Notices

Federal Register
Vol. 64, No. 206
Tuesday, October 26, 1999

This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. 99–003–2]

Agritope, Inc.; Availability of Environmental Assessment for Determination of Nonregulated Status

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: We are advising the public that an environmental assessment has been prepared for a proposed determination that certain cantaloupe lines developed by Agritope, Inc., which have been genetically engineered for altered fruit ripening, would no longer be considered regulated articles under our regulations governing the introduction of certain genetically engineered organisms. We are making this environmental assessment available to the public for review and comment.

DATES: We will consider all comments that we receive by November 26, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Please send an original and three copies of your comments to: Docket No. 99–003–2, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS Suite 3C03, 4700 River Road, Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737–1238.

Please state that your comment refers to Docket No. 99–003–2.

You may read the petition for a determination of nonregulated status submitted by Agritope, Inc., the environmental assessment, and any comments we receive on this notice of availability at USDA, room 1141, South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC, between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. To be sure someone is there to help you, please call (202) 690–2817 before coming.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Sivramiah Shantharam, Biotechnology and Biological Analysis, PPQ, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 133, Suite 4B03, Riverdale, MD 20737–1236; (301) 734–4882. To obtain a copy of the environmental assessment, contact Ms. Kay Peterson at (301) 734–4885; e-mail: kay.peterson@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

On December 6, 1998, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) received a petition (APHIS Petition No. 98–350–01p) from Agritope, Inc. (Agritope), of Portland, OR, seeking a determination that cantaloupe (*Cucumis melo* L.) lines designated as A and B, which have been genetically engineered for delayed fruit ripening, do not present a plant pest risk and, therefore, are not regulated articles under APHIS' regulations in 7 CFR part 340.

On March 16, 1999, APHIS published a notice in the **Federal Register** (64 FR 12926–12927, Docket No. 99–003–1) announcing that the Agritope petition had been received and was available for public review. The notice also discussed the role of APHIS and the Food and Drug Administration in regulating the subject cantaloupe lines and food products derived from them. In the notice, APHIS solicited written comments from the public as to whether cantaloupe lines A and B posed a plant pest risk. The comments were to have been received by APHIS on or before May 17, 1999. APHIS received no comments on the subject petition during the designated 60-day comment period.

Cantaloupe lines A and B have been genetically engineered to contain a modified SAMase (*sam-k*) gene derived from *Escherichia* coli bacteriophage T3. The *sam-k* gene encodes an S-adenosylmethionine hydrolase enzyme capable of degrading and thus reducing S-adenosylmethionine (SAM). Reduction of SAM results in lowered ethylene production during fruit ripening in cantaloupe lines A and B and a corresponding increase in the uniformity of ripening in the field. The subject cantaloupe lines also contain and express the neomycin phosphotransferase II (*nptII*) gene derived from *E. coli.* The *nptII* gene was used as a selectable marker during the plant transformation process. Expression of the added genes is controlled in part by gene sequences from the plant pathogen *Agrobacterium tumefaciens,* and the *A. tumefaciens* method was used to transfer the added genes into the parental inbred cantaloupe lines.

Cantaloupe lines A and B are considered regulated articles under APHIS' regulations in 7 CFR part 340 because they contain gene sequences derived from a plant pathogen. Field tests of the subject cantaloupe lines have been conducted under APHIS permits and notifications since 1997 under confined conditions. If Agritope's petition for a determination of nonregulated status were approved, Agritope's cantaloupe lines A and B would no longer be considered regulated articles under APHIS' regulations in 7 CFR part 340 and the requirements pertaining to regulated articles under those regulations would no longer apply to the subject cantaloupe lines or their progeny.

To provide the public with documentation of APHIS' review and analysis of the environmental impacts and plant pest risk associated with a determination of nonregulated status for Agritope's cantaloupe lines A and B, an environmental assessment (EA) has been prepared. The EA was prepared in accordance with: (1) The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), (2) regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the procedural 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).

Done in Washington, DC, this 20th day of October, 1999.

Bobby R. Acord,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 99–27920 Filed 10–25–99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–34–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Intergovernmental Advisory Committee Subcommittee Meeting

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: The Intergovernmental Advisory Committee will meet on