

or crops but did not provide any specific disagreement with APHIS' analysis. Several commenters questioned the performance and drought-tolerant capabilities of corn event MON 87460. Other issues raised by commenters include concerns regarding the adequacy of the analysis in the EA, effects of GE crops on biodiversity and organic agriculture, increased use of glyphosate, health and environmental effects of GE crops, and marketing and trade implications. APHIS has addressed the issues raised during the comment period and has provided responses to the comments as an attachment to the finding of no significant impact.

National Environmental Policy Act

To provide the public with documentation of APHIS' review and analysis of any potential environmental impacts associated with the determination of nonregulated status of Monsanto's corn event MON 87460, an 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). Based on our EA, the response to public comments, and other pertinent scientific data, APHIS has reached a finding of no significant impact with regard to the preferred alternative identified in the EA.

Determination

Based on APHIS' analysis of field and laboratory data submitted by Monsanto, references provided in the petition, peer-reviewed publications, information analyzed in the EA, the PPRA, comments provided by the public, and information provided in APHIS' response to those public comments, APHIS has determined that Monsanto's corn event MON 87460 is unlikely to pose a plant pest risk and therefore is no longer subject to our regulations governing the introduction of certain GE organisms.

Copies of the signed determination document, as well as copies of the petition, PPRA, EA, finding of no significant impact, and response to comments are available as indicated in the **ADDRESSES** and **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** sections of this notice.

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 19th day of December 2011.

Kevin Shea,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 2011–33011 Filed 12–22–11; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–34–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. APHIS–2010–0032]

Notice of Determination of Pest-Free Areas in Mendoza Province, Argentina

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: We are advising the public that we are recognizing the Southern and Central Oases in the southern half of Mendoza Province in Argentina as pest-free areas for Mediterranean fruit fly and South American fruit fly. Based on our site visit to the area and our review of the documentation submitted by Argentina's national plant protection organization, which we made available to the public for review and comment through previous notices, the Administrator has determined that these areas meet the criteria in our regulations for recognition as pest-free areas for Mediterranean fruit fly and South American fruit fly.

DATES: *Effective Date:* December 27, 2011.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ms. Meredith C. Jones, Regulatory Coordination Specialist, Regulatory Coordination and Compliance, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 156, Riverdale, MD 20737; (301) 734–7467.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Under the regulations in “Subpart—Fruits and Vegetables” (7 CFR 319.56–1 through 319.56–54, referred to below as the regulations), the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits or restricts the importation of fruits and vegetables into the United States from certain parts of the world to prevent plant pests from being introduced into and spread within the United States.

Section 319.56–4 of the regulations contains a performance-based process for approving the importation of commodities that, based on the findings of a pest risk analysis, can be safely

imported subject to one or more of the designated phytosanitary measures listed in paragraph (b) of that section. One of the designated phytosanitary measures is that the fruits or vegetables are imported from a pest-free area in the country of origin that meets the requirements of § 319.56–5 for freedom from that pest and are accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate stating that the fruits or vegetables originated in a pest-free area in the country of origin.

Under the regulations in § 319.56–5, APHIS requires that determinations of pest-free areas be made in accordance with the criteria for establishing freedom from pests found in International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM) No. 4, “Requirements For the Establishment of Pest Free Areas.” The international standard was established by the International Plant Protection Convention of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization and is incorporated by reference in our regulations in 7 CFR 300.5. In addition, APHIS must also approve the survey protocol used to determine and maintain pest-free status, as well as protocols for actions to be performed upon detection of a pest. Pest-free areas are subject to audit by APHIS to verify their status.

In accordance with our process, we published a notice¹ in the **Federal Register** on June 25, 2010 (75 FR 36347–36348, Docket No. APHIS–2010–0032), in which we announced the availability, for review and comment, of a commodity import evaluation document (CIED) that evaluates the information presented by Argentina in support of its request to recognize additional areas as pest-free areas for Mediterranean fruit fly (*Ceratitis capitata*) in Argentina. We solicited comments on the notice for 60 days ending on August 24, 2010. We received two comments by that date, one from a State agricultural official and the other from an official of Argentina's national plant protection organization (NPPO).

The first commenter acknowledged Argentina's history of successful Medfly control efforts, but stated that APHIS should not relax its fruit fly-related restrictions until it can confirm that no other pest fruit flies—notably *Anastrepha* species fruit flies—are present in the area. The second commenter provided information to support a finding that the Mendoza Province is free of the South American

¹ To view the June 2010 and August 2011 notices, the CIEDs, and the comments we received, go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=APHIS-2010-0032>.

fruit fly (*Anastrepha fraterculus*). As a result of these comments, APHIS contacted the Argentine NPPO, which requested that, in addition to the pest-free status for *C. capitata*, the Mendoza province of Argentina also be recognized as free of *A. fraterculus*.

We published a second notice in the **Federal Register** on August 19, 2011 (76 FR 51934–51935, Docket No. APHIS–2010–0032), in which we announced the availability, for review and comment, of a CIED evaluating the information presented by Argentina in support of its request to recognize additional areas as pest-free areas for the South American fruit fly and all other economically important species of *Anastrepha* in Argentina. We solicited comments on the notice for 60 days ending on October 18, 2011. We received no comments by that date.

Therefore, in accordance with § 319.56–5(c), we are announcing the Administrator's determination that the Southern and Central Oases in the southern half of Mendoza Province in Argentina meet the criteria of § 319.56–5(a) and (b) with respect to freedom from Medfly, South American fruit fly, and all other economically important species of *Anastrepha*. Accordingly, we are recognizing these areas as pest-free areas for Medfly, South American fruit fly, and all other economically important species of *Anastrepha* and have added them to the list of pest-free areas. A list of pest-free areas currently recognized by APHIS can be found at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/import_export/plants/manuals/ports/downloads/DesignatedPestFreeAreas.pdf.

Done in Washington, DC, this 19th day of December 2011.

Kevin Shea,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 2011–33110 Filed 12–23–11; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. APHIS–2011–0095]

Monsanto Co.; Availability of Petition, Plant Pest Risk Assessment, and Environmental Assessment for Determination of Nonregulated Status of Soybean Genetically Engineered To Produce Stearidonic Acid

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: We are advising the public that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has received a petition from the Monsanto Company seeking a determination of nonregulated status of soybean designated as MON 87769, which has been genetically engineered to produce stearidonic acid, an omega-3 fatty acid not found in conventional soybean. The petition has been submitted in accordance with our regulations concerning the introduction of certain genetically engineered organisms and products. We are soliciting comments on whether this genetically engineered soybean is likely to pose a plant pest risk. We are making available for public comment the Monsanto petition, our plant pest risk assessment, and our draft environmental assessment for the proposed determination of nonregulated status.

DATES: We will consider all comments that we receive on or before February 27, 2012.

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

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal:* Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=APHIS-2011-0095-0001>.

- *Postal Mail/Commercial Delivery:* Send your comment to Docket No. APHIS–2011–0095, 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-2011-0095> 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) 690–2817 before coming.

The petition, draft environmental assessment, and plant pest risk assessment are also available on the APHIS Web site at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/brs/aphisdocs/09_18301p.pdf, http://www.aphis.usda.gov/brs/aphisdocs/09_18301p_dea.pdf, and http://www.aphis.usda.gov/brs/aphisdocs/09_18301p_dpra.pdf.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Evan Chestnut, Policy Analyst, Biotechnology Regulatory Services, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 147, Riverdale, MD 20737–1236; (301) 734–0942, email: evan.a.chestnut@aphis.usda.gov. To

obtain copies of the petition, draft environmental assessment, or plant pest risk assessment, contact Ms. Cindy Eck at (301) 734–0667, 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 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 09–183–01p) from the Monsanto Company (Monsanto) of St. Louis, MO, seeking a determination of nonregulated status of soybean (*Glycine max*) designated as event MON 87769, which has been genetically engineered to produce stearidonic acid, an omega-3 fatty acid not found in conventional soybean, stating that this soybean 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, soybean event MON 87769 has been genetically engineered to express high levels of the fatty acid stearidonic acid and smaller amounts of three other fatty acids, as well as for reduced expression of linoleic acid. Soybean event MON 87769 is currently regulated under 7 CFR part 340. Interstate movements and field tests of soybean event MON 87769 have been conducted under permits issued or 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