

Statement by the Sugar Industry Biotech Council on USDA's APHIS Announcement for Partial Deregulation of Roundup Ready Sugar Beets

February 8, 2011

On February 4, 2011, the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) authorized planting of Roundup Ready sugar beets. USDA APHIS' decision included mandatory interim measures for planting Roundup Ready sugar beet crops, including the spring 2011 crop, while APHIS prepares a final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on Roundup Ready sugar beets.

The sugar beet industry appreciates the Secretary's leadership and USDA's thorough scientific review reflected in this partial deregulation of Roundup Ready sugar beets while work on the EIS continues. To address the uncertainty created by the Center for Food Safety's vows to overturn APHIS' determination, the sugar beet industry has filed a lawsuit in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia that, in part, seeks a declaratory judgment that APHIS' action fulfills the requirements of federal law.

Because the sugar beet industry feels that a few of the mandatory measures required by APHIS go beyond what is required under federal law, the lawsuit also asks the Court to determine that certain of the interim measures adopted by APHIS impose an unnecessary burden. This lawsuit does not reflect a lack of respect or dissatisfaction with the significant work that USDA has undertaken to address matters that are critical to our industry, including the opportunity to plant Roundup Ready sugar beets this spring.

Sugar beets are unique in that the commercial crop grown for sugar production does not produce seed. Since the crop was deregulated in 2005, there has been no evidence of harm. In fact, Roundup Ready sugar beets offer numerous environmental benefits. The Roundup Ready system in sugar beets requires fewer herbicide applications to effectively control weeds. Fewer trips across the field mean reduced greenhouse gas emissions, reduced soil erosion, reduced soil compaction and enhanced water conservation.

Sugar beets are an important crop, planted on 1.2 million acres in the United States annually and supplying half of our nation's sugar. This important supply is essential for our food manufacturers and consumers. The value of sugar beet crops is critically important to rural communities and their economies. Roundup Ready sugar beets planted on 95 percent of all sugar beet acreage have allowed growers to control weeds – one of their greatest challenges – in a more environmentally sustainable way. Sugar beet growers are committed to protecting this technology now and in the future for all growers, rural communities, the North American food industry and consumers.