The introduction and establishment of new honeybee diseases, parasites, and undesirable honeybee strains in the United States could cause multimillion dollar losses to American agriculture. Diseases or parasites can weaken or kill honeybees, thereby causing substantial reductions in the production of honey and other honeybee products, as well as a reduction in pollination activity. Pollination is necessary for the production of many important crops, including forages, fruits, vegetables, and vegetable oils.

To protect the health of the U.S. honeybee population, we engage in a number of information collection activities designed to allow us to determine whether shipments of honeybees, honeybee semen, or bee-related items (such as beekeeping equipment) represent a possible risk of introducing exotic bee diseases, parasites, or undesirable honeybee strains into the United States.

Our primary means of obtaining this vital information is requiring importers to apply to us for an import permit. The permit application contains such information as the amount of bee semen to be imported and the species or subspecies of honeybee from which the semen was collected; the country or locality of origin; and the intended port of entry in the United States.

We also require importers and shippers to adhere to a number of marking and shipping requirements that enable us to easily identify and process shipments of honeybees, honeybee semen, and other restricted articles when they arrive at U.S. ports of entry.

These information gathering procedures help us prevent the entry of shipments that pose a potential health risk to the U.S. honeybee population.

We are asking the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to approve the continued use of this information collection activity.

The purpose of this notice is to solicit comments from the public (as well as affected agencies) concerning our information collection. We need this outside input to help us:

(1) Evaluate whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Agency, including whether the information will have practical utility;

(2) Evaluate the accuracy of our estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used;

(3) Enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and

(4) Minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, through use, as appropriate, of automated, electronic, mechanical, and other collection technologies, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses.

Estimate of burden: The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average .269 hours per response.

Respondents: Importers and shippers of honeybees, honeybee semen, and other regulated articles.

Estimated annual number of respondents: 91.

Estimated annual number of responses per respondent: 1.2637.

Estimated annual number of responses: 115.

Estimated total annual burden on respondents: 31 hours. (Due to rounding, the total annual burden hours may not equal the product of the annual number of responses multiplied by the average reporting burden per response.)

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.

Done in Washington, DC, this 18th day of February 1998.

Craig A. Reed,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 98–4493 Filed 2–20–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–34–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. 97–119–1]

AgrEvo USA Co.; Receipt of Petition for Determination of Nonregulated Status for Corn Genetically Engineered for Insect Resistance and Glufosinate Herbicide Tolerance

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 AgrEvo USA Company seeking a determination of nonregulated status for corn designated as Transformation Event CBH–351, which has been genetically engineered for insect resistance and tolerance to the herbicide glufosinate. The petition has been submitted in accordance with our regulations concerning the introduction of certain genetically engineered organisms and products. In accordance with those regulations, we are soliciting public comments on whether this corn presents a plant pest risk.

DATES: Written comments must be received on or before April 24, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Please send an original and three copies of your comments to Docket No. 97–119–1, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Suite 3C03, 4700 River Road Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737–1238. Please state that your comments refer to Docket No. 97–119–1. A copy of the petition and any comments received may be inspected at USDA, room 1141, South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC, between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. Persons wishing access to that room to inspect the petition or comments are asked to call in advance of visiting at (202) 690–2817 to facilitate entry into the reading room.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Susan Koehler, Biotechnology and Biological Analysis, PPQ, APHIS, Suite 5B05, 4700 River Road Unit 147, Riverdale, MD 20737–1236; (301) 734–4886. To obtain a copy of the petition, contact Ms. Kay Peterson at (301) 734–4885; e-mail: mkpeterson@aphis.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: 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 determination of nonregulated status must take and the information that must be included in the petition.

On September 22, 1997, APHIS received a petition (APHIS Petition No. 97–265–01p) from AgrEvo USA Company (AgrEvo) of Wilmington, DE, requesting a determination of nonregulated status under 7 CFR part 340 for corn designated as

Transformation Event CBH–351 (event CBH–351), which has been genetically engineered for insect resistance and tolerance to the herbicide glufosinate. The AgrEvo petition states that the subject corn should not be regulated by APHIS because it does not present a plant pest risk.

As described in the petition, event CBH–351 corn has been genetically engineered to express a Cry9C insecticidal protein derived from the common soil bacterium, *Bacillus thuringiensis* subsp. *tolworthi (Bt tolworthi)*. The petitioner states that the Cry9C protein is effective in controlling the larvae of the European corn borer during the complete growing season. The subject corn also contains the *bar* gene derived from the bacterium *Streptomyces hygroscopicus*. The *bar* gene encodes the phosphinothricin acetyltransferase (PAT) protein, which confers tolerance to the herbicide glufosinate. Expression of these added genes is controlled in part by gene sequences from the plant pathogens cauliflower mosaic virus and *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*. Microprojectile bombardment was used to transfer the added genes into the recipient inbred corn line (PA91 × H99) × H99. While the subject corn contains the *bla* selectable marker gene, which is normally expressed in bacteria, tests indicate that this gene is not expressed in the plant.

Event CBH–351 corn has been considered a regulated article under the regulations in 7 CFR part 340 because it contains gene sequences from plant pathogens. This corn has been field tested since 1995 in the United States under APHIS notifications. In the process of reviewing the notifications for field trials of the subject corn, APHIS determined that the vectors and other elements were disarmed and that the trials, which were conducted under conditions of reproductive and physical containment or isolation, would not present a risk of plant pest introduction or dissemination.

In the Federal Plant Pest Act, as amended (7 U.S.C. 150aa, *et seq.*), ''plant pest'' is defined as ''any living stage of: Any insects, mites, nematodes, slugs, snails, protozoa, or other invertebrate animals, bacteria, fungi, other parasitic plants or reproductive parts thereof, viruses, or any organisms similar to or allied with any of the foregoing, or any infectious substances, which can directly or indirectly injure or cause disease or damage in any plants or parts thereof, or any processed, manufactured or other products of plants.'' APHIS views this definition very broadly. The definition covers direct or indirect injury, disease, or damage not just to agricultural crops, but also to plants in general, for example, native species, as well as to organisms that may be beneficial to plants, for example, honeybees, rhizobia, etc.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for the regulation of pesticides under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA), as amended (7 U.S.C. 136, *et seq.*). FIFRA requires that all pesticides, including herbicides, be registered prior to distribution or sale, unless exempt by EPA regulation. In cases in which genetically modified plants allow for a new use of an herbicide or involve a different use pattern for the herbicide, EPA must approve the new or different use. When the use of the herbicide on the genetically modified plant would result in an increase in the residues of the herbicide in a food or feed crop for which the herbicide is currently registered, or in new residues in a crop for which the herbicide is not currently registered, establishment of a new tolerance or a revision of the existing tolerance would be required. Residue tolerances for pesticides are established by EPA under the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act (FFDCA), as amended (21 U.S.C. 301, *et seq.*), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) enforces tolerances set by EPA under the FFDCA. A pesticide petition has been filed with EPA to establish a regulation for an exemption from the requirement of a tolerance for residues of *Bt tolworthi* Cry9C and the genetic material necessary for its production in or on all raw agricultural commodities.

FDA published a statement of policy on foods derived from new plant varieties in the **Federal Register** on May 29, 1992 (57 FR 22984–23005). The FDA statement of policy includes a discussion of FDA's authority for ensuring food safety under the FFDCA, and provides guidance to industry on the scientific considerations associated with the development of foods derived from new plant varieties, including those plants developed through the techniques of genetic engineering. The petitioner has begun consultation with FDA on the subject corn.

In accordance with § 340.6(d) of the regulations, we are publishing this notice to inform the public that APHIS will accept written comments regarding the Petition for Determination of Nonregulated Status from any interested person for a period of 60 days from the date of this notice. The petition and any comments received are available for public review, and copies of the petition may be ordered (see the **ADDRESSES** section of this notice).

After the comment period closes, APHIS will review the data submitted by the petitioner, all written comments received during the comment period, and any other relevant information. Based on the available information, APHIS will furnish a response to the petitioner, either approving the petition in whole or in part, or denying the petition. APHIS will then publish a notice in the **Federal Register** announcing the regulatory status of AgrEvo's insect resistant and glufosinate-tolerant corn event CBH–351 and the availability of APHIS' written decision.

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 150aa–150jj, 151–167, and 1622n; 31 U.S.C. 9701; 7 CFR 2.22, 2.80, and 371.2(c).

Done in Washington, DC, this 18th day of February 1998.

Craig A. Reed,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 98–4492 Filed 2–20–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–34–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Housing Service

Rural Business-Cooperative Service

Rural Utilities Service

Farm Service Agency

Notice of Request for Extension of a Currently Approved Information Collection

AGENCIES: Rural Housing Service, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, Rural Utilities Service, and Farm Service Agency, USDA.

ACTION: Proposed collection; comments request.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, this notice announces the intention of the above-named Agencies to request an extension for the currently approved information collection in support of the servicing of Community and Insured Business Programs Loans and Grants.

DATES: Comments on this notice must be received by April 24, 1998 to be assured of consideration.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Sharon R. Douglas, Loan Specialist, Community Programs Division, Rural Housing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Stop 3222, 1400 Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC 20250–3222. Telephone (202) 720–1506.