

provisions of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1508), (3) USDA regulations implementing NEPA (7 CFR part 1b), and (4) APHIS' NEPA Implementing Procedures (7 CFR part 372). Based on our previous NEPA review completed for TwinLink™ cotton and our conclusion that the BCS extension request for a determination of nonregulated status of cotton event T303–3 encompasses the same scope of environmental analysis as TwinLink™ cotton, APHIS has reached a FONSI with regard to a determination of nonregulated status of cotton event T303–3.

Based on APHIS' analysis of field and laboratory data submitted by BCS, references provided in the extension request, peer-reviewed publications, information analyzed in the TwinLink™ cotton EA, and the similarity of cotton event T303–3 to the antecedent organism, cotton event T304–40, APHIS has determined that cotton event T303–3 is unlikely to pose a plant pest risk. We have therefore reached a preliminary decision to approve the request to extend the determination of nonregulated status of cotton event T304–40 to cotton event T303–3, whereby cotton event T303–3 would no longer be subject to our regulations governing the introduction of certain genetically engineered organisms.

Paragraph (e) of § 340.6 provides that APHIS will publish a notice in the **Federal Register** announcing all preliminary decisions to extend determinations of nonregulated status for 30 days before the decisions become final and effective. In accordance with § 340.6(e) of the regulations, we are publishing this notice to inform the public of our preliminary decision to extend the determination of nonregulated status of cotton event T304–40 to cotton event T303–3.

APHIS will accept written comments on the FONSI regarding a determination of nonregulated status of event T303–3 for a period of 30 days from the date of this notice. The extension request, FONSI, and preliminary determination for event T303–3, as well as the supporting documents, are available for public review as indicated under

ADDRESSES and FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT above.

After the comment period closes, APHIS will review all written comments received during the comment period and any other relevant information. All comments received regarding the FONSI will be available for public review. After reviewing and evaluating the comments on the FONSI, if APHIS determines that no substantive information has been

received that would warrant APHIS altering its preliminary regulatory determination or FONSI, our preliminary regulatory determination will become final and effective upon notification of the public through an announcement on our Web site at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/biotechnology/pet_proc_imp.shtml. APHIS will also furnish a response to the petitioner regarding our final regulatory determination. No further **Federal Register** notice will be published announcing the final regulatory determination regarding cotton event T303–3.

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 7701–7772 and 7781–7786; 31 U.S.C. 9701; 7 CFR 2.22, 2.80, and 371.3.

Done in Washington, DC, this 9th day of July 2012.

Kevin Shea,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 2012–17133 Filed 7–12–12; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–34–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. APHIS–2012–0046]

GENECTIVE SA; Availability of Petition for Determination of Nonregulated Status of Maize Genetically Engineered for Herbicide Tolerance

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: We are advising the public that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has received a petition from GENECTIVE SA seeking a determination of nonregulated status of maize designated as VCO-Ø1981–5, which has been genetically engineered for tolerance to the herbicide glyphosate. The petition has been submitted in accordance with our regulations concerning the introduction of certain genetically engineered organisms and products. We are making the GENECTIVE SA petition available for review and comment to help us identify potential environmental and interrelated economic issues and impacts that APHIS may determine should be considered in our evaluation of the petition.

DATES: We will consider all comments that we receive on or before September 11, 2012.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments by either of the following methods:

- **Federal eRulemaking Portal:** Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=APHIS-2012-0046-0001>.

- **Postal Mail/Commercial Delivery:** Send your comment to Docket No. APHIS–2012–0046, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A–03.8, 4700 River Road Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737–1238.

Supporting documents and any comments we receive on this docket may be viewed at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=APHIS-2012-0046> or in our reading room, which is located in Room 1141 of the USDA South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC. Normal reading room hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. To be sure someone is there to help you, please call (202) 799–7039 before coming.

The petition is also available on the APHIS Web site at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/brs/aphisdocs/11_34201p.pdf.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. John Turner, Director, Environmental Risk Analysis Programs, Biotechnology Regulatory Services, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 147, Riverdale, MD 20737–1236; (301) 851–3954, email: john.t.turner@aphis.usda.gov. To obtain copies of the petition, contact Ms. Cindy Eck at (301) 851–3892, email: cynthia.a.eck@aphis.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Under the authority of the plant pest provisions of the Plant Protection Act (7 U.S.C. 7701 *et seq.*), the regulations in 7 CFR part 340, “Introduction of Organisms and Products Altered or Produced Through Genetic Engineering Which Are Plant Pests or Which There Is Reason to Believe Are Plant Pests,” regulate, among other things, the introduction (importation, interstate movement, or release into the environment) of organisms and products altered or produced through genetic engineering that are plant pests or that there is reason to believe are plant pests. Such Genetically Engineered (GE) organisms and products are considered “regulated articles.”

The regulations in § 340.6(a) provide that any person may submit a petition to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) seeking a determination that an article should not be regulated under 7 CFR part 340. Paragraphs (b) and (c) of § 340.6 describe the form that a petition for a determination of nonregulated status

must take and the information that must be included in the petition.

APHIS has received a petition (APHIS Petition Number 11–342–01p) from GENECTIVE SA of Chappes, France, seeking a determination of nonregulated status of maize (*Zea mays* L.) designated as event VCO-Ø1981–5, which has been genetically engineered for tolerance to the herbicide glyphosate, stating that this maize is unlikely to pose a plant pest risk and, therefore, should not be a regulated article under APHIS' regulations in 7 CFR part 340.

As described in the petition, maize event VCO-Ø1981–5 has been genetically engineered to contain the stably integrated *epsps grg23ace5* gene expressing the EPSPS ACE5 protein, an improved EPSPS enzyme which confers tolerance to the herbicide glyphosate. The EPSPS ACE5 protein was derived from the bacteria *Arthrobacter globiformis*. Maize event VCO-Ø1981–5 is currently regulated under 7 CFR part 340. Interstate movements and field tests of maize event VCO-Ø1981–5 have been conducted under notifications acknowledged by APHIS.

Field tests conducted under APHIS oversight allowed for evaluation in a natural agricultural setting while imposing measures to minimize the risk of persistence in the environment after completion of the test. Field tests were also conducted in Europe and Canada. Data are gathered on multiple parameters and used by the applicant to evaluate agronomic characteristics and product performance. These and other data are used by APHIS to determine if the new variety poses a plant pest risk.

Paragraph (d) of § 340.6 provides that APHIS will publish a notice in the **Federal Register** providing 60 days for public comment for petitions for a determination of nonregulated status. On March 6, 2012, we published in the **Federal Register** (77 FR 13258–13260, Docket No. APHIS–2011–0129) a notice¹ describing our process for soliciting public comment when considering petitions for determinations of nonregulated status for GE organisms. In that notice we indicated that APHIS would accept written comments regarding a petition once APHIS deemed it complete.

In accordance with § 340.6(d) of the regulations and our process for soliciting public input when considering petitions for determinations of nonregulated status for GE organisms, we are publishing this notice to inform the public that APHIS will accept

written comments regarding the petition for a determination of nonregulated status from interested or affected persons for a period of 60 days from the date of this notice. The petition is available for public review, and copies are available as indicated under

ADDRESSES and FOR FURTHER

INFORMATION CONTACT above. We are interested in receiving comments regarding potential environmental and interrelated economic issues and impacts that APHIS may determine should be considered in our evaluation of the petition. We are particularly interested in receiving comments regarding biological, cultural, or ecological issues, and we encourage the submission of scientific data, studies, or research to support your comments. We also request that, when possible, commenters provide relevant information regarding specific localities or regions as maize growth, crop management, and crop utilization may vary considerably by geographic region.

After the comment period closes, APHIS will review all written comments received during the comment period and any other relevant information; any substantive issues identified by APHIS based on our review of the petition and our evaluation and analysis of comments will be considered in the development of our decisionmaking documents.

As part of our decisionmaking process regarding a GE organism's regulatory status, APHIS prepares a plant pest risk assessment to assess its plant pest risk and the appropriate environmental documentation—either an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)—in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), to provide the Agency with a review and analysis of any potential environmental impacts associated with the petition request. For petitions for which APHIS prepares an EA, APHIS will follow our published process for soliciting public comment (see footnote 1) and publish a separate notice in the **Federal Register** announcing the availability of APHIS' EA and plant pest risk assessment. Should APHIS determine that an EIS is necessary, APHIS will complete the NEPA EIS process in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR part 1500–1508) and APHIS' NEPA implementing regulations (7 CFR part 372).

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 7701–7772 and 7781–7786; 31 U.S.C. 9701; 7 CFR 2.22, 2.80, and 371.3.

Done in Washington, DC, this 9th day of July 2012.

Kevin Shea,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 2012–17130 Filed 7–12–12; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. APHIS–2012–0020]

Monsanto Co.; Availability of Petition for Determination of Nonregulated Status of Soybean Genetically Engineered for Increased Yield

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: We are advising the public that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has received a petition from the Monsanto Company (Monsanto) seeking a determination of nonregulated status of soybean designated as MON 87712, which has been genetically engineered for increased yield. The petition has been submitted in accordance with our regulations concerning the introduction of certain genetically engineered organisms and products. We are making the Monsanto petition available for review and comment to help us identify potential environmental and interrelated economic issues and impacts that APHIS may determine should be considered in our evaluation of the petition.

DATES: We will consider all comments that we receive on or before September 11, 2012.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments by either of the following methods:

- **Federal eRulemaking Portal:** Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=APHIS-2012-0020-0001>.

- **Postal Mail/Commercial Delivery:** Send your comment to Docket No. APHIS–2012–0020, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A–03.8, 4700 River Road Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737–1238.

Supporting documents and any comments we receive on this docket may be viewed at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=APHIS-2012-0020> or in our reading room, which is located in room 1141 of the USDA South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC. Normal reading room hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday

¹ To view the notice, go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=APHIS-2011-0129>.