New regulation on Steviol glycosides sweeteners (High purity Stevia rebaudiana leaf extract)

The European Commission has amended the regulation on the specification of steviol glycosides used as sweeteners in food:

Regulation EU 2016/1814 modifying the regulation EU 231/2012, amending the specifications for steviol glycosides set out in the annex II and III of the regulation EU 1333/2008 (published the 14th of October 2016 and will enter in force on November the 3rd 2016)

What are the changes in this new text and what the incidences?

First of all, this amendment follows a scientific opinion of EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) adopted on the 17th of November 2015 and published in the EFSA Journal the 8th of December 2015:

Scientific Opinion on the safety of the proposed amendment of the specifications for steviol glycosides (E960) as a food additive.

This opinion has been given as an answer to a request of the European Commission that follows a request from an applicant of the food industry.

The ANS Panel (EFSA Panel on Food Additives and Nutrient Sources added to Food) concluded that including rebaudiosides D and M as alternatives to rebaudioside A in the predominant components would be of no safety concern and that the specific steviol glycosides composition (E960) would not be of safety concern either.

Based on this scientific opinion, the Commission amended the regulation. Let's have a look on the differences between the two texts:

In the section "Definition":

In the regulation 231/2012 (old version) was written:

- "… resulting in a final product consisting mainly (at least 75%) of stevioside and/or rebaudioside A."

The text in the new regulation:

- "…. Resulting in a final product containing not less than 95% of the below identified 11 related steviol glycosides, in any combination and ratio".

In the section "Assay", the new text adds rebaudioside M to the list of steviol glycosides.

There are no other differences between the two texts except that in the new regulation detailed information is given on the chemical name, chemical formula, molecular weight and CAS N° of all the 11 steviol glycosides (including rebaudioside M). In the previous annex, this information was given only for stevioside and rebaudioside A.

Finally, rebaudioside M is added to the list of described and authorized steviol glycosides which number changes from 10 to 11 and more importantly, these steviol glycosides can be present *in any combination and ratio*

EUSTAS comments on this new regulation:

The main change is the removal of the “75% minimum of stevioside/rebaudioside A” rule, what was the reason of this rule? We can imagine that it has been set to guarantee the natural status of the extracted steviol glycosides as it was known that most of the *Stevia rebaudiana* varieties known at that period contained mainly 75 % of stevioside and rebaudioside A. But breeders have selected new varieties that have steviol glycoside combinations and ratios that do not match the 75 % of stevioside and rebaudioside A rule. The selections are without mutation or genetic engineering and can be considered as completely natural varieties!

Another reason of this change might be to allow rebaudioside M enriched steviol glycosides on the market as a better taste can then be obtained.

Summary:

1) new regulation for steviol glycosides with minimum 95% purity

2) No 75 % rule in the new regulation

3) Rebaudioside M has been added to the 10 already approved steviol glycosides

References :

- Commission Regulation EU 2016/1814, Official Journal of the European Union, 14.10.2016, L278 p 37-41
- Commission Regulation EU 231/2012, Official Journal of the European Union, 22.3.2012, L83 p 270-271
- Scientific Opinion, EFSA Journal, 2015; 13 (12): 4316 p1-28;