

Glyphosate Tolerant (Roundup® Ready) Alfalfa Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Background

On December 18, 2009, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a notice in the *Federal Register* announcing the availability of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that evaluates the potential environmental effects of deregulating two lines of alfalfa genetically engineered (GE) to tolerate the herbicide glyphosate. The GE alfalfa is commonly referred to as Roundup Ready® (RR) alfalfa and is referred to as glyphosate-tolerant (GT) alfalfa in the EIS.

APHIS prepared the draft EIS to comply with a February 2007 judgment and order by the U.S. Court for the Northern District of California. APHIS originally deregulated the lines of RR alfalfa in June 2005 and a lawsuit was subsequently filed. The judge vacated APHIS' 2005 decision to deregulate RR alfalfa and determined that the agency must prepare an EIS in support of its decision to deregulate RR alfalfa.

The document, "Glyphosate-Tolerant Alfalfa Events J101 and J163: Request for Nonregulated Status, Draft Environmental Impact Statement, November 2009," describes APHIS' two alternatives—to grant nonregulated status to the lines of GE alfalfa or to maintain regulated status. APHIS analyzed these two alternatives with regard to their potential impacts on gene flow between the RR alfalfa and non-GE alfalfa, on weed development, wildlife species, and species with special status. The draft EIS also analyzes the alternatives with regard to their impact on herbicide use, plant species, socioeconomics (including conventional and organic alfalfa markets, dairy and beef markets, and trade), human health and safety, land use and production practices, and the physical environment (including soil, climate and air quality, and water).

Public Comment Overview

As part of the decisionmaking process, APHIS' Biotechnology Regulatory Services (BRS) is seeking public comment on the draft EIS. The public is a key partner in the EIS process, and your participation is important. The first opportunity for public comment was in January 2008, when APHIS issued a Scoping Notice of Intent (NOI). This notice identified potential issues and alternatives to be studied, and requested public comment to further shape the scope of the EIS. These comments contributed to the development of the draft EIS.

Currently, APHIS is accepting public comments on the draft EIS for 60 days, during which time APHIS will hold four public meetings in different locations throughout the United States. BRS will use the comments to assist in developing a final EIS. The 60-day public comment period, which began on December 18, 2009, closes on February 16, 2010. You may submit your comments by any of the methods outlined below.

Next Steps

After the 60-day public comment period closes, we will carefully review the comments received; develop a final EIS; and issue a record of decision for the petition to grant nonregulated status to the Roundup® Ready alfalfa lines. Under the National Environmental Policy Act, the final EIS must be published and available for public inspection 30 days before publication of the record of decision. A future decision regarding the deregulation of RR alfalfa will be issued only after the completion of the court-ordered EIS process.

How to Submit Comments

1. Public Meetings

Written and oral comments will be accepted at four public meetings, the dates and locations of which are detailed below. Participants at the public meetings may submit prepared written comments, record comments on comment forms, or present comments verbally during the listening session, which will be a part of the public record.

2. Postal mail or commercial delivery

Please send an original and three copies of written comments to: Docket No. APHIS-2007-0044, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A-03.8, 4700 River Road, Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737-1238. Please state in the body of your comment that it refers to Docket No. APHIS-2007-0044.

3. Internet

If you wish to submit a comment using the Internet, go to the Federal eRulemaking portal at: <http://www.regulations.gov/search/Regs/home.html#documentDetail?R=0900006480a6b7a1> to submit or view public comments and to view supporting and related materials available electronically. Please do not use alternative means to send comments through the Internet. Using the Federal eRulemaking portal is the best way to ensure that your comments will be associated with the correct docket and reviewed.

Consideration will be given to comments received on or before February 16, 2010. Comments are posted on the Regulations.gov Web site and may be reviewed at USDA, Room 1141, South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C., between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. To facilitate entry into the comment reading room please call (202) 690-2817.

Public Meeting Details

January 19, 2010, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., local time. The Golden Nugget, 129 Fremont Street, Las Vegas, NV 89101. For directions or facilities information, call (301) 734-8010.

February 3, 2010, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., local time. Buffalo County Fairgrounds Exhibit Center, 3807 Avenue N, Kearney, NE 68847. For directions or facilities information, call (301) 734-8010.

February 4, 2010, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., local time. Holiday Inn Haymarket, 141 N. 9th St., Lincoln, NE 68508. For directions or facilities information, call (301) 734-8010.

February 9, 2010, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., local time. USDA Riverside, Oklahoma City Memorial Conference Rooms B, C, and D, 4700 River Road, Riverdale, MD 20737. For directions or facilities information, call (301) 734-8010.

Additional Information

For more information, please visit: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/biotechnology/alfalfa.shtml> Additionally, for further information regarding the draft EIS, contact:
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To obtain copies of the EIS, contact:

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