USDA APHIS Reopens Public Comment Period On The dEIS And PRA

Friday, April 19, 2019

On April 12, 2019, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) announced the reopening of the public review and comment period for the draft Environmental Impact Statement (dEIS) and the preliminary Pest Risk Assessment (PRA). These two documents have been prepared in response to a permit application from a company requesting the environmental release of genetically engineered (GE) Citrus tristeza virus (CTV). The reopening of comments is the result of a new research paper released after the initial comment period back in the summer of 2018. The research paper examines the movement of CTV, which could raise questions regarding the transmissibility of GE CTV. Updates to the dEIS and PRA have been made according to the new information obtained. While the dEIS evaluated the environmental impacts that could result from approving the permit application, the preliminary PRA analyzes the GE plant virus as a biological control measure and its potential to pose a risk to plant health. In its announcement, USDA APHIS clearly states that applying GE CTV does not mean that the trees are themselves GE. The permit application requests the approval for the use of GE CTV as a biological control agent that would help manage citrus greening disease. Instead, a gene from spinach is delivered to the tree’s circulatory system. Comments must be submitted on or prior to April 30, 2019.

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