

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Administrative failure triggers custody of GE cotton fields

Report Categories:

Biotechnology - GE Plants and Animals

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Report Highlights:

Mexican federal biotechnology regulators gain custody of genetically engineered (GE) cotton fields as a precautionary measure after finding events, not explicitly mentioned on permits, were granted in the state of Chihuahua and La Laguna region.

General Information:

For stacked or pyramid events, the Mexican biosafety regulation does not require additional reviews that combines two or more already-approved genetically engineered (GE) traits. In practice, the Mexican government evaluates them as a different event than the parental ones. As a routine procedure the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fishery and Food (SAGARPA), monitors the fulfillment of precautionary measures for each GE release every year.

During this routine procedure in May and June 2017, officials found the following two cases of events not explicitly mentioned on commercial GE cotton permits in the state of Chihuahua and La Laguna region:

- a. The events Boulgard I under a permit for Boulgard II. Boulgard II is a stacked event that contains Boulgard I.
- b. Events approved to the release for one company in areas of another company. The producer does have the freedom to buy the seeds to any company that is a possibility for commercial permits.

The Mexican government observed this as an administrative failure and in August 2017, ordered the precautionary custody of 1,500 hectares of GE cotton, resulting in 13 court injunctions by the seed industry and complicating the relationship between SAGARPA and industry. However, according to regulators, in November of this year SAGARPA will establish biosafety measures for the management and processing of the fields under custody. It is expected that the production of these fields will be processed as fiber and oil.

In recent years, the seed industry has submitted dozens of requests for the release of GE cotton in several pilot and commercial stages. There are entities, such as in the state of Chihuahua, where seeds are planted after the required consultation with indigenous communities.

The main genetically engineered (GE) crop cultivated in Mexico is cotton. According to Mexico's Food and Fisheries Information Service (SIAP), nearly 95 percent of the total surface planted was GE cotton. In marketing year 2015/16, total cotton production and harvested area estimates were 0.9 million bales in a harvested area of 133,000 hectares, based on SAGARPA figures.