

## Glyphosate-resistant Kentucky bluegrass one step closer



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Is genetically engineered (GE) Kentucky bluegrass in your future? Probably not in your near-term future but, yes, you'll likely see it within a couple of years, says Scotts Miracle-Gro.

Glyphosate-tolerant bluegrass recently took another step to eventually entering the market. And this over strong concerns by the Center for Food Safety (CES), which is fearful that the variety's resistance to the herbicide commonly known as Roundup would increase the likelihood that it becoming a troublesome weed.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) doesn't feel the tolerance to a single herbicide warrants regulating it as a noxious weed. APHIS ruled in mid July that the Roundup-tolerant Kentucky bluegrass doesn't fall under its authority for regulation. Kentucky bluegrass is grown across the United States, but is best suited to northern and mountainous regions of North America, where it's the turfgrass of choice for home lawns, commercial properties, sports fields, parks, cemeteries – indeed just about anywhere a green, dense sward is desired. GE turfgrasses, including creeping bentgrass for golf courses, have been a reality for more than a decade. Their release as a commercially available varieties, however, remain under review by several government agencies. The commercial entry of a glyphosate-resistant turfgrasses, of course, would require a dramatically different weed management strategy than is presently being practiced by most turfgrass professionals and homeowners. Consider the impact of GE beans and corn on agriculture, for example.

"USDA strongly encourages Scotts, early in the research stages of GE Kentucky bluegrass, to work with industry partners and stakeholders and to develop appropriate and effective stewardship measures," urged Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to Scotts.

In a September 2010 letter to USDA, Scotts sought confirmation that its Kentucky bluegrass variety, which is genetically engineered to be resistant

to the herbicide glyphosate, is not regulated under APHIS' plant pest authority in the Plant Protection Act or biotechnology regulations. APHIS confirmed that organisms used in generating Scotts' variety of GE Kentucky bluegrass are not considered to be plant pests, and the company did not use a plant pest to genetically engineer that variety of bluegrass. The government agency added that it has no reason to believe that the modified bluegrass itself is a plant pest.

The question of whether the herbicide-resistant turfgrass variety posed a risk of becoming a serious weed risk was raised in 2002. Subsequently, APHIS to conducted a risk assessment and evaluated whether impacts posed by the polant would warrant it being regulated as a federal noxious weed. APHIS has made all materials regulated to Scotts' herbicide-tolerant bluegrass available at [www.aphis.usda.gov](http://www.aphis.usda.gov), including its responses to Scotts and the International Center for Technology Assessment and the Center for Food Safety; the risk assessment; and other accompanying documents.