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Bosnia-Herzegovina

Biotechnology

Status of Biotech Regulations

2003

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Report Highlights:

At present, there are no laws and regulations that govern the approval, production, importation and labeling of products of agricultural biotechnology in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, a national food safety law is being drafted that will govern biotech imports and labeling requirements, and a national seeds and planting materials law is being drafted that will govern biotech seed and planting material imports. Since BiH hopes to join the European Union in the near future, the country will most likely follow EU guidelines in drafting this legislation.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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Application and Regulation of Biotechnology

Agricultural biotechnology does not have significant application yet in Bosnia and Herzegovina¹, with exceptions of some basic biotechnologies, such as fermentation techniques, artificial insemination, micropropagation, tissue culture etc.

Only limited funds are available for biotechnology research. Since the 1992-1995 war, the country is suffering from an economic crisis that affected both the education and scientific research and development centers. Institutions involved in biotechnology research and testing are the Institute of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Sarajevo, agricultural faculties in Sarajevo and Mostar, the Agricultural Institute Sarajevo, and the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in Sarajevo. Ongoing projects are limited to application of *in vitro* production of a range of vegetable, tree, ornamental and crop species. Some basic research was done on transformation of potato, wheat and tobacco using *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* at the Institute for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Sarajevo. Haploids, protoplasts and embryo rescue techniques are used in breeding. Molecular markers are used to a small extent. Facilities for GMO testing are generally poor and unequipped. Only biotech presence can be tested, and for sophisticated analysis the laboratories in the neighboring countries are used.

At present, no laws and regulations have been implemented that affect the approval, production, importation and labeling of products of agricultural biotechnology in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The national-level law on food safety, which will be drafted soon, will govern import of biotech foods and labeling requirements. The national level law on seeds and planting materials is being prepared, and it will govern the import of biotech seeds and planting materials. Since BiH's goal is to join the European Union in near future, it is expected that the country will follow the EU guidelines in drafting this legislation.

The influence of the EU position regarding the GM foods can be spotted already. Generally speaking, biotech products are not desirable in BiH. Local authorities, especially those in the Republica Srpska officially allow, but in reality oppose imports of genetically modified food products. Three years ago the RS Ministry of Agriculture rejected the import of U.S. corn that contained biotech product. In 2002 UMCOR imported soybean meal under the USDA monetization program and local authorities reacted negatively again. The problem was resolved after they found out that the EU imports the same product from the U.S.

The reason for Bosnia's resistance to biotech crops and foods is not just because of the EU requirements. Both the government and farmers tend to think that organic production is important segment of BiH agriculture. Agricultural production is more traditionally oriented and use of agrochemicals/pesticides is lower than elsewhere in Europe. There are also few industrial polluters. Agriculturists believe that release of biotech products would threaten organic production in the country and cause losses of potential export markets. Private sector has not yet started any activities regarding agricultural biotechnology research and application.

The majority of people in BiH believe that biotech products are already being imported and grown in the country, since BiH was unable to control its borders for a long time after the war

¹ Under the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, Bosnia Herzegovina (BiH) is divided into two Entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (F BiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS). Each has its own ministry of agriculture, forestry and water management. Due to this dual governmental structure there is no common agricultural policy at the national level.

ended, and was also unable to test the biotech presence in foods and seeds. The Institute for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Sarajevo plans to undertake a survey in order to detect if biotech varieties of potato and corn are being grown in the country. The size of this survey will depend on available funds.

In May 2002, the Agricultural Faculty Sarajevo organized a conference on agricultural biotechnology regulations and environmental risk assessment. USDA supported the conference. The main outcome of the conference was recognition that BiH has to become more actively involved in biotechnology research and applications and that the country urgently needs national legislation for biotech products.

International protocols: BiH has signed the Convention on Biological Diversity but has not signed the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol.