change the definition of "media". Therefore this comment is not germane to the proposal.

One commenter suggested that Dutch and Israeli imports should be imported only in absolutely sterile media. This commenter stated that all kinds of weeds and diseases are imported into The Netherlands and handled there in ways that circumvent inspection or quarantine requirements theoretically designed to control the pests. The commenter also stated that sterile media is necessary for plants from Israel because desert weeds and diseases that occur there have not been identified or are not well known, but present risks.

Response: We cannot respond since we have no evidence to support these claims, and the commenter did not provide evidence to support his claim.

Several commenters stated that no plants in media should be allowed to be imported into the United States.

Response: Certain plants are already enterable in media; we did not propose to change the entry status of those plants. This commenter did not explain why no plants in media should be allowed entry.

Anthurium Concerns

Commenters opposed to allowing the importation of Anthurium species noted that the Anthurium industry in Hawaii has had to deal with introduction of *Xanthomonas campestris* pathovar *dieffenbachiae* with losses of \$8.5 million. They stated that Hawaii is especially liable to new pest infestations, and that anthuriums are especially susceptible to new pests. They also stated that the scientific information on pests of anthuriums is probably not all inclusive because anthuriums have not been of great economic importance compared to other cut flowers.

Response: The special vulnerability of Hawaii to tropical pests that do not survive well in most of the United States was considered by the pest risk analysis for anthuriums. During the analysis, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, California, and Florida were specifically considered and recognized as areas that needed special consideration due to their climate. We understand that the scientific information on pests of anthuriums, like most plants, is not all inclusive. We must use the best information available in making our decisions. The safeguards in the rule are deliberately broad to provide protection against a diversity of plant pests including those that were not identified.

Several commenters stated that the proposed requirements were not fully adequate because the APHIS pest risk

analysis states that for some plants, inspection at port of entry would not serve as an adequate safeguard since symptoms of significant diseases are not present during the incubation period.

Response: As with other plants in media, the primary safeguards are those applied before and during growth in the foreign country. These safeguards are very strict because inspection at port of entry will not serve as an adequate safeguard for certain pests, either because of their size, or because symptoms are not present during the incubation period, or because pests would be hidden by the growing medium.

Several commenters stated that the decision to import the five genera, especially *Rhododendron*, seems to go against the findings of the APHIS committee of researchers who prepared the worksheets and evaluations of pest risk (the Kahn report, made available through the proposed rule), which recommended against admitting *Rhododendron* due to pathogens in Europe, and raised concerns about other genera

Response: The function of the Kahn report was not to recommend that the genera under study be admitted or prohibited, but to identify the risks that would be associated with their admission. The Kahn report did identify significant risks that would be associated with unregulated admission of Rhododendron in growing media, and less significant risks regarding the other genera. APHIS evaluated those risks and tailored specific regulatory controls and safeguards to mitigate the risks in preparing the proposed rule. Since this final rule does not include importation for Rhododendron, a discussion of the efficacy of controls and requirements to mitigate risks associated with importation of *Rhododendron* will be deferred until such time as we publish further rulemaking for that genus.

Some commenters stated that there is no reason to import the five genera, since production of the same genera or easily substitutable plants in the United States is more than adequate, and new varieties can be obtained by cuttings or tissue culture.

Response: We have no authority to base a prohibition on the availability of plants in the United States. Any prohibition or restriction must be based on pest risk.

Previous Introductions of Serious Pests Into the United States

Several commenters stated that a large number of pests have been introduced into the United States and have caused significant economic and environmental

harm. They stated that many of these pests were introduced despite import controls believed to be as effective as the proposed regulations for plants in growing media. They believe that available and legal methods of control have proved inadequate to control most of these pests, and that the proposed regulations would only speed the introduction of more pests of this type. Examples of introduced pests cited by these commenters include Egyptian cotton moth, Asian gypsy moth, Geranium Xanthomonas bacterial blight, fire ants, Mexican fruit fly, Mediterranean fruit fly, honeybee tracheal mite, Narcissus bulb nematode, apple ermine moth, Varroa mite, azalea flower spot, chrysanthemum white rust, sweet potato white fly, Thrips palmi, lethal yellowing, Ganaderma zonaturum and Apopka weevil, *Melaleuca,* brown snails, zebra mussel, European gypsy moth, purple loosestrife, a Japanese weed (Phylanthese), TSWV virus (spread by thrips), serpentine leaf miner, Japanese beetles, golden nematode, black vine weevil, pine shoot beetle, Dutch elm disease, Chestnut blight, European pine shoot moth, apple maggot, oriental fruit moth, Caribbean fruit fly, citrus canker, citrus leafminer, black parlatoria scale, Diaprepes root weevil, stunt of Chrysanthemum, Cylindrocladium of azalea, Liriomyza trifolii, L. huidobrensis, Spodotera exigua, Frankliniella occidentalis, and Bemisia tabaci.

Response: The majority of the organisms listed by these commenters are usually not found associated with plants in growing media of the genera proposed for importation. In some cases, such as apple maggot, Frankliniella occidentalis, and others, the pests are indigenous to North America. Several of the pests named, such as the Egyptian cotton moth, have not, in fact, become established even temporarily in the United States. Chestnut blight, European Gypsy Moth, and other introduced pests that did become established, did so prior to the establishment of Federal plant quarantines, and their presence does not support a charge that quarantine regulations are not effective. Melaleuca is a horticultural introduction only recently considered as a noxious weed; for many years, our regulatory programs did not attempt to restrict its importation. The honeybee tracheal mite, azalea flower spot, and other remaining pests are not likely to be associated with plants in growing media grown under the conditions in the proposal.