

Questions and Answers: Partial Deregulation of Roundup Ready Sugar Beets

Q. What are Roundup Ready sugar beets

A. Roundup Ready (RR) sugar beets are sugar beets that have been genetically engineered (GE) to be resistant to the herbicide glyphosate, commonly known as Roundup®.

Q. Why is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) partially deregulating RR sugar beets?

A. After conducting an environmental assessment, accepting and reviewing public comments, and conducting a plant pest risk assessment, APHIS has determined that the Roundup Ready sugar beet root crop, when grown under APHIS imposed conditions, can be partially deregulated without posing a plant pest risk or having a significant effect on the environment. This partial deregulation is an interim measure until APHIS is able to complete a full environmental impact statement.

Q. How did APHIS come to its decision of partially deregulating RR sugar beets?

A. In November 2010, APHIS released an environmental assessment (EA) that examined a range of options for addressing Monsanto Company (Monsanto) and KWS SAAT AG's (KWS) request that the agency allow continued cultivation of RR sugar beets under carefully tailored measures.

In response to APHIS' request for comment on the draft environmental assessment (EA), many comments expressed interest in an alternative that combined aspects of alternatives 2 and 3, so that sugar beets could be partially deregulated with conditions imposed by APHIS. Monsanto also submitted information that expanded upon what the petitioners meant by "partial deregulation." APHIS reviewed this additional information and developed its preferred alternative that partially deregulates sugar beets by combining the administrative aspects of alternatives 2 and 3.

Q. What does the Preferred Alternative in the EA require?

A. Pursuant to the partial deregulation, growers of RR sugar beet root crop will be required to enter into a compliance agreement that outlines mandatory requirements for how the crop can be grown. If APHIS determines that the mandatory conditions of the partial deregulation set forth in the compliance agreements are not complied with, APHIS has the discretion to revoke, withdraw, or otherwise cancel the conditional partial deregulation for root crop production. Further, APHIS may use the full range of its Plant Protection Act authorities to impose civil and/or criminal penalties and remedial measures, including seizure, quarantine, and/or destruction of root crop that is in violation of the mandatory conditions of the partial deregulation. APHIS has also issued its decision to continue to regulate the seed crop through its permitting process.

Q. What are the mandatory conditions for the partial deregulation?

A. The mandatory conditions for the partial deregulation of RR sugar beets consist of:

1. APHIS permits and notifications authorizing the plantings, interstate movement, and importation of RR sugar beets associated with seed production, including mandatory permit conditions; and
2. compliance agreement with mandatory conditions and restrictions associated with the planting, interstate movement, and importation of RR sugar beet root crop. RR sugar beets could be harvested, processed, stored, transported, processed, and sold in commerce subject to these conditions.

Q. Does this decision suggest that APHIS will eventually deregulate RR sugar beets?

A. This partial deregulation is an interim action and does not indicate that APHIS will or will not decide to fully deregulate RR sugar beets. APHIS will not make that decision until its RR sugar beet environmental impact statement (EIS) process is complete.

Q. When do you expect the EIS for RR sugar beets to be completed?

A. APHIS has begun to prepare the EIS and estimates that it will be completed by May 31, 2012.

Q. Why does this process take so long?

A. APHIS must ensure that it has adequate time to fully and appropriately examine the potential environmental effects that may result from a determination of nonregulated status.

Q. Are RR sugar beets widely grown?

A. Currently, RR sugar beets are processed into a large percentage of the United States' domestic sugar supply. USDA's Economic Research Service estimates that adoption of GE sugar beet varieties exceeded 95 percent of U.S. sugar beet production in 2010.

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