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Estonia

Biotechnology

Status of Coexistence Regulations in the Baltic Countries

2006

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Report Highlights:

Coexistence regulations for GM crops in the three Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, are in various stages of development. Estonia is still developing its first proposal for submission to the EU, which it plans to submit in April 2007. In contrast, Latvia has sent two proposals to the Commission for review and Lithuania has sent three. The draft proposals include wide buffer zones and onerous registration and documentation requirements.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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Overview

Coexistence regulations for GM crops in the three Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, are in various stages of development. In each country the Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for the development of the regulations. All three agreed to a basic framework for GM crop coexistence on July 11, 2006, though these guidelines are not binding. Estonia is still developing its first proposal for submission to the EU, which it plans to submit in April 2007. In contrast, Latvia has sent two proposals to the Commission for review and Lithuania has sent three.

The general buffer distances agreed to by the three countries in July 2006 are provided below. To date, the distances proposed to the EU have been within these distances.

Corn	200
Potato	50
Beet	1000
Rape	4000
Cross-pollinating grain	500

Estonia

Estonia is still developing their initial draft regulations to submit to the European Commission for review and comment. They are currently working with an expert from Germany under the EU's Twinning project to help with their development. (Under the Twinning project, new EU members are provided assistance from older member states that have more experience with an issue.) Officials from the Ministry of Agriculture say that they hope to have their initial proposal to the Commission by April 2007. It is very likely the distances will be similar to the July guidelines noted above. The proposal will also include registration and documentation requirements, though they have yet to be drafted.

Latvia

Latvia submitted their initial proposal to the EU in February 2006. They met with the other Baltic countries on coexistence in July and based on that framework and comments from the Commission on their initial proposal, they sent a second proposal to the EU on July 19, 2006. Latvian officials expect to hear back from the EU by the end of October on their current submission. Officials in the Latvian Ministry of Agriculture said that they do not know if the EU will have additional concerns or will accept their new proposal. The proposal places significant documentation and registration requirements on farmers who intend to plant GM seed. For example, before planting a GM crop, farmers must obtain signed concurrence documents from any neighboring farmers who cultivate fields bordering those that will be planted with GM seed.

Distances between GM and non-GM crops in Latvia's most recent proposal:

Corn	200
Potato	50
Beet (not for seed)	200
Rape	4000
Wheat	Not identified

Lithuania

Lithuania also submitted its initial package to the EU in February 2006. Since that time they have submitted two revised packages to the Commission with the latest submitted in mid-September, 2006. The proposal will be reviewed during the 90-day waiting period that ends in mid-December. The proposal also includes very detailed registration and documentation requirements for farmers who intend to plant GM seed.

Distances between GM and non-GM crops in Lithuania's most recent proposal:

Corn	200
Potato	20
Beet (not for seed)	50
Rape	3000
Wheat	50

Post Comment

Because of their geography and climate, it is unlikely that the GM seed varieties currently approved for use in the EU have great potential in these countries. Future GM varieties for industrial uses, such as the production of paper from high-starch potatoes and biofuel production, hold more potential. For example, Lithuania, the largest agricultural producer of the three, produces primarily barley and wheat. Only about 17 percent of its total production area is planted in crops that have commercially viable GM varieties (7%-rape; 6%-potatoes; 3%-beets; 1%-corn) and of these, only biotech corn varieties are approved for planting in the EU.

Therefore, currently, the importance of coexistence regulations in these countries is primarily political. However, in the long term, as new uses and new varieties are developed, the regulations will be more significant. Farmers who are weighing seed choices and considering GM seed for the first time may decide that the additional regulatory requirements, particularly the registration and documentation requisites, will create enough extra work that they will choose to avoid planting the new GM varieties. If approved by the EU, it is not clear how pro-biotech farmers will be able to overcome onerous registration and record keeping requirements and unnecessarily wide buffer zones.