

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Voluntary  Public

**Date:** 10/23/2015

**GAIN Report Number:**

## **Ecuador**

**Post:** Quito

### **FAS Quito Helps Ecuador's Food Manufacturers Assess Impact of GE-Food Labeling**

**Report Categories:**

Agriculture in the News

Biotechnology - GE Plants and Animals

**Approved By:**

Mariano J. Beillard

**Prepared By:**

Henry Vega and Mariano J. Beillard

**Report Highlights:**

Working with Ecuador's National Association of Manufacturers of Food and Beverage (ANFAB), FAS Quito organized three back-to-back workshops in the cities of Guayaquil (September 28), Cuenca (September 29), and Quito (September 30). The biotech outreach campaign contributed to expanding dialogue; allowing participants to exchange information on genetically-engineered (GE) food labeling policies, experiences, and trends. It also highlighted the possibility of creating effective, non-commercially disruptive GE-derived food labeling policies.

## **General Information:**

Working with Ecuador's National Association of Manufacturers of Food and Beverage (ANFAB), FAS Quito supported the organization of three back-to-back workshops in the cities of Guayaquil (September 28), which included opening remarks by U.S. Consul General Patricia Fietz, Cuenca (September 29), and Quito (September 30). The biotech outreach campaign contributed to expanding dialogue; allowing participants to exchange information on genetically-engineered (GE) food labeling policies, experiences, and trends. It also highlighted the possibility of creating effective, non-commercially disruptive GE-derived food labeling policies.

Participating government officials (policymakers and regulators), members of the food industry and producers, academics, and the public discussed the impact of GE-food labeling on consumer perceptions. A key outcome of participants' interaction was the unscripted discussion on the impact of mandatory GE-labeling on sales of GE-content products.

## **Consumer Confusion Surrounding Mandatory Labeling:**

Consumer confusion surrounding mandatory GE-labeling is widespread. While the discussion remains highly technical among ANFAB's membership, it is less well understood by smaller, more informal manufacturers. To compensate for an imperfect understanding of GE-labeling, a number of local manufacturers have opted to label their products as being free of genetically modified organisms (GMO), as well as being "100 percent transgenic-free." There is however no current Ecuadorian regulation, that defines how to accurately make such claims. FAS Quito, in supporting this outreach campaign has sought to clarify what constitutes effective, non-commercially disruptive GE-content product labeling practices.

This widely attended (150 plus participants) outreach campaign has sparked the need to create a sound, science-based foundation for regulatory reform. It assisted in debunking public misperceptions that adversely impact the international trade in food and agricultural products; often exacerbated by "non-GMO" type claims. Collaboration with ANFAB attracted a higher level of participation than anticipated from industry, academia, and government officials.

Seminar presenters included Dr. Xavier Sanchez of the International Center for Food Industry Excellence at Texas Tech University who led the discussion. Dr. Richard Goodman, a food allergen specialist at the University of Nebraska, explained the complexity of accurate food products labeling. Dr. Azmy Azmy, a DuPont chemist specializing in biotechnology, illustrated the differences between labeling a food product as being a "non-GM" and "GMO-free." Dr. Azmy also elaborated on the pricing of identity preserved commodities.

David Schmidt, chief executive officer of the International Food Information Council provided participants with an overview of the effects of GE-food labeling in the marketplace, explaining how U.S. consumer perception has evolved over the years. Other presenters included Adriana Castaño, a Colombian biologist and regional expert in biotechnology regulation and Dr. Victoria Córdoba, a local lawyer specialized in Ecuadorian food law. Similarly FAS Regional Agricultural Attaché Mariano Beillard stressed the need to promote a culture of rigorous scientific research, to ensure that regulations are science- and risk-based; indicating that mandatory labeling regimes applicable only to GE-content

products creates the mistaken belief among consumers that these are different, less safe than non GE-content product. FAS highlighted throughout the workshops the need for exemptions and commercially viable thresholds under mandatory labeling regimes.

FAS Quito and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) are publishing a conference report. A pdf copy of the report will be available on the [Mi Comida Sana](#) website in November 2015.



Biotech outreach participants during the Quito (September 30, 2015) workshop event.  
Photo Credits: Henry Vega.

### **Mandatory Labeling of GE-Content Food Products:**

On October 15, 2013, Ecuador published an amendment to Technical Regulation RTE INEN 022 “Labeling of Processed, Packed, and Packaged Food Products” requiring labeling of food and beverage products with genetically-engineered content. The labeling, effective August 2014, requires that products with GE-content in excess of 0.9 percent include “*Contiene Transgénicos*” (contains GE) on the label. See, FAS Quito’s [GAIN Ecuador – Agricultural Biotechnology Annual 2015](#) for additional information.

### **U.S.-Ecuador Food and Agricultural Products Trade:**

U.S.-Ecuador agricultural trade reached \$2.7 billion in calendar year (CY) 2014, up nearly 14 percent from the previous year. Ecuador exported a record \$2.3 billion in food and agricultural products to the United States while importing some \$437 million in U.S.-origin product. Major U.S. agriculture exports to Ecuador include soybean meal, wheat, cotton, prepared food, and fresh fruits.