

 **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **USDA Announces Final Environmental Impact Statement and Plant Pest Risk Assessment for Genetically Engineered Sugar Beets**

WASHINGTON, June 1, 2012—The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), today published two assessments prepared in response to a petition for nonregulated status submitted to the Agency by developers of a variety of sugar beet genetically engineered (GE) to be resistant to the herbicide glyphosate. This variety is commonly referred to as Roundup Ready (RR) sugar beets. In considering the request, and in accordance with a U.S. District Court decision in 2009, APHIS has prepared two analyses, one under the Plant Protection Act and another under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). These two analyses will be available for public review for at least 30 days before APHIS makes its final regulatory determination.

Under the Plant Protection Act and APHIS’ regulations, the Agency is specifically required to evaluate if the RR sugar beet variety is a plant pest to agricultural crops or other plants or plant products. The Act defines a plant pest as organisms, such as bacteria, fungi, or insects that can cause harm to agricultural crops or other plants or plant products. APHIS’ final plant pest risk assessment (PPRA), available [here](#), finds RR sugar beets are not likely to pose a plant pest risk.

While APHIS’ PPRA is focused on the plant pest risk associated with RR sugar beets, the Agency’s final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), available [here](#), comprehensively evaluates the potential environmental impacts of the three alternatives before the Agency. While helpful in informing the Agency regarding any potential environmental impacts before making its final regulatory determination under the Plant Protection Act, NEPA does not provide APHIS any authority to address such environmental impacts.

The final PPRA and EIS are not APHIS’ final regulatory determination on the petition for the nonregulated status of RR sugar beets. These two documents will be available for public review for at least 30 days before APHIS makes its final regulatory determination on the petition for nonregulated status. APHIS will publish in the Federal Register its record of decision for the FEIS and its final regulatory determination after that 30 day period has concluded.

In examining these alternatives – to maintain the regulated status of RR sugar beets; to determine that nonregulated status was appropriate for RR sugar beets; or to continue regulation of RR sugar beets with regulatory conditions in place – APHIS has evaluated a host of concerns and issues that have been raised regarding RR sugar beets. These include gene flow between RR sugar beets and non-GE sugar beet, table beet, Swiss chard, and wild beet varieties. APHIS also analyzed the implications for herbicide use and tillage, and impacts on weed development and on

non-target organisms, such as amphibians. The Agency also studied impacts of its decision on public health and worker safety.

In the FEIS, APHIS has selected alternative 2, determination of nonregulated status for RR sugar beets, as the Agency's preferred alternative. This is consistent with the Agency's authority with regard to determining the plant pest risk of RR sugar beets.

In response to a U.S. District Court decision in 2009, APHIS has worked hard to complete this FEIS and ensure it is sound and comprehensive. While APHIS worked on the EIS for the petition for full nonregulated status for RR sugar beets, the Agency granted an interim regulatory measure to partially deregulate the RR sugar beet root crop production under mandatory conditions and issue regulatory permits for the seed crop production. This allowed both the root and seed crops to go into the ground and be harvested in accordance with strict Agency requirements and monitoring.

In October, 2011, APHIS published a draft PPRA and a draft EIS and made them available for public comment for 60 days. APHIS held three public meetings across the United States during the open comment period for both documents, and approximately 150 people attended. APHIS received approximately 25,000 comments on the drafts, many of which were helpful to the agency.

APHIS has submitted the final EIS to the Environmental Protection Agency for publication in the Federal Register. APHIS anticipates that EPA will publish a notice that the final EIS on RR sugar beets is available for public review in the Federal Register on June 8th, 2012. A copy of the FEIS provided to EPA can be reviewed [here](#) and the final PPRA is available [here](#).

With Agriculture Secretary Vilsack's leadership, APHIS works tirelessly to create and sustain opportunities for America's farmers, ranchers and producers. Each day, APHIS promotes U.S. agricultural health, regulates genetically engineered organisms, administers the Animal Welfare Act, and carries out wildlife damage management activities, all to safeguard the nation's \$157 billion agriculture, fishing and forestry industries. In the event that a plant or animal pest or disease of concern is detected, APHIS implements emergency protocols and partners with affected states and other countries to quickly manage or eradicate the outbreak. To promote the health of U.S. agriculture in the international trade arena, APHIS develops and advances science-based standards with trading partners to ensure America's agricultural exports, valued at more than \$137 billion annually, are protected from unjustified restrictions.

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