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NBA GIVES CHAINSTORES, WHOLESALERS, RETAILERS AND TRADERS ULTIMATUM TO HAVE PERMITS IN THEIR SHOPS FOR SELLING PRODUCTS THAT MAY CONTAIN GMOs.

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA- THE National Biosafety Authority (NBA) has directed all chain stores, wholesalers, retailers and traders dealing in products that may contain genetically modified organisms (GMOs) a one week ultimatum to get copies of permits from their suppliers for them to sell the products.

The directive follows the spot and compliance checks that the Authority has been conducting in the last three weeks.

NBA Registrar Mr Lackson Tonga says all traders who will not have copies of permits for placing on the market products that may contain GMOs will be dealt with according to the provisions of the law.

The Authority conducts risk assessment to ascertain the safety of the processed food made from genetically modified organisms and thereafter issue an appropriate permit. Two different kinds of permits are issued in relation to food, feed or processing. One permit is for importation of products that may or contain GMOs and is valid for about five years and another for placing on the market, to enable one to sell products that may contain GMOs, and is valid for a maximum of about six months. Wholesalers and distributors (importers) are required to get import permits to bring in the country products containing GMOs and further get a permit for the products to be sold on the Zambian Market.

“We are happy that most wholesalers, chain stores and retailers are getting products from distributors who have permits to import products that may contain GMOs. However, we are concerned that most of them do not have the copies of permits to place on the market. In almost all the places we visited, retailers did not have copies of such permits and when asked to produce a permit they had to refer us to the distributor or call the distributor for verification,” Mr Tonga explained.

“It is just imperative that they have such important documents, as a permit to place on the market, in their shops or files. As such we are giving all shop owners, traders, wholesalers and retailers seven days in which to get these permits from their distributors to avoid being inconvenienced when we visit them next time soon.”

He said those that will not have copies of permits for placing on the market will have their products and goods confiscated and destroyed.

Mr. Tonga disclosed that four leading superstores and one distributor have been asked to pull down products that may contain GMOs after they were found to be wanting in some areas. The five were given 24 hours in which to address the specific matters raised with them and in other instance produce the required documentations.

“Of these, four have already been engaged and we are happy with their response. We are doing this because our interest is the safety of humans, animals and the environment as per our mandate,” Mr Tonga said.

“We are going flat out to ensure that all traders comply with the regulations. And those found to be abrogating parts of the Act or conditions of the permits may have the permits withdrawn.”

The NBA has from 2015 to date issued 24 permits to various companies for the importation and or placing on the market of products that may contain genetically modified organisms, while three permits have been granted for research activities using genetically modified organisms. The import permits are valid for 5 years while permits for placing on the market range between three to six months to ensure compliance and prevent companies from contravening the law.

Meanwhile three (3) distributors and two (2) Chain Stores have so far applied for new permits for both importation and or placing on the market of food and feed that may contain GMOs.

“We are happy with the response, this shows that people are getting aware of the regulations and by them coming forth to apply for permits is an indication that they do not want to contravene the law,” Mr Tonga said.

The NBA is the only regulatory body which considers products that may contain GMOs to be placed on the market after conducting risk assessment and upon granting of a permit. The Authority also regulates research and development on GMO as well as the transiting of GMOs and their products through the country.

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About NBA

NBA was established under the Biosafety Act No. 10 of 2007. Through the Act the NBA regulates the research, development, application, importation, export, transit, contained use, release or placing on the market of any GMO or products of GMO's whether intended for use as a

pharmaceutical, food, feed or processing, or a product of a GMO. The NBA also ensures that any activity involving the use or a product of GMO prevents any socio-economic impact or harm to human, animal health and the environment in the country.

Some of the functions of the NBA include processing notifications and applications of GMOs or products of GMOs into the country, in accordance with the requirements of the Biosafety Act, promoting public awareness and education concerning the activities regulated under the Act such as risk assessment, risk management and authorization processes; keeping any GMO or any product of a genetically modified organism under review and to ban its handling or release in Zambia. NBA furthermore, establishes and maintains a database of GMOs and their products as well as making available such information to the public.

For more information about NBA visit: www.nbazambia.org.zm, Facebook page: NBA-Zambia and follow us on twitter: @NBA_Zambia

For inquiries Contact:

Sandra Lombe

Communications Officer

Email: nbacomcommunications1@yahoo.com or lombe2@gmail.com

+260 211 278316 /0977854716/ 0961439503