

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY
USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT
POLICY

Required Report - public distribution

Date: 11/30/2010

GAIN Report Number:

Syria

Biotechnology - GE Plants and Animals

Approved By:

Jonathan Gressel

Prepared By:

Julio Maldonado

Report Highlights:

Biotechnology is still a relatively new issue in Syria. Yet to be announced legislation may require vegetable seeds to be certified non-genetically modified. This issue has not affected the large volume of corn and soybean exports from the United States to Syria in the past and is not expected to do so in the future. There are no signs of any biotechnology development in the field of animal production.

Section I. Executive Summary:

The biotechnology issue is still relatively new in Syria. There is only a limited awareness of the issue. The Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform does not yet have instructions regarding biotechnology. Under current regulations, importers of sunflower seeds have to present a certificate for sunflower seed imported for crushing that the seeds are not genetically modified. According to trade sources, this condition is not enforced. The United States does not export any sunflower seeds to Syria due to the presence of cheaper sources in East Europe. U.S. exports of corn, soybeans, and soybean meal are not affected by any decisions on biosafety. This is expected to continue in the foreseeable future. Imports of vegetable seeds may be required to be non-genetically modified in the future.

Section II. Plant Biotechnology Trade and Production:

Syria does not produce any biotechnology products, and none are under development. The major agricultural products exported from the United States to Syria are corn, soybeans, soybean meal and vegetable seeds. None of these products require any sort of GMO-free certification. Decision makers at the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform realize that any decision to ban or add additional regulations on imports of genetically modified feed ingredients that are imported on a large scale would lead to increases in feed costs, and eventually higher costs of all animal products, which Syrian consumers can not afford.

Syria imports large quantities of corn, soybeans, and soybean meal, mainly from the United States and Argentina. A significant part of these two commodities from both origins is genetically engineered. Corn is also imported from East European sources. Syria is not a food aid recipient or likely to be so in the near future. Syria does not export nor produce any biotechnology crops that were developed outside the United States.

Section III. Plant Biotechnology Policy:

The decision maker is the General Authority for Agricultural Research in the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Environment do not have a large role in this field. A bio-safety committee has been established. This committee is formed by members from the Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (the General Authority of Agricultural Research), Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Health and the Atomic Energy Authority.

To the best available information, there are no political factors that may influence regulatory decisions related to agricultural biotechnology. However, decision makers realize that any decision prohibiting imports of such products may have a negative impact on the prices of feed ingredients which will be reflected on the prices of animal products.

According to the General Authority for Agricultural Research which submits the recommendations to the higher authorities for final decisions, genetically modified organisms will not be prohibited from import if they will be used as a feed ingredient or as a raw material for the local industry. However, some restrictions will be imposed on the imports of any commodity that is going to be imported for planting in Syria. This new policy was expected to be issued a few years ago, but has not yet been announced. Informally, the General Authority for Agricultural Research has indicated that some recommendations have been submitted, and a decision will be made regarding the imports of genetically modified organisms. No such decision has been taken until now. When finally decided, the decision

may take more time to be implemented.

Syria does not require testing for biotechnology crops. This is possible with the available technology but no one requires it. Accordingly, no product registration is required.

There are no rules in place or proposed related to coexistence between biotechnology and non-biotechnology crops, including organic agriculture.

Under the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement (GAFTA) that went into effect on January 1, 2005, processed foods are permitted to be imported from Arab countries that have ratified the agreement. In addition, processed food products are being permitted to be imported from all sources. Prevailing labeling instructions do not provide for any requirement to include anything on the label regarding biotechnology-derived ingredients.

Syria signed and ratified the Biosafety Protocol by Decree 9 on January 29, 2004. The Biosafety Committee is responsible for taking any necessary actions to ensure compliance with the protocol.

To date, there are no biotechnology-related trade barriers that hurt U.S. exports. The new legislation, when announced, is not expected to affect bulk commodities exports from the United States to Syria for use as feed or for crushing and other industrial uses. Economics will be the major force behind continuing with the current policy. Exporters of vegetable seeds may be required to provide a certificate that the seeds are not genetically modified.

A biotechnology conference was held in Mid-June 2010 under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform. Specialists from many Arab countries and Italy as well as FAO and the International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA) attended it. No decisions were published.

Section IV. Plant Biotechnology Marketing Issues:

In general, the average consumer is not concerned about biotechnology. The general trend is that if the product is permitted to be imported, it is acceptable to be consumed. This is expected to continue in the foreseeable future.

Section V. Plant Biotechnology Capacity Building and Outreach:

There are no plans to plant biotechnology products or crops in Syria. The situation may change when the issue becomes more popular around the world and when the need to increase agricultural production becomes very pressing. With the current slow decision making process, this could take many years.

Section VI. Animal Biotechnology:

Genetic engineering in the field of animal production is not used in Syria. There are no regulations in this field and none are expected on this technology in the near future. There is no public opinion on this subject. There are no international organizations active in this field. The need to increase animal protein production for the fast growing population may be the triggering mechanism that may help in this field on the long term.

