

 **NEWS RELEASE**

United States Department of Agriculture • Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service • Legislative and Public Affairs  
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## **USDA REOPENS PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD ON PROPOSED RULE FOR BIOTECHNOLOGY REGULATIONS**

WASHINGTON, Jan. 15, 2009--The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) will be extending the public comment period for another 60 days on a proposed rule to revise existing regulations regarding the importation, interstate movement and environmental release of certain genetically engineered (GE) organisms.

"We received more than 15,000 comments during the initial comment period on our proposed changes to our biotechnology regulations," said Cindy Smith, administrator of APHIS. "That shows the significance of this proposal. With today's reopening of the comment period, we ask the public to give us further feedback on specific aspects of our proposal. This will help ensure we consider the best possible information as we move forward in an open and transparent manner with this very important and high priority rulemaking."

APHIS is extending the public comment period to allow more time for interested parties to prepare and submit comments. While the public is invited to comment on any of the provisions outlined in the proposed rule, APHIS is particularly interested in receiving comments related to the following areas:

- The scope of the regulations and which GE organisms should be included or excluded from the proposed regulations;
- Incorporation of the noxious weed provisions of the Plant Protection Act into the proposed regulations,
- Elimination of the notification procedure--a streamlined procedure for authorizing the importation, interstate movement or environment release of certain GE organisms--including specific suggestions for protecting against the introduction of plant pests or noxious weeds while minimizing any additional burden or delay for applicants and
- Regulation of GE crops that produce pharmaceutical and industrial compounds, including specific suggestions on how to provide appropriate protection based upon risk.

In some cases commenters identified concerns about these issues, but did not provide specific suggestions as to how the proposed rule could be revised to address these concerns. By reopening the comment period, APHIS intends to gather more specific information and detailed suggestions regarding these issues. With this extension, APHIS will consider all comments received on or before March 17, 2009, including any comments received after the close of the original public comment period on Nov. 24, 2008, and the date of this notice.

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In order to provide additional opportunities for the public to comment on the proposed rule, APHIS intends to hold one or more additional public meetings on the proposed rule. The time and place of the public meeting(s) will be announced in the *Federal Register*. APHIS held three public meetings on the proposed rule during the initial comment period.

The proposed rule was originally published on Oct. 9, 2008. Notice of the extended public comment period is scheduled for publication in the Jan. 16, 2009, *Federal Register*.

Consideration will be given to comments received on or before March 17, 2009. Send two copies of postal or commercial delivery comments to Docket No. APHIS-2008-0023, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A-03.8, 4700 River Road, Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737-1238. Comments can be submitted on the Federal eRulemaking portal at <http://www.regulations.gov/fdmspublic/component/main?main=DocketDetail&d=APHIS-2008-0023>.

Comments received are posted on the Regulations.gov Web site and also can 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.

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