

US regulators propose restrictive rules for GMO wheat field trials

After rogue genetically engineered wheat plants found in Oregon and Montana caused market fluctuations and lawsuits, the federal regulating agency [proposed](#) a change to its oversight regulations. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is requesting comments on a September 25th proposal to require permits for field testing of genetically engineered (GE) wheat instead of the current notification system.

The notification system is an "expedited procedure that is less rigorous than permitting," according to a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report that was compiled after the separate discoveries of GE wheat in Oregon and Montana. "Permits impose restrictions on movement and planting to prevent escape of plant material that may pose a pest risk. Sponsors follow APHIS guidance on testing and movements to ensure that the plant will not damage agriculture, human health, or the environment," the report said.

APHIS conducted an extensive investigation into the Oregon incident that generated a report that is almost 13,000 pages long. The agency found that it was an "isolated occurrence," but was unable to determine how the GE wheat got into that field. The investigation into the Montana incident is apparently still ongoing.

These incidents are not unique blots on APHIS' track record. In 2001, GE corn was found in taco shells made by Kraft Foods, in 2006 GE rice was reported in commercial rice samples, and an unapproved GE cotton variety that produces its own pesticide was found in a crop of approved GE cotton in 2008.

"Such incidents of regulatory noncompliance continue to raise concerns about the limitations of APHIS' biotechnology regulatory structure. Critics of GE crops have pointed to these incidents as evidence of APHIS' lax oversight and inadequate field trial protocols," the CRS report said.

Comments on the permitting proposal are due Oct. 26.