

USDA Announces Next Steps on Sugar Beets

WASHINGTON, Sept. 1, 2010

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) today announced the agency's next steps in response to a recent court decision on Roundup Ready sugar beets.

"USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service must chart a course for compliance with its statutory authorities and environmental statutes, such as NEPA, while USDA works to create the environment where all types of producers can and do produce all types of crops," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "The steps we have outlined today not only respond to the concerns of producers while complying with the court's ruling, but also further USDA's continuing efforts to enable coexistence among conventional, organic, and biotechnology production systems."

APHIS announced the following steps:

- APHIS has received applications from and is issuing permits to sugar beet seed producers to authorize "steckling" (i.e seedlings) production this fall under strict permit conditions that would not allow flowering of the stecklings. APHIS anticipates that issuance of such non-flowering permits can be completed in the next 2 weeks.
- APHIS has also received and is evaluating a request for a partial deregulation of Roundup Ready sugar beets. In connection with this evaluation, APHIS is developing an appropriate environmental analysis to inform its decision making regarding this request to authorize future seed and root crop plantings under a combination of permits, administrative orders, or other regulatory measures. Any regulatory measures taken would include mitigating restrictions consistent with those proposed to the Court as interim measures while APHIS completes the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the petition for determination of non-regulated status for GE sugar beets. APHIS anticipates making decisions on appropriate interim regulatory measures by the end of the year. There will be an opportunity for public comment on any environmental analyses developed.
- APHIS will continue to place a priority on the expedited completion of the EIS, a process that is anticipated to take 2 years.

The Court's ruling does return genetically engineered sugar beets to regulated status, but does not apply to genetically engineered sugar beet root and seed crops that were planted by August 13, 2010. The genetically engineered sugar beet root crop that has already been planted may be processed and sold as sugar. The genetically engineered sugar beet seed crop that has already been planted may be harvested and stored. The Court's ruling does not preclude the appropriate exercise of APHIS' administrative discretion to authorize the future planting of Roundup Ready sugar beets pursuant to USDA's regulatory authority and biotechnology regulations.