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Saudi Arabia

Biotechnology

Detailed Information on Saudi Arabian GMF Testing 2002

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Report Highlights:

The MOC confirmed that it has contracted with King Faisal Hospital to do GMO testing and that King Faisal subcontracts with Genetic ID to do the tests for them overseas until it gets its laboratories operational in about a month. The MOC has approved the PCR Real Time Method for GMO testing and has set a 1 percent threshold to account for cross contamination.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Riyadh [SA2], SA

SUBJECT: Saudi Ministry of Commerce Provides Details on Biotech Food Labeling

Summary: The MOC confirmed that it has contracted with King Faisal Hospital to do GMO testing and that King Faisal subcontracts with Genetic ID to do the tests for them overseas until it gets its laboratories operational in about a month. The MOC has approved the PCR Real Time Method for GMO testing and has set a 1 percent threshold to account for cross contamination. Moreover, the MOC has received a budget to develop its own biotech laboratories which could be operational in about a year. According to the MOC, current testing results have been good with products declared GMO free actually testing GMO free with only two exceptions: one from the US and one from the Philippines. In the U.S. case, the importer argued that his shipment was en route prior to the labeling implementation date (December 1). The MOC concurred and took no action against the company. As for the Philippines case, the MOC has banned the Philippines exporter from exporting any food products to Saudi Arabia. Also, it was reported that local food products are being tested. End summary.

1. On March 4, 2002, ATO/Riyadh met with a senior MOC official to discuss the status of biotech food labeling in Saudi Arabia. During the meeting, it was confirmed that the MOC has contracted with King Faisal Hospital to conduct biotech food testing. However, the King Faisal currently sends the samples overseas to Genetic ID but that in about a month King Faisal will start testing in its own laboratories. ATO was also told that the MOC has approved a budget for the MOC to develop its own biotech laboratories. When asked how long this will take, the official said that he cannot tell whether it will be in six months or a year. He said it all depends on how long it takes to order the lab equipment and to train their scientists.

As for testing, the official gave the following procedures:

- at port, on a random basis, the MOC takes food samples for biotech testing;
- the importer whose product is selected for testing, pays the MOC laboratory at port 1,800 Saudi Riyals (\$480 USD) per sample;
- in all cases, the remainder of the shipment is allowed into the country;
- the MOC sends the sample to King Faisal Hospital and King Faisal sends it to Genetic ID (according to the official, this process takes about three weeks);
- the MOC has authorized Genetic ID to use the PCR Real Time Method of testing;
- also the MOC has approved Genetic ID to use a 1 percent threshold to take into account cross contamination;

2. According to the contact, test results thus far have been good. Food products declared

GMO free have tested negative for the most part. However, he said that there have been two cases of undeclared GMO presence: one from the US and one from the Philippines. In the US case, he said that the MOC accepted the importers claim that the corn flour shipment was en route before the biotech labeling requirement went into effect. However, in the Philippines case, the MOC has banned the exporter from exporting any food products to Saudi Arabia. According to the official, companies whose products test negative will not be tested again for another 6 - 12 months. He also said that there have been some food products with the GMO triangles on their labels but that he could not provide specific brand names.

3. As for the 1 percent threshold, the official said that the Minister of Commerce has approved it internally and that the MOC will most likely not issue a public press release announcing the 1 percent threshold.

END OF REPORT