

Update 3: EU Nations to Ban Suspect Corn Imports

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European Union nations voted Friday to ban U.S. shipments of suspect corn gluten animal feed unless the bloc has full assurance that the imports are free of non-authorized genetically modified corn.

The move could affect millions of dollars' worth of corn gluten exports. The dispute centers on a batch of Bt10 genetically modified corn that Swiss agrochemicals company Syngenta AG inadvertently sold in the United States and exported to Europe without approval.

"This is a targeted measure which is necessary to uphold EU law, maintain consumer confidence and ensure that the unauthorized GMO Bt10 cannot enter the EU. Imports of maize products which are certified as free of Bt10 will be able to continue," said EU Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou.

The ban will effectively shut out all imports of U.S. corn gluten, since there is currently no effective way of testing for Bt10, which has not been approved by American or European regulators. EU spokesman Philip Tod said Syngenta was working to develop and validate such a test, but they could not say when it would be ready for use.

Mike Mack, chief operating officer of Syngenta Seeds, said it would quickly have a workable test for the EU.

"We will make operational within a matter of days a valid test method to detect for Bt10," Mack said. Such a test would still need further approval from EU authorities. It was not immediately clear how long such approval would take.

U.S. shipments of corn gluten feed to the EU totaled 347 million euros (\$450 million) last year.

The United States said the ban was exaggerated.

"We view the EU's decision to impose a certification requirement on U.S. corn gluten due to the possible, low-level presence of Bt10 corn to be an overreaction," said Edward Kemp, spokesman for the U.S. mission to the EU.

"U.S. regulatory authorities have determined there are no hazards to health, safety or the environment related to Bt10," Kemp added. "There is no reason to expect any negative impact from the small amounts of Bt10 corn that may have entered the EU."

The ban is to come into force early next week, pending formal approval by the EU's head office.

