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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. 03–021–1]

Tropical Soda Apple; Availability of an Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of availability and request for comments.

SUMMARY: We are advising the public that an environmental assessment has been prepared by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service relative to the control of tropical soda apple, *Solanum viarum* Dunal (Solanaceae). The environmental assessment considers the effects of, and alternatives to, the release of a nonindigenous beetle, *Gratiana boliviana* Spaeth (Coleoptera: Chrysomelidae), into the environment as a biological control agent to reduce the severity of infestations of tropical soda apple in Florida and other infested States in the continental United States. We are making this environmental assessment available to the public for review and comment.

DATES: We will consider all comments that we receive on or before April 4, 2003.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments by postal mail/commercial delivery or by e-mail. If you use postal mail/commercial delivery, please send four copies of your comment (an original and three copies) to: Docket No. 03–021–1, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3C71, 4700 River Road Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737–1238. Please state that your comment refers to Docket No. 03–021–1. If you use e-mail, address your comment to regulations@aphis.usda.gov. Your comment must be contained in the body of your message; do not send attached files. Please include your name and

address in your message and “Docket No. 03–021–1” on the subject line.

You may read any comments that we receive on the environmental assessment in our reading room. The reading room 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) 690–2817 before coming.

APHIS documents published in the **Federal Register**, and related information, including the names of organizations and individuals who have commented on APHIS dockets, are available on the Internet at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppd/rad/webrepor.html>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Tracy A. Horner, Ecologist, Environmental Services, PPD, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 149, Riverdale, MD 20737–1236; (301) 734–5213.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is considering an application from a researcher at the University of Florida for a permit to release a nonindigenous beetle, *Gratiana boliviana* Spaeth (Coleoptera: Chrysomelidae), into the environment to reduce the severity of infestations of tropical soda apple, *Solanum viarum* Dunal (Solanaceae) in Florida and other infested States in the continental United States.

Tropical soda apple is a perennial shrub that belongs to the plant family Solanaceae, section Acanthophora, genus *Solanum*, and subgenus *Leptostemonum*. A plant with foliage unpalatable to livestock, tropical soda apple can infest a pasture or rangeland in 1 to 2 years, resulting in lower stocking rates. It is native to Brazil and Argentina but has become a weed in other areas of South America and in Africa, India, Nepal, the West Indies, Honduras, Mexico, and the United States. Tropical soda apple was originally detected in the United States in Florida in 1988. The pasture land infested in 1992 was estimated to be approximately 150,000 acres; 10 years later, the infested area had increased to more than 1 million acres of improved

pastures, citrus groves, sugar cane fields, ditches, vegetable crops, sod farms, forestlands, and natural areas. Tropical soda apple was placed on the Federal Noxious Weed List in 1995, and it is listed as one of the most invasive species in Florida by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council. In addition to Florida, the plant has been reported in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania. Researchers believe that it has the potential to expand its range even further in the United States.

Three types of controls are currently being used to limit the spread of tropical soda apple: chemical, mechanical, and regulatory. Chemical control involves the use of herbicides. Mechanical control is attempted by mowing to a three- to four-inch height to prevent the plants from producing fruit and seeds. Several southern States are trying to prevent the spread of tropical soda apple by means of regulatory control, regulating the movement of cattle, hay, sod, manure, lots of seed, and soil from infested areas to areas free of infestation. Unfortunately, herbicides and mowing only provide temporary weed suppression, and in addition to being expensive, they are not always practical in inaccessible areas. Moreover, herbicides can have negative environmental effects, which include leaving undesirable chemical residues in the ecosystem and in commodities and adversely affecting non-target organisms.

The biological control agent *G. boliviana*, a nonindigenous tortoise beetle in the insect family Chrysomelidae, has the potential to reduce the severity of infestations of tropical soda apple in Florida and other infested States in the continental United States. Adults and larvae feed on tropical soda apple leaves, restricting the vigor and growth rate of the plants and potentially reducing the competitive advantage this invasive weed has over native vegetation. APHIS has completed an environmental assessment that considers the effects of, and alternatives to, the release of *G. boliviana* into the environment as a biological control agent for tropical soda apple.

APHIS' review and analysis of the potential environmental impacts associated with releasing *G. boliviana*

into the environment are documented in detail in an environmental assessment entitled "Field Release of a Nonindigenous Beetle, *Gratiana boliviana* (Coleoptera: Chrysomelidae), for Biological Control of Tropical Soda Apple, *Solanum viarum* (Solanaceae)" (February 2003). We are making this environmental assessment available to the public for review and comment. We will consider all comments that we receive on or before the date listed under the heading **DATES** at the beginning of this notice.

The environmental assessment may be viewed on the Internet at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/> by following the link for "Document/Forms Retrieval System," then clicking on the triangle beside "6-Permits-Environmental Assessments" and selecting document number 0033. You may request paper copies of the environmental assessment by calling or writing to the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**. Please refer to the title of the environmental assessment when requesting copies. The environmental assessment is also available for review in our reading room (information on the location and hours of the reading room is listed under the heading **ADDRESSES** at the beginning of this notice).

The environmental assessment has been 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 1), and (4) APHIS' NEPA Implementing Procedures (7 CFR part 372).

Done in Washington, DC this 28th day of February 2003.

Peter Fernandez,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 03–5134 Filed 3–4–03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–34–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food and Nutrition Service

Agency Information Collection Activities: Proposed Collection, Comment Request—National Hunger Clearinghouse Survey

AGENCY: Food and Nutrition Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, this

notice announces FNS' intention to request renewal of Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval of the National Hunger Clearinghouse Survey.

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by May 5, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information has practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology. Comments may be sent to Pam Phillips, Director, Consumer and Community Affairs, Office of Communications and Governmental Affairs, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 912, Alexandria, VA 22302.

All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Pam Phillips, (703) 305–2298. Copies of this information collection can be obtained from Martha Newton at the address listed above.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: National Hunger Clearinghouse Survey.

OMB Number: 0584–0474.

Expiration Date: 2/28/03.

Type of Request: Renewal of OMB approval.

Abstract: Section 26(d) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1769g(d)), which was added to the Act by section 123 of Pub. L. 103–448 on November 2, 1994, mandated that FNS enter into a four-year contract with a non-governmental organization to establish and maintain an information clearinghouse (named "USDA National Hunger Clearinghouse" or "Clearinghouse") for groups that assist low-income individuals or communities regarding nutrition assistance programs or other assistance. FNS awarded the contract to World Hunger Year (WHY), Inc. on September 29, 1995; the contract ended on September 30, 1999.

Section 26(d) was amended by section 112 of Pub. L. 105–336 on October 31,

1998 to extend funding for the Clearinghouse (now called "National Hunger Clearinghouse" or "Clearinghouse") through fiscal year 2003. FNS awarded the five-year contract to World Hunger Year on September 29, 1999; it expires on September 30, 2003.

The Clearinghouse includes a database of non-governmental, grassroots programs that work in the areas of hunger and nutrition, as well as a mailing list of relevant local governmental agencies. Under the original contract, Clearinghouse staff established the database by reviewing relevant programs of organizations contained in several existing mailing lists. Program and mailing information about organizations culled from these lists were collected and entered into the database once each contract year (years one through four of the original contract and years one through four so far of the existing contract) through a series of electronically-processed survey questionnaires sent through the United States Postal Service. Clearinghouse staff followed up by phone or facsimile to ensure the highest possible return rate on the questionnaires. Surveys could also be completed on the World Wide Web. Returned surveys were scanned and data entered into the database.

Survey questionnaires will be sent out one more time (year five) in the current contract. For this information collection, the following information was determined:

Estimate of the Burden: Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average five minutes for the survey (the survey includes one two-page instrument).

Respondents: The respondents are non-governmental organizations that have grassroots food and nutrition programs.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 1,750.

Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent: One response per respondent.

Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents: 146 hours.

Dated: February 27, 2003.

Eric M. Bost,

Under Secretary, Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services.

[FR Doc. 03–5114 Filed 3–4–03; 8:45 am]

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