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Prohibiting the Use of Brominated Vegetable Oil

Report Categories:

Agriculture in the News

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

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Report Highlights:

The Hong Kong government is asking for information on U.S. regulation of brominated vegetable oil (BVO) for their deliberation of amending legislation to prohibit the use of brominated vegetable oil as food additive in Hong Kong. Given BVO's permitted use in the U.S. and the prevalence of U.S. beverages in the local market, the HKG probably wants to take a comprehensive scientific review of BVO before prohibiting its use in Hong Kong. Available information indicated that they are on the verge of proposing corresponding legislative amendment.

Summary:

The Hong Kong government (HKG) is considering seriously to amend its legislation prohibiting the use of brominated vegetable oil (BVO) as a food additive. They explained that their “decision” is based on the food safety evaluation conducted by Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) that BVO should not be used as food additives in the absence of evidence indicating its safety. JECFA’s study showed that high doses of BVO could cause degenerative cardiac lesions in experimental animals. Also, accumulation of lipid and lipid-bound bromine was shown in adipose tissue and in intracellular fat of various other tissues in human and experimental animals. Government officials explained that because of this safety reason and the fact that there are alternatives available in the market which can have similar functions of BVO for beverage manufacturing purposes, they tend to support a ban on BVO.

According to the information provided by the HKG, JECFA’s study on BVO was conducted in 1970. The recent thinking of the HKG to include BVO on the prohibited list was probably prompted by the news earlier this year that two global beverage manufacturing companies stopped using BVO in all their drinks in response to consumers’ concern.

Action Required:

The HKG has written to post requesting information on U.S. regulations on BVO. They understand that BVO is permitted to be used on an interim basis in the U.S. as a stabilizer for flavoring oils used in fruit-flavored beverages, in an amount not to exceed 15ppm in the finished beverage, pending the outcome of additional toxicological studies on which periodic reports at 6-month intervals are to be furnished and final results submitted to the Food and Drug Administration promptly after completion of the studies.

<http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfcr/CFRSearch.cfm?FR=180.30%20>

Specifically, the HKG wants FDA to share with them more scientific information regarding BVO being allowed up to 15 ppm in beverages and whether the FDA has any plan to review this standard.

Statistics:

In 2013, the U.S. exported a total of \$27.7 million of fruit and vegetable juices and \$19.7 other non-alcoholic beverages to Hong Kong.