

USDA Solicits Public Comments on Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the Use of Genetically Engineered Fruit Flies and Pink Bollworm

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is soliciting public comments regarding the draft environmental impact statement (EIS) entitled, *Use of Genetically Engineered Fruit Fly and Pink Bollworm in APHIS Plant Pest Control Programs, Draft Environmental Impact Statement—April 2008*. The draft EIS will be published in the *Federal Register* on May 30 and is available online for review at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant_health/ea/geneng.shtml.

The draft EIS analyzes three alternatives for their potential impact on the human environment and takes into consideration comments previously received on this topic. Additionally, it provides detailed information regarding APHIS' preferred alternative, a proposal to develop genetically engineered fruit flies (*Diptera: Tephritidae*) and pink bollworm (*Pectinophora gossypiella*) for use in activities using the Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) for pest control. The genetically engineered insects would augment the SIT already in use by the agency.

Currently, APHIS mass produces insects in special facilities, sterilizes them using irradiation and releases them to mate with insects in the wild. After their release, the sterile insects' unproductive mating activities lower reproduction rates in the wild and reduce the overall pest population.

Using genetically engineered fruit flies and pink bollworm as proposed, APHIS officials could enhance the agency's sterile insect pest control techniques. Under APHIS' proposal, the agency would use genetic engineering to produce and rear only sterile, male insects with genetic identification markers. While irradiation sterilizes insects, it also reduces mating ability.

Genetically engineered sterile insects would be able to compete more effectively for mates in the wild, enhancing overall program efficacy.

The proposal offers considerable benefits to APHIS' ongoing control and eradication efforts, including: reducing operating costs, making more effective use of available APHIS resources and improving the overall efficiency of the pink bollworm and fruit fly programs. This technology would be applied at locations where control programs for these pests take place: Arizona, California and Mexico (pink bollworm); and California, Florida and Texas (fruit fly).

The draft EIS also establishes criteria for future decisions regarding the use of the genetic engineering technology and identifies potential impacts to address when documenting these decisions.

Consideration will be given to comments about the draft EIS received on or before July 14. To comment, please send two copies by postal mail or commercial delivery to: Environmental Analysis and Documentation, Policy and Program Development, APHIS, USDA, 4700 River Road, Unit 149, Room #3D-06D, Riverdale, MD 20737-1238. Attention: Dr. David Bergsten, EIS Project Manager. To provide comment via the Internet, please submit your input by e-mail to david.a.bergsten@aphis.usda.gov.

Note to Stakeholders: Stakeholder announcements and other APHIS information are available on the Internet. Go to the APHIS home page at www.aphis.usda.gov and click on the "Newsroom" button. For additional information about this topic contact Suzanne Bond at (301) 734-5175 or by e-mail at Suzanne.m.bond@aphis.usda.gov.

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