

Questions and Answers: Environmental Assessment on Genetically Engineered Eucalyptus

Q. What is a eucalyptus?

A. Eucalyptus species are among the fastest growing woody plants in the world and represent about 8 percent of all planted forests. While there are over 700 eucalyptus species identified, only a limited number are grown commercially. Eucalyptus is a preferred fiber source for the global pulp and paper industry.

Q. What is ArborGen's intended purpose for these eucalyptus hybrids?

A. According to the applicant, genetically engineered (GE) cold tolerant eucalyptus would enable the production of this hardwood species for pulping and for biofuel applications in managed plantation forests in the southeastern United States.

Q. Has APHIS made a determination of nonregulated status for a GE organism with a cold tolerant trait before?

A. No. This is the first GE organism with such a trait reviewed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). ArborGen has not requested a determination of non-regulated status for its eucalyptus at this time.

Q. Are the eucalyptus hybrids currently under regulation?

A. Yes. ArborGen's GE eucalyptus hybrids are currently under APHIS regulation.

Q. Why was an environmental assessment (EA) prepared for this hybrid?

A. APHIS prepared an EA to provide the public with documentation of APHIS' review and analysis of any potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed release under permit of these GE eucalyptus trees.

Q. In what States are the controlled releases being held?

A. There are a total of 6 confined field site locations in the States of Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, and South Carolina encompassing a total of 14.7 acres.

Q. Are these locations different from those previously permitted by APHIS?

A. Yes. This EA covers some new sites relative to earlier releases.

Q. Wasn't APHIS previously sued over its field trials of GE eucalyptus?

A. Yes. On July 1, 2010, several environmental groups sued APHIS to block authorization of field trials of GE eucalyptus, alleging various violations of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Q. What was the outcome of the litigation?

A. On October 6, 2011, the Court ruled in USDA's favor on all counts, finding that APHIS' EA was fully sufficient.

Q. Is a permit required before a GE organism is introduced?

A. Yes. A permit must be obtained or a notification acknowledged before a regulated article may be introduced. APHIS' regulations for GE organisms set forth the permit application requirements and the notification procedures for the importation, interstate movement, or release in the environment of regulated articles.

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