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Regulations Governing the Importation of Biotechnology Food Products in the GCC-4

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Report Highlights:

Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (GCC-4), covered by Office of Agricultural Affairs in Dubai, permit the importation of genetically engineered (GE) food products of plant origin.

Additionally, GCC-4 countries have established several technical regulations that require labeling for both raw and further processed food and feed that may contain GE plant products. These regulations have yet to be enforced. Finally, genetic engineering in animals and related products are not permitted for production or importation in the GCC-4.

Section I. Executive Summary:

Severe climatic conditions and limited water resources limit commercial agricultural production in the GCC-4. As a result, the GCC-4 relies heavily on the importation of raw, semi, and fully processed foods to satisfy consumer demand. Nearly 90 percent of food consumed within GCC-4 countries is

imported. U.S. agricultural and related exports to the GCC-4 were valued at \$1.6 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2016 while U.S. food exports to the entire Gulf region were approximately \$3.3 billion dollars. The United States exports a wide variety of agricultural goods to the GCC-4; however, consumer-oriented products represent approximately 60 percent of the total value in U.S. agricultural exports to the region.

In 2011, GCC-4 countries passed several technical regulations focusing on GE food issues such as detection, risk analysis, traceability, and general requirements for plant and plant products. While these technical regulations have been approved by each member country, no official action has been taken to enforce these requirements. If GCC-4 countries were to implement a GE regulation for labeling, a lack of consumer understanding about GE products could negatively impact U.S. food exports to the region. Additionally, GE animal products are not permitted within the GCC-4 market.

Section II. Author Defined:

Chapter 1: Plant Biotechnology

Part A: Production and Trade

- a. **Production Development:** The GCC-4 agricultural sector is limited to only a few varieties of fruits and vegetables grown seasonally. There is no commercial production of GE products in the GCC-4. Oman and Kuwait have conducted limited research on the use of biotechnology to enhance production of citrus and dates while the UAE is currently studying the use of drought resistant plant varieties. Additionally, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research has done preliminary research on biotechnology in date palm trees in order to combat red weevil, a plant pest that causes serious crop damage and threatens the future of date production in the region.
- b. **Commercial Production:** See above
- c. **Exports:** There is no export of GE agricultural products from the GCC-4.
- d. **Imports:** GE crops and foods that contain GE ingredients have been permitted to enter GCC-4 countries both directly and through trans-shipments.
- e. **Food Aid:** N/A
- f. **Trade Barriers:** N/A

Part B: Policy

- a. **Regulatory Framework:** No biotechnology crops are produced in GCC-4 countries. Consequently, there are no established procedures to address environmental issues related to the production of biotech crops.

Since the GCC's inception, its Member States have pursued a policy to harmonize the food laws and regulations within the region. GCC-4 countries are moving towards customs unification in order to facilitate and simplify trade within the region. A greater emphasis is being placed on the harmonization of technical regulations, standards, and import procedures for food and food labeling.

As per the recommendation of the GCC Standards Organization (GSO) biotechnology subcommittee, GCC-4 countries have developed the following technical regulations to monitor and test imported raw and processed foods for biotechnology ingredients:

GSO ISO 21570: 2009 (ISO 21570:2005)

“Foodstuffs—Methods of analysis for the detection of genetically modified organisms and derived products—Quantitative nucleic acid based methods”

GSO ISO 21098: 2009 (ISO 21570:2005)

“Foodstuff-- Nucleic acid based method of analysis of genetically modified organisms and derived products – Information to be supplied and procedure for the addition of methods to ISO 21569, ISO 21570, ISO 21571”

GSO CAC/GL 44:2009

“Principles for the risk analysis of foods derived from modern biotechnology issued by (Codex Alimentarius Commission) in its original language.”

CAC/GL 44:2003

“Principles for the risk analysis of foods derived from modern biotechnology”

GSO 2141/2011

“General requirements for genetically modified unprocessed agricultural products”

GSO 2142/2011

“General requirements for genetically modified processed food and feed”

GSO 2143/2011

“General Requirements for risk assessment and traceability for genetically modified products.”

- b. Approvals: N/A
- c. Stacked or Pyramided Event Approvals: N/A
- d. Field Testing: N/A
- e. Innovative Biotechnologies: N/A
- f. Coexistence: N/A
- g. Labeling: Technical Regulation *GSO 2143/2011* provides details on the labeling requirements for processed food and feed. The following is a text from the technical regulation describing the labeling requirement:

Without prejudice to what is stated in GSO mentioned in item 2.1, and the requirements stated in the GSO Standards for each product. The following requirements shall be clearly identified on the label:

- If the product consists of more than one ingredient, the words (genetically modified) or (produced from genetically modified, name of the ingredient) shall appear clearly and easily to be read in the list of ingredients in parentheses immediately following the ingredient concerned with same font size and different color.
- If the ingredient is designated by the name of a category, the words (contains genetically modified, name of organism) or (contains, name of ingredient, produced from genetically modified, name of organism) shall appear clearly and easily to be read in the list of ingredients

with same font size and different color.

- If there is no list of ingredients, the words (genetically modified) or (produced from genetically modified, name of organism) shall appear clearly and easily on the labeling.
- Labeling must not mislead the purchaser as to the characteristics of the foodstuff and among other things, in particular, as to its nature, identity, properties, composition, method of production and manufacturing.
- The indications referred to in (4/2/1 and 4/2/2) may appear in a footnote to the list of ingredients and in this case they must be printed in a font at least the same size as the list of ingredients. If there is no list of ingredients, they must appear clearly and easily to be read on the labeling.
- If the food is offered for sale to the final consumer as non-pre-packaged food or as prepackaged food in small containers of which the largest surface has an area of less than 10 cm square, the information required in (4/2/1 and 4/2/2) must be permanently and visibly displayed either on the food display or immediately next to it, or on the packaging material, in font sufficiently large for it to be easily identified and read.

While the above mentioned technical regulations and standards have been adopted by the GCC member states, they have not yet been officially enforced. The application of these regulations could negatively affect U.S. food exports to the GCC states.

- h. Monitoring and Testing: To date, formal GE monitoring programs don't exist.
- i. Low Level Presence Policy (LLP): Other than the requirements described in Part B, additional policies for LLP do not exist.
- j. Additional Regulatory Requirements: No
- k. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR): N/A
- l. Cartagena Protocol Ratification: Among the GCC countries covered by OAA Dubai, Oman and Qatar are the only countries that have ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. While bio-safety committees do exist in GCC-4 member-states, the role of the committee in each country is under development.
- m. International Treaties/ FORA: GCC-4 countries are members of the IPPC and Codex Alimentarius.
- n. Related issues: N/A

PART C: Marketing

- a. Public/ Private Opinions: Currently, GCC-4 regulations for GE are not enforced. Regulatory officials in nearly all GCC-4 countries have highlighted the need for improved consumer education on the safety and benefits of biotech crops as well as advocating for the development of the regulatory capacity to test for GE in foods.
- b. Market Acceptance/ Studies: N/A

Chapter 2: Animal Biotechnology

No animal biotechnology activities are currently conducted in the GCC-4 countries. There are no technical regulations or standards that govern animal biotechnology. However, the use of animal biotechnology in food is closely scrutinized over concerns that genes from banned animals under Islamic rules could be used during production.

PART D: Production and Trade

- a. Production Development: There is no production of GE animal products in the GCC-4
- b. Commercial Production: There is no commercial production of GE products in the GCC-4.
- c. Exports: There is no export of GE animal products from the GCC-4.
- d. Imports: There is no import of GE animal products to the GCC-4.
- e. Trade Barriers: N/A

Part E: Policy

- a. Regulatory Framework: No biotechnology animals are produced in the GCC-4 countries.
- b. Innovative Biotechnologies: N/A
- c. Labeling and Traceability: N/A
- d. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR): N/A
- e. International Treaties/ FORA: N/A
- f. Related issues: N/A

PART F: Marketing

- a. Public/ Private Opinions: N/A
- b. Market Acceptance/ Studies: See summary above