m^2$
Genetics Department, Agricultural Research Organization (ARO) – The Volcani Center	Fruit set under temperature stress in tomatoes.	0.1 ha
CBD Technologies	Increased growth rate in potatoes.	0.02 ha
CBD Technologies	Increased growth rate in eucalyptus.	1 ha
Field and Garden Crops, ARO – The Volcani Center	Starch synthesis reduction in Strawberry leaves.	0.05 ha
Rahan Meristem (1998)	Banana plants with improved fruit shelf life.	0.3 ha
R. H. Smith Institute of Plant Sciences and Genetics, Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences, The Hebrew University	Glyphosate-based weed management practices with Roundup Ready cotton.	0.3 ha
	Efficacy of purple nutsedge (*Cyperus rotundus*) control using crop rotations.	0.5 ha
	Glyphosate-based weed management practices with Roundup Ready corn.	0.3 ha

Source: Israeli Plant and Protection Services.

D) STACKED EVENT APPROVALS: Field tests of biotech stacked events are subject to the approval of the Plant Protection and Inspection Services. Since Israel does not permit commercial production of GE crops or seeds, stacked event approval is not applicable.

E) ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENT: N/A

F) COEXISTENCE: N/A

G) LABELING: Israel currently has no declared government policy on biotech labeling. Regulations are however progressing to advanced drafting stage; same will eventually require positive labeling when a product or an ingredient is genetically engineered. Proposed biotech labeling requirements will specify that in food products containing more

than 0.9 percent of a GE ingredient, that the ingredient be marked as GE component. Feed stuff will not require labeling as GE product despite containing biotech ingredients (i.e., corn for feed, DDGS, corn gluten feed, soybean, and soy meals). Israel is not planning to require biotech labeling for meat or dairy products from animals fed with GE feeds.

Europe is Israel's main food and agricultural product export destination; Israeli food manufacturers consequently follow EU biotech labeling regulations and requirements. Israeli importers of raw agricultural materials for the food manufacturing sector as result often require an exporter declaration stating that the product is free of GE content.

EU-destined Israeli Onion Soup

EU-destined Israeli Waffles

H) TRADE BARRIERS: Israel has so far refrained from erecting trade barriers to GE food or

agricultural products. FAS Tel Aviv anticipates Israel will raise trade barriers once it finalizes its biotechnology policy. We expect that those products and crop varieties not initially included on the FCS list will be denied entry until thorough (FCS) risk assessments are completed.

I) INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR): N/A

J) CARTAGENA PROTOCOL: Israel has not signed the Cartagena Protocol on Bio-Safety and is unlikely to do so in foreseeable future.

K) INTERNATIONAL TREATIES: Israel is not a participant in GE plants and seeds discussions in international organizations. FAS Tel Aviv sources indicate that Israel will follow the EU's biotech regulatory system, including labeling requirements.

L) RELATED ISSUES: N/A

M) MONITORING AND TESTING: Israel has not established a system for testing GE food or agricultural products. FAS Tel Aviv expects that once the country finalizes its biotechnology policy, the government will adopt a testing and control system for GE products and commodities.

N) LOW LEVEL PRESENCE POLICY: N/A

PART C: MARKETING

A) MARKET ACCEPTANCE: Israeli consumer awareness of GE food products is improving, but most Israelis are unable to identify which products contain a biotech component. Israel's commercial agriculture sector and its research community are the strongest proponents of GE crop and seed production.

B) PUBLIC/PRIVATE OPINIONS: In December 2011, the Knesset Committee on Science and Technology held a public hearing on GE and agricultural research. FAS Tel Aviv found the discussion receptive to the use of GE in food. We attribute the strong receptivity to the presence of mostly farm sector and researcher community members; no consumer or environmental protection organizations representatives attended the hearing. The Commission agreed to complete the drafting of biotech legislation and labeling requirements regulations, as well as encourage consumer education on the benefits of GE products.

C) MARKETING STUDIES: FAS Tel Aviv is unaware of any ongoing Israeli marketing studies on GE crops, seeds or food products.

PART D: CAPACITY BUILDING AND OUTREACH

A) ACTIVITES: N/A

B) STRATEGIES AND NEEDS: FAS Tel Aviv recommends that U.S. exporters of biotech seeds, U.S. crop associations, and others entities contact Post prior to the export of GE crops (e.g., corn, soybeans, sunflower) for additional guidance.

CHAPTER 2: ANIMAL BIOTECHNOLOGY

PART E: PRODUCTION AND TRADE

FAS Tel Aviv's sources confirm that at present the subject of GE animals is not at a key issue of discussion within Israeli policy making circles. Israel has not yet enacted legislation and regulations on development and testing, as well as the commercial use and the import of GE animals, clones, and products thereof. The Ministry of Agriculture's Veterinary Services and Animal Health (VSAH) unit oversees animal biotech issues.

A) BIOTECHNOLOGY PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT: Israel is conducting limited GE research (mainly with insects) at the university level. The Weizmann Institute is studying biotechnology applied to human tissue and organ replacement.

B) COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION: There is no commercial production of GE animals in Israel. FAS Tel Aviv has no knowledge of any food products being produced locally from GE animals.

C) BIOTECHNOLOGY EXPORTS: No known exports of GE animals.

D) BIOTECHNOLOGY IMPORTS: Israel has no reported imports of GE animals for agricultural purposes. The local livestock industry is however a major consumer of imported biotech soybeans and corn for use as animal feed. FAS Tel Aviv is unaware of any industry move to forgo biotech feeds.

PART F: POLICY

A) REGULATION: The Veterinary Services and Animal Health unit handles all testing requests. A scientific committee within the VSAH evaluates testing requests.

B) LABELING AND TRACEABILITY: There no traceability or labeling policy.

C) TRADE BARRIERS: Israel at this time has no biotech barriers; however no GE animals have been imported either for commercial or research purposes.

D) INTERLLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR): N/A

E) INTERNATIONAL TREATIES: Israel is a member of Codex a*limentarius* and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

PART G: MARKETING

A) MARKET ACCEPTENCE: Limited public awareness of GE animals.

B) PUBLIC/PRIVATE OPINIONS: Animal biotechnology is not a political issue; there is little to no lobbying for or against GE or cloning. We expect that if these issues arise, public opinion will be similar to the one on GE crops.

C) MARKET STUDIES: No known market studies.

PART H: CAPACITY BUILDING AND OUTREACH

A) ACTIVITES: N/A

B) STARTEGIES AND NEEDS: FAS Tel Aviv recommends increased engagement with the VSAH, which will benefit from increased awareness of U.S. biotech policies and regulations.