

US apple shipments to India ‘disrupted’

Washington tells WTO panel that New Delhi should provide scientific justification

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Apple exports from the US to India have been disrupted on New Delhi’s decision to mandate “non-GM (genetically modified) origin” and “GM-free” certificates for certain agricultural imports, the US has complained. Washington wants India to withdraw the measure that came into effect from March 1.

“The measure (GM-free certificate requirement) has disrupted US apple exports. Trade stoppages risk future product shortages and could lead to price increase for Indian consumers and further disruptions to Indian supply chain,” the US said, raising the issue with the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Committee of the WTO.

Last August, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) published an order specifying that every consignment of 24 identified food products need to be accompanied by a non-GM-origin-cum-GM-free certificate issued by Competent National Authority of the exporting country.

The order was to be effective from January 1, 2021, but was postponed to March 1.

Food items

The US Department of Agriculture does not issue such certificates and US apple exporters have reported complained that the Indian market is technically closed for them since the non-GMO certification requirement came into force.

“Apple exports from the US to India had already taken a hit following imposition of additional import duties of 20 per cent in 2019, as retaliation for US action against Indian steel and aluminium. This increased total import duties on the fruit to 70 per cent. There has been a sharp drop in apple exports from the US to India over the last couple of years and shipments are expected to fall further this year because of the GM-free mandatory certification,” a person tracking the industry told BusinessLine.

Import of fresh apples from the US to India dropped by 32.91 per cent in 2020-21 to \$34.60 million from \$51.58 million in 2019-20

Alternative approaches

The US, in its submission to the SPS Committee this month, reiterated that India must provide the scientific justification and the risk assessment for the measure, or otherwise indicate the relevant international standards or guidelines on which this measure is based. “In the absence of this information, the US again urges India to withdraw its measure,” it said.

The mandatory certificate requirement imposed by India follows a study carried out by research and advocacy body Centre for Science and Environment in 2018 which found that despite the FSSAI not allowing GM food in the country, several samples of edible oils, processed and packaged food and infant food items, produced locally and imported, were found to contain GM ingredients. While 32 per cent samples tested GM-positive, the bulk of it was imported.

Washington suggested that India could consider alternative approaches that can be implemented in a non-discriminatory manner, and in a way that is not more trade-restrictive than necessary.