

The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 15 Apr 2008

Curbs again on imported GM food

Chetan Chauhan
New Delhi, April 14

G74a
HT

THE GOVERNMENT has brought imported genetically modified food products under the ambit of regulation once again, six months after the control was axed.

The recent environment ministry's notification, however, clarified the regulation would be in place only for six months. By that time, the Health Ministry will have to constitute Food Safety and Standard Authority to regulate GM and other types of food products.

The environment ministry in August 2007 had removed all regulations on the import of processed GM food products. The notification had exempted food-

stuffs, ingredients in foodstuffs and additives including processing aids derived from living modified organisms where the end product was not a living modified organism from the purview of environment protection rules on GM products.

Before the notification, the ministry's Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) was looking into approvals for the import of processed GM food. Till date, the GEAC has not given permission for import of packaged GM food. Only the import of crude GM soyabean was allowed.

(The August notification meant that any packaged food processed in the west could reach Indian shopping malls without much government regulation.

15-04-08
Importers were only required to seek import permission from the commerce ministry, as the food safety mechanism of the health ministry was not ready.

The decision caused brouhaha over the safety of imported GM food and even the health ministry opposed the decision. At a recently GEAC meeting, the health ministry representative asked the committee to start regulating imported GM food. Several activist groups had also protested.)

Thereafter, the environment ministry kept its August notification in abeyance for six months and asked the health ministry to make the Food Safety and Standard Authority functional by then.

chetan@hindustantimes.com