**APHIS** **Stakeholders Announcement**

Plant Protection and Quarantine December 20, 2006

# USDA To Hold Public Meetings Nationwide

## *Agency Seeks Comments on Intent to Prepare Environmental Impact Statement on the Use of Genetically Engineered Insects*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is inviting the general public to attend a series of meetings aimed at soliciting comments on its intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) concerning the use of genetically-engineered fruit flies and pink bollworm in certain pest control programs.

The agency is considering using genetically engineered fruit flies, *Diptera: Tephritidae*, and pink bollworm, *Pectinophora gossypiella*, in its ongoing plant pest control programs for fruit flies and pink bollworm. Currently, these programs use a sterile insect technique that involves mass-rearing the pests in a special facility, sterilizing the insects by irradiation and then releasing them to mate with their wild counterparts. The release of sterile insects reduces the pest population through associated decreases in their reproduction rate. Genetically engineered fruit flies and pink bollworm could augment the sterile insect technique by producing only male insects with genetic identification markers. These insects would compete more effectively for mates and produce no viable offspring.

The contemplated uses of genetically engineered plant pests are expected to improve existing APHIS plant pest control programs, reduce operational costs and provide considerable potential benefits to the ongoing control and eradication efforts of the agency.

Under the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, agencies must examine the potential environmental effects of proposed federal actions and alternatives. This EIS will examine the range of potential effects that the proposed applications could pose to the human environment. APHIS invites responses to the following questions:

1. Are there any new or greater risks or apparent benefits associated with the strategy of using genetic engineering instead of classical genetic techniques to develop new insect strains to improve ongoing APHIS plant pest control programs? If so, please explain.
2. The proposed EIS focuses on the development and use of genetic engineering to improve specific APHIS plant pest control programs. Are there any unique risks that APHIS should consider in detail for genetic engineering of pink bollworm and fruit fly species?
3. What are the potential risks of non target effects associated with this technology?

All comments will be considered fully in developing a final scope of study. Interested parties can attend any or all meetings held in the following locations:

- January 17—9 a.m., USDA, Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building; 12th and Jefferson Drive, S.W., Washington, D.C.
- January 23—9 a.m., Airport Marriot, 2200 E. Holt Boulevard, Ontario, Calif.
- January 25—9 a.m., Tempe Holiday Inn, 915 E. Apache Boulevard, Tempe, Ariz.
- January 30—9 a.m., Agricultural Research Center, 2413 East Highway 83, Building 213, Weslaco, Texas
- February 1—9 a.m., Airport Embassy Suites, 555 N. Westshore Boulevard, Tampa, Fla.

Registration will take place 30 minutes prior to the start of each meeting. Anyone who reads a statement at these meetings will be asked to provide two copies of the statement to the presiding officer.

Notice of this action was published in the Dec. 19 *Federal Register*.

APHIS invites comments on this proposed EIS. Consideration will be given to comments received on or before Feb. 20, 2007. Send an original and three copies of postal mail or commercial delivery comments to Docket No. APHIS–2006–0166 Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A–03.8, 4700 River Road, Unit 118, Riverdale, Md. 20737-1238. If you wish to submit a comment using the Internet, go to the Federal eRulemaking portal at http://www.regulations.gov, select "Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service" from the agency drop-down menu; then click on "Submit." In the Docket ID column, select APHIS–2006–0166 to submit or view public comments and to view supporting and related materials available electronically.

Comments are posted on the Regulations.gov Web site and may also be viewed at USDA, Room 1141, South Building, 14th St. and Independence Ave., 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.

**Note to Editors:** Stakeholder announcements and other APHIS Information are available on the Internet. Go to the APHIS home page at http://www.aphis.usda.gov and click on the "Publications" button. For more information regarding this notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement and proposed scope of study, please contact David A. Bergsten (301) 734-4883 or david.a.bergsten@aphis.usda.gov.

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