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Report Highlights:

India and Brazil to draw up farm tariff formula, *DGFT for bringing more items under mandatory quality control*, *Panel for clipping GEAC wings*, *Insect-resistant Bt cotton may be released soon*.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
New Delhi [IN1]
[IN]

Welcome to Hot Bites from India, a weekly summary of issues of interest to the U.S. agricultural community. The report includes information that has been garnered during travel within India, reported in the local media, or offered by host country officials and agricultural analysts. Press articles are included in this report. Significant issues will be expanded upon in subsequent reports from this office.

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INDIA AND BRAZIL TO DRAW UP FARM TARIFF FORMULA

India and Brazil have opposed the tariff reduction formula proposed by the U.S. and European Union at the WTO, with the just concluded agriculture negotiations ending without making any headway. The two developing countries indicated that they were working on an alternative approach to reduce tariffs, which is likely to draw from the elements of the formula floated by Stuart Harbinson, former Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, WTO. (Source: Business Standard, 04/26/04)

DGFT FOR BRINGING MORE ITEMS UNDER MANDATORY QUALITY CONTROL

The Indian industry and other stakeholders should insist and work towards getting more items under the 'mandatory quality control norm', according to the Director General of Foreign Trade, Mr. L. Mansingh. "We have to think consumer interest, especially when there are no quantitative restrictions. The mandatory quality control is only there for 118 items. India is wide open for flood of substandard products," he said at a seminar "Exporting Successfully" organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry. "We have been liberalizing to a large extent. But you must remember that more liberalization is possible only when you play by the rules of the game. There is a limit to which we can accept liberalization, beyond which we may have to step in," he added. (Source: Business Line, 04/23/04)

PANEL FOR CLIPPING GEAC WINGS

The MS Swaminathan Committee on applications of biotechnology in agriculture has sought to reduce the powers of the existing regulatory authority, Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC). It has suggested that pending the setting up of an autonomous Agricultural Biotechnology Regulatory Authority, the release of transgenic crops for commercial cultivation should be done by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and the Agriculture Ministry. The panel has limited the powers of the GEAC to "only environmental clearance." Regarding selection of crops for developing transgenics, the panel report said, "the alternatives available for meeting the food and nutritional needs should be viewed comprehensively" before resorting to transgenics. The panel also suggested labeling genetically modified (GM) products, setting up Codex norms for GM food, and protection of organic farming zones and agro-biodiversity sanctuaries from the effects of cross-pollination of GM crops. With a view to hasten the process of clearance of GM crops, the panel report suggests "once the extant/transgene has been declared bio-safe, its derivatives need not always be evaluated for bio-safety again." (Source: Financial Express, 04/28/04)

Post Comment: The Swaminathan Committee report will be presented to the cabinet for approval once a new government is established.

INSECT-RESISTANT BT COTTON MAY BE RELEASED SOON

Dr. S.R. Rao, Director, Department of Biotechnology (DBT), while addressing a seminar, revealed that the final tests for releasing insect-resistant Bt cotton varieties in the northern

region of the country are progressing. He said the research work on genetically modified plants, which is going on in more than 200 laboratories, is more precise, efficient, and can be easily monitored. Dr. Rao added that the developments in the field of genetically modified plants are significant as agriculture is not only the backbone of the economy, but it is also a way of life, a tradition, and an anchor of overall livelihood opportunity for about 700 million people. Other medical professionals who attended the seminar also claimed that the application of biotechnology in agriculture would potentially improve food security by raising crop tolerance against biotic and abiotic stresses. (Source: Tribune 4/23/04)

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