

PRE-PUBLICATION NOTICE

On June 30, 2026, Douglas M. Troutman, the EPA Assistant Administrator for the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention, signed the following document:

Action: **Notice**
Title: **Innovation Challenge: Alternatives to Conventional Pesticides for Crop Desiccation; Notice of Availability**
FRL #: **FRL-13375-01-OCSPP**
Docket ID #: **EPA-HQ-OPP-2026-3862**

EPA is submitting this document for publication in the *Federal Register* (FR). EPA is providing this document solely for the convenience of interested parties. It is not the official version of the document for purposes of public notice and comment under the Administrative Procedure Act. This document is not disseminated for purposes of EPA's Information Quality Guidelines and does not represent an Agency determination or policy. While we have taken steps to ensure the accuracy of this Internet version of the document that was signed, the official version will publish in a forthcoming FR publication, which will appear on the Government Printing Office's govinfo website (<https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/fr>) and on Regulations.gov (<https://www.regulations.gov>) in the docket identified above.

Once the official version of this document is published in the *Federal Register*, this version will be removed from the Internet and replaced with a link to the official version. At that time, you will also be able to access the on-line docket for this *Federal Register* document at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

For further information about the docket and, if applicable, instructions for commenting, please consult the ADDRESSES section in the front of the Federal Register document.

This page is intentionally blank.

BILLING CODE 6560-50-P

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

[EPA-HQ-OPP-2026-3862; FRL-13375-01-OCSP]

Innovation Challenge: Alternatives to Conventional Pesticides for Crop Desiccation; Notice of Availability

AGENCY: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is announcing this request for information (RFI) seeking public input to inform development of an Innovation Challenge focused on practical, cost-effective alternatives to using conventional pesticide chemicals for crop desiccation. EPA aims to identify opportunities to reduce reliance on conventional pesticide chemical desiccants while supporting harvest readiness, crop quality, and operational efficiency. Input will help EPA shape the challenge's scope, eligibility, evaluation criteria, and potential pilot or demonstration components.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before **[insert date 90 days after date of publication in the *Federal Register*]**.

ADDRESSES: Submit your comments, identified by docket identification (ID) number EPA-HQ-OPP-2026-3862, through <https://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the online instructions for submitting comments. Do not submit electronically any information you consider to be Confidential Business Information (CBI) or other information whose disclosure is restricted by statute. Additional instructions on commenting or visiting the docket, along with more information about dockets generally, is available at <https://www.epa.gov/dockets>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Elizabeth Vizard, Immediate Office (mail

code 7501P), Office of Pesticide Programs, Environmental Protection Agency, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW., Washington, DC 20460-0001; telephone number: 202-566-9878; email address: *PestDesChallenge@epa.gov*

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

I. Executive Summary

A. Does This Action Apply to Me?

You may be potentially affected by this action if you grow, process, research, or otherwise work with crops that commonly use desiccants, or if you develop, supply, or investigate technologies related to harvest readiness or crop dry down. Potentially affected entities may include, the following list of North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) codes affected by this action are those that align with these activities:

- Agricultural organizations (except youth farming organizations, farm granges), Farmers' associations, Farmers' unions, and Growers' associations (NAICS 8133910)
- Agricultural Implement Manufacturing (NAICS 33311),
 - Agricultural cooperative extension program administration (NAICS 926140),
 - Agricultural pest and weed regulation, government; Pest control programs, agriculture, government; Regulation and inspection of agricultural products; Weed control, agriculture, government (NAICS 926140),
- Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools (NAICS 611310),
- Farming of various types of crops (NAICS 111),
- Food Manufacturing: includes an array of human and animal food production subsectors (NAICS 311), and
- Support Activities for Crop Production, covering firms engaged in: aerial crop dusting or

spraying (i.e., using specialized or dedicated aircraft), Farm management services, Planting crops, Cultivating service (NAICS 11511).

If you have any questions regarding the applicability of this proposed action to a particular entity, consult the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

B. What is the Agency's authority for taking this action?

The Innovation Challenge is being conducted under the America Competes Act of 2010 (15 U.S.C. 3719) which authorizes U.S. federal agencies to conduct prize competitions to stimulate innovation, advance agency missions, and solve problems. It allows agencies to award prizes, engage the private sector, and use federal resources to foster technological breakthroughs.

C. What action is the Agency taking?

This request for information (RFI) seeks input to support the development of an Innovation Challenge promoting alternatives to using conventional pesticides chemicals for crop desiccation. This RFI will supplement stakeholder consultations and help shape the challenge's scope, eligibility, and evaluation criteria.

D. What Should I Consider as I Prepare My Comments for EPA?

1. Submitting CBI. Do not submit CBI through <https://www.regulations.gov> or email. If you wish to include CBI in your comment, follow the instructions at <https://www.epa.gov/dockets/commenting-epa-dockets#rules> and clearly mark all information claimed as CBI. Information so marked will not be disclosed except in accordance with 40 CFR parts 2 and 703, as applicable.

2. Tips for Preparing Your Comments. When preparing and submitting your comments, see the commenting tips at <https://www.epa.gov/dockets/commenting-epa-dockets>.

II. Background

Desiccants are defined as pesticides used to artificially accelerate the drying of plant tissue (7 U.S.C. 136(g)). For purposes of this Innovation Challenge, EPA is focused on desiccants and desiccation methods used on growing crops near the end of the growing season to accelerate dry down, increase harvest uniformity, and improve harvest efficiency. They are commonly used in crops such as small grains, pulses, oilseeds, cotton, and potatoes.

Stakeholders have expressed interest in reducing reliance on using conventional pesticides for crop desiccation due to perceived concerns related to pesticide residues, applicator exposure, regulatory variability, and market preferences. Conventional pesticides that act as desiccants are generally synthetic chemicals that accelerate the drying of plant tissue, as opposed to biological pesticides (that are derived from natural materials) and antimicrobial pesticides (intended to have pesticidal action against microbes).

Potential alternatives envisioned as part of this Innovative Challenge include non-conventional pesticide desiccants, agronomic strategies, mechanical or physical methods, biological approaches such as plant breeding innovations, precision agriculture tools, and postharvest conditioning technologies.

EPA invites responses from growers; producer organizations and cooperatives; equipment manufacturers; input suppliers; storers and processors; researchers; state, local, territorial, and tribal governments; non-governmental organizations; food and feed companies; and other interested parties.

III. Request for Public Comment

A. What feedback does EPA hope to gain from public comments?

EPA is seeking public input on specific aspects of the Innovation Challenge. The

following information and topics may help inform stakeholder input on barriers and needs, program design and funding uses, phasing and award structure, and additional information for the Agency.

1. *Barriers and needs.* EPA is requesting information on crop production.

- What types of crop desiccants do growers currently use? Both quantitative and qualitative information is welcomed. Please also provide information on what crop is being produced.

- What alternatives to conventional pesticide chemical desiccation are currently available to growers?

- Do growers commonly use non-conventional pesticide chemical desiccation options? If not, what are the reasons growers do not commonly use them?

- Does equipment currently exist or can equipment be modified to accelerate crop drying such that harvest is not slowed?

- Do other supply chain participants (storers, shippers, processors, manufacturers, grocers, etc.) have any characteristics they are seeking in a desiccant or drying method? Or any characteristics that they prefer to avoid?

- Are there barriers (technical, operational, regulatory, market) to adopting alternatives to conventional pesticide chemical desiccation in your crops/regions? Please specify.

- What standards (e.g., residue/quality metrics, moisture targets, lodging risk, storability) must be met to make a particular non-conventional pesticide chemical desiccant method practically and/or economically viable for growers? Are there other requirements a non-conventional pesticide chemical desiccation option must meet to make it viable for grower adoption?

- Aside from potential human health and environmental risks, are there other current limitations growers experience when utilizing conventional pesticide chemical desiccants? Are these shortcomings or limitations something a non-conventional pesticide chemical desiccant could or should potentially alleviate for growers or their markets? If yes, please specify what those limitations are.

- Are you aware of existing or ongoing research that pertains to non-conventional pesticide chemical desiccants or non-pesticidal drying methods, specifically those with a lower risk profile to human health or the environment than those that are currently available or commonly used by growers?

2. *Program design and funding uses.* EPA is requesting information on program eligibility and outreach.

- What eligibility requirements should be considered for potential award recipients?

- Should EPA use this contest to promote research into new technologies? If so, should EPA require progress reports? Should EPA reward someone who has already developed a new technology?

- Should EPA use this contest to promote outreach (i.e., programs to encourage adoption of alternatives to desiccation by conventional pesticide chemicals)? Should EPA reward existing successful programs, and/or possible startup programs?

- Should EPA specifically focus the contest on a particular crop or region of the country where desiccation is particularly high? Or should EPA ask entrants to explain why their idea/submission will have a substantial effect on the amount of conventional pesticide chemical desiccants being used for plant desiccation?

- If an applicant presents EPA with an existing or new technology as a proposed

alternative to conventional pesticide chemical desiccation, what metrics should be used to evaluate it?

3. *Phasing and award structure.* EPA is requesting information on program implementation.

- How should EPA distribute the \$30 million total prize? For example, should EPA issue the prize to a single winner; should it be divided among multiple prizes?

- Should the challenge use a phased approach (e.g., Phase 1 ideation; Phase 2 proof-of-concept; Phase 3 pilot/demonstration)? Recommend phase timing, deliverables, and funding levels.

4. *Overall approach.* EPA recognizes the importance of transparency and stakeholder input as we continue to develop this program. Other feedback is welcome in the form of questions, comments or additional information for consideration as we move forward.

- Share any studies, case examples, or data sets that could inform challenge design, evaluation criteria, or regional pilot selection.

- Identify any priority crops/regions for early demonstrations and any partnerships that may be ready to participate.

B. What is the request for information?

EPA encourages all potentially interested parties, including growers and producer organizations, agricultural equipment manufacturers, agricultural research and extension services, food and feed processors, State, Local, Territorial, and Tribal Governments, and NGOs to comment on the Innovation Challenge. To the extent possible, the Agency asks commenters to please provide contact information, organization type, relevant experience, and any links to supporting materials i.e. please cite any public data related to or that supports responses, and to

the extent permissible, describe any supporting data that is not publicly available.

Authority: Authority: 15 U.S.C. 3719

Dated: June 30, 2026.

Douglas M. Troutman

Assistant Administrator, Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention