

**Kenya: Importation of GM Maize to Start Next Week
(All Africa Global Media)**

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Traders can start importing genetically modified food including maize next week.

The head of the National Bio-safety Authority, Dr Roy Mugiira, said regulations on the importation of GM foods will be gazetted by this Friday.

"The regulations will give clear health and environmental guidelines on the foods being imported," said Dr Mugiira yesterday.

He said that the new rules had not been prompted by recent government permission to allowed millers to import GM maize to ease the current shortage of maize.

According to the new regulations, NBA can license importers for up to 10 years provided their products have no negative effects on health or the environment.

Dr Mugiira said authorities in the country of origin like South Africa would certify foods but once in Kenya more tests would be carried out.

"All imports will need permits from our bio-safety clearing house which is recognised by the Cartagena protocol," he said yesterday.

Last week acting Minister for Higher Education, Science And Technology Prof Hellen Sambili gazetted the 2009 Biosafety Act.

Several MPs and non-governmental organization have opposed GM foods.

"We need protection from the government from these unscrupulous traders who can sell anything to the public just for their financial gain," said Lari MP David Njuguna.

Parliamentary Agriculture committee chairman John Mututho also opposes import of GM foods.

Last week African Biodiversity Network and the Unga Revolution claimed a consignment of GM maize was already in Mombasa waiting to be off-loaded.

ABN advocacy officer Anne Maina claimed animal feeding trials have shown damage to liver, kidney, pancreas, stomach bleeding and effects on fertility.

"We can easily import GMO free maize from Malawi and Zambia who had a bumper harvest last season," she said.

Dr Mugiiira however said there is no evidence that GMOs are harmful.

Genetically engineered products usually carry a new gene, which may not be related to the crop, to achieve a desired trait. Scientists may for instance introduce a gene to make GM maize drought or pest resistant.

The gazettelement will come as a relief for millers and importers who have been complaining of an acute shortage of maize. The government last week forecast a shortfall of 14.8 million 90-kg bags of maize in 2011/12 due to drought.

Six millers with 20 per cent market share have closed their main plants but said GM would curb future shortfalls.

"Bio-tech is the way we should go and ... it will help us to overcome our perpetual shortage of maize," said Diamond Lalji, chairman of Cereals Millers Association that comprises 28 major millers in Kenya.

"GM maize is cheaper by about 30 percent compared with non-GM and that is expected to bring down the cost of the final product," said Lalji.

Pembe Flour Mills Ltd, Kenya's second biggest producing 240,000 kg a day, has not produced any maize flour in the last 12 days.

Unga, the country's fourth largest with brands like Jogoo, shut its plant in Eldoret last Saturday.

"We have a lot of orders pending from (supermarkets) but we cannot supply," said Abdulmajid Mohamed, a local manager at Pembe.

The millers are projecting losses thanks to lower sales, the weak shilling and increased labor costs.

Pembe said millers were paying Sh4,000 shillings per 90 kg bag of maize compared with 1,350 shillings a year ago.

Several EU countries have banned genetically modified maize developed by American firm Monsanto.

France banned GMO maize in February 2008 followed by Luxembourg, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Greece.

In 2009, Monsanto, the world's biggest seed company sued the German government's decision to ban the cultivation and sale of genetically modified maize despite European Union rulings that the bio-tech grain is safe.

Monsanto's modified maize seed (MON 810) has been authorized for sale and cultivation in the EU's 27 member states since 1998. Its 10-year license is currently being renewed and a decision is expected later in the year.

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