

Malaysia wants GM foods from US labelled
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Malaysia has insisted in free trade talks with the United States that imports of genetically-modified food must be labelled, reports said today.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Azmi Khalid said Malaysia was demanding mandatory labelling even though the United States had suggested American companies only make voluntary declarations.

"Without the label, we will not know the contents of the food," Azmi was quoted as saying by the Sun newspaper.

"We will not allow our population to consume without being able to assess what they can or cannot take as food and medicine," he said.

Malaysia is a majority Muslim nation where there is strong awareness about consuming only foods that are considered halal, or permissible under Islam.

Under the concept of halal, pork and its by-products, alcohol and animals not slaughtered according to Koranic procedures are all "haram" or forbidden, as are any products derived from the animals.

Azmi said Malaysia had decided on compulsory labelling despite US opposition during trade negotiations on the basis it would hamper access to US imports, the state Bernama news agency reported

"In this aspect, our stand is consistent with that of Australia and the European Union," Azmi was quoted as saying.

The minister said proposed legislation on biosafety was expected to be passed by parliament and come into force by year's end, and that compulsory labelling would start after that.

Malaysia and the US embarked on negotiations for a free trade agreement in June last year, but talks became bogged down in February.

The two countries failed to work out a deal by a crucial March 31 deadline which would have allowed the agreement to be fast-tracked through the US Congress.

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