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Global leaders rethink seed approval process, livestock squeeze

By Sara Wyant, Agri-Pulse Editor

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The European Union, long known for foot-dragging on approvals for new varieties of genetically modified seeds, may need to rethink its policy or could put a large share of its livestock production at risk. That seems to be the message delivered by European Agriculture Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel in what the *New York Times* reported Monday was a closed door meeting with other farm ministers.

However, some of her comments come as no surprise after **they were first reported on her web site blog Nov. 8.** Fresh from a trip to Argentina and Brazil, she explained that her directorate-general has carried out an economic study looking at the impact on our livestock sector if the major exporting countries continue to move over to GMOs, especially for soybean varieties, which the EU has not yet approved. A copy of that report is available here:

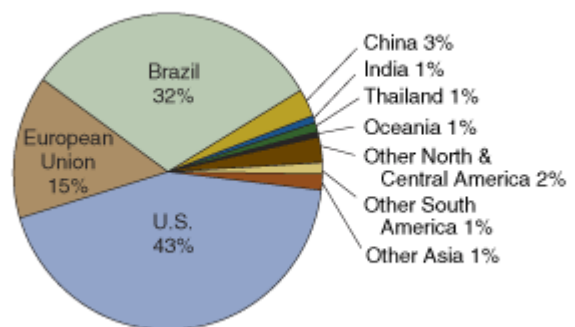


http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/envir/gmo/economic_impactGMOs_en.pdf

Fischer Boel said she was not arguing that “we in the European Union should authorize the imports of GM products which science tells us to reject. But where science has given a product a clean bill of health, that fact must be paramount as we follow the authorization procedure. And it is **difficult to understand that an approval procedure can take 4-6 years in Europe, and less than a year elsewhere.**”

She pointed out several obvious market realities, as the global demand for both biofuels and protein continue to grow. “China and other emerging countries are now also big importers and do not all share our hesitations about GMOs,” she explained. In both

About 90 percent of global biofuel production is concentrated in U.S., Brazil, and Europe, 2007



Source: ERS and FO Licht. Includes only ethanol for fuel

Argentina and Brazil, **“several new GMOs are likely to be used and it could become increasingly difficult to ensure that no trace of non-EU approved GMOs is found in shipments to Europe,** which we presently require through our zero tolerance policy.

Of particular concern is Monsanto’s Roundup Ready 2 soybean (MON 89788), which the EU report says is likely to be approved by U.S. regulators a few months from now and could be planted in 2008 or 2009. “Since MON 89788 is not expected to be cultivated (in major feed exporting countries) before 2008, any potential disruption is assumed to take place during 2009-2010. After this period, the GM soybean is expected to be authorized in the EU and imports will be unrestricted again.”

Under the worst case scenario, with imports of soybeans and meal interrupted from the U.S., Argentina and Brazil, the EU would face an import deficit of 32.3 million tons of soybean meal equivalent, although higher production of oilseeds in some member states might make up part of the difference. Under that same scenario, pork production would drop 39% and 35% below baseline in 2009 and 1020, respectively, and the EU would become a net importer of pig meat.

“It is clear from the report of Commissioner Boel’s closed-door meeting recently—and other interactions with both EU officials and farm organizations we’ve had over several weeks—that livestock feeders in Europe are in a tight squeeze,” notes Jay Vroom, CEO of CropLife America. “One contributor is the stand off over certain long pending biotech event approvals that are artificially keeping some supply of feed grains from reaching the markets across the continent. We are also seeing very troubling signs of non-science based policy driving options for revision of the EU pesticide registration directive and in some member states as well—such as the so called Grenelle process in France.



“In the CropLife network of associations around the world we’ve consistently advocated for strong and transparent, science-based regulation of crop protection chemicals and biotechnology products,” he added. **“We welcome Commissioner Boel providing leadership at this critical moment, and hope she** can guide a restoration of science and expediency to regulatory decision making in Europe.”

In related news, the Philippine government plans to subsidize Bt-corn planting in an effort to boost productivity. The Department of Agriculture (DA) in Central Mindanao is targeting at least 5,000 hectares where the controversial *Bacillus thuringiensis* corn (Bt corn) will be planted under a subsidy program, according to the Sun Star. The Department of Agriculture central office last week announced in a statement that farmers who will chose to plant the transgenic crop would be given a subsidy worth P1,200 per hectare.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Operations Dennis Araullo said DA encourages farmers to grow high-yielding crops developed through biotechnology, "for them to maximize profit and at the same time solve the problem of hunger and poverty."

"We need to increase productivity. With limited land devoted for food production and more

and more agricultural lands being converted for other purposes, the only way we can increase productivity is through an advanced farming technology. Biotechnology is a solution to such problems," he was quoted in the Sun Star as saying. The Asiatic corn borer is said to be one of the most damaging corn pests that can cause as much as 80 percent yield loss.

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