

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Might We Get Orange Petunias Back?

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We might, if the USDA's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) agrees with German breeder Westhoff's recent petition to grant "non-regulated" status to any petunias that contain the orange-inducing maize gene that the USDA banned two years ago.

You recall the story: A plant biologist noticed an orange petunia in a planter at a train station in Helsinki, Finland. He mentioned it to a friend at the Finnish Board for Gene Technology, and the next thing we know, plant health organizations around the world are banning any petunia that carries this maize gene. We in the U.S. lost scores of colorful petunias, some of which are not the least bit orange, such as Supertunia Raspberry Blast. (Canada chose not to ban the plants.)

Westhoff, which saw about 25% of its petunia varieties caught up in the orange gene fiasco, filed a petition on July 25 asking APHIS to reverse its decision and allow petunias with the gene to be sold in the U.S. As I understand it, the decision would apply to all petunias, not just Westhoff's. Here's the announcement from APHIS:

We are advising the public that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has received a petition from Westhoff Vertriebsgesellschaft mbH (Westhoff) seeking a determination of nonregulated status of petunias containing the A1 gene of maize (A1-DFR Petunias), which have been genetically engineered to add a new color (orange) and brilliance. The petition has been submitted in accordance with our regulations concerning the introduction of certain genetically engineered organisms and products. We are making the Westhoff petition available for review and comment to help us identify potential environmental and interrelated economic issues and impacts that APHIS may determine should be considered in our evaluation of the petition.

The comment period closed on September 23, with seven commenters in favor and two opposed. Now the fate of orange petunias is in APHIS's hands.

Read the full petition and all the comments at www.regulations.gov/docket?D=APHIS-2019-0037. **GT**