

Public Comment: Programmatic Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Biotechnology regulatory services, a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, is considering potential revisions to its existing regulations regarding the importation, interstate movement and environmental release of genetically engineered (GE) organisms.

As part of the decisionmaking process, BRS is seeking public comment on its draft environmental impact statement (EIS). The draft EIS evaluates the regulatory alternatives that we are considering and the potential environmental effects of the proposed regulatory changes.

The draft EIS is a crucial step in our regulatory revision process. Its purpose is to provide a detailed analysis of the proposed revisions and allow for public input and comment. Proposed revisions under consideration include expanding BRS' regulatory oversight of GE organisms that may damage crops and other plants to also include GE plants that may pose a broader array of risks to agriculture, the environment and public health. Increasing the number of GE organisms that may be regulated will be more protective of the environment and reduce the likelihood of environmental impacts as technology advances.

BRS is considering additional changes, including a tiered permitting system based on potential environmental risk. Under this risk-based system, organisms in more restrictive tiers would require additional regulatory oversight. A process for continued oversight of crops that do not meet the criteria for deregulation is also under consideration.

The public is a key partner in the EIS process, and your participation is important. Throughout the development of this draft, BRS has encouraged public involvement, and your comments continue to be valued as we move forward in the EIS process.

The first opportunity for public comment occurred in January 2004 when APHIS published a notice of intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS in connection with potential changes to federal regulations regarding GE

organisms. This notice identified potential issues and alternatives to be studied in the EIS and requested public comment to further shape the scope of the EIS. These comments contributed to the issues the agency is considering in the draft EIS. BRS also held a series of stakeholder meetings to discuss issues associated with the proposal.

The information and alternatives contained in the draft EIS will assist BRS in making an informed decision regarding regulatory and policy changes and will help define the rationale for these recommended changes. In addition to the draft EIS, BRS will use the comments you contribute, other public comments we've received and the latest scientific information to formulate proposed new regulations (a proposed rule).

The public comment period on the draft EIS begins July 13, 2007. You may submit your comments by any of the methods outlined below.

How to Submit Comments

1. Written and oral comments will be accepted at three 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 enter comments electronically. A court reporter will also be present to take oral comments.
2. Postal mail or commercial delivery: Please send an original and three copies of written comments to: Docket No. APHIS-2006-0112, 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-2006-0112.
3. Internet: 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 dropdown menu; then click on "Submit." In the Docket ID column, select APHIS-2006-0112 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 right docket and reviewed by the right people.

Consideration will be given to comments received on or before Sept. 11, 2007. Comments are posted on the Regulations.gov Web site and may be reviewed 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.

Dates and Locations of Public Meetings:

Aug. 1, 2007, 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.

Aug. 3, 2007, from 4 p.m. to 6 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.

Aug. 16, 2007, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., local time. Walter A. Buehler Alumni & Visitors Center, Alpha Gamma Rho Hall, University of California, Davis, Calif. 95616. For directions or facilities information, call (530) 754-9195 or visit <http://www.alumnicenter.ucdavis.edu/>

Aug. 30, 2007, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., local time. Hilton Kansas City Airport, Osage Rooms A and B, 8801 NW 112th Street, Kansas City, Mo. 64153. For directions or facilities information, call (816) 891-8900 or visit <http://www.hiltonkci.com/>

For more information, please visit these Web sites:

Draft EIS:

<<http://www.aphis.usda.gov>>

Federal Register notices related to EIS:

NOI

Jan. 23, 2004

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/brs/fedregister/BRS_20040123a.pdf>

Peer review plan of the science associated with the programmatic EIS:

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/peer_review/peer_review_agenda.shtml>

For further information regarding the draft EIS, contact

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To obtain copies of the EIS, contact

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