

Nations comply with FSSAI regulations on GM food imports



FSSAI had demanded 'non-GM origin and GM-free certificate' for imports of 24 listed food products to India from 1 March.

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Several countries have started issuing genetically modified (GM)-free certificates for imported food crop consignments, after initial resistance to India's regulation seeking such certificates that became effective on 1 March.

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On 21 August 2020, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) issued an order requiring a "non-GM origin and GM-free certificate", issued by the competent national authority of the exporting country, to accompany all imports of 24 listed food products to India, to become effective beginning 1 January. The date was later revised to 1 March.

The tolerance limit for accidental presence of GM is 1% of the imported food crop consignments. The regulation does not apply to processed food at present.

Countries such as Chile, New Zealand, South Africa, and Italy have started issuing non-GM certificates, while Turkey, Poland, Iran, Serbia, and Brazil have also agreed to comply with

the regulation, according to an FSSAI official who spoke under condition of anonymity. "The US and Argentina have proposed some models for the certification, which we are studying," the official said.

A study conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment in 2018 on the prevalence of GM food in India formed the basis of the latest regulations. As much as 32% of the samples tested positive for genetic modification, with 80% of it being imported products, according to the study conducted on both domestic and imported food items.

"We are a country with zero tolerance for GM products. We cannot not have regulations on GM prevalence in food items. While other countries complain about our regulations, Indian authorities issued 7,660 non-GM certificates to 98 countries in 2019 on products ranging from sweet corn, soya, and basmati rice," the official said.

During India's latest trade policy review, Japan held that the measure is "unnecessarily trade restrictive" in the light of the policy objective as there is currently no globally available detection method for proving whether a crop is GM or not and virtually no certificate can be provided by the exporting country. Japan even questioned FSSAI's legal authority to regulate the import of these products.

India in its reply to most countries said the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, empowers the central government to formulate regulations concerning genetically modified articles of food.

A query sent to the commerce ministry did not elicit any response till the time of going to the press.