PPQ 2024 Annual Report

Strengthening Pest Exclusion Abroad

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Agricultural Quarantine Inspection

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection (CBP) safeguard U.S. agricultural and natural resources from the introduction of invasive pests and diseases through the Agricultural Quarantine and Inspection (AQI) program. PPQ, part of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), assesses the risks associated with international trade and specific imported agricultural products and develops import regulations to exclude foreign pests and diseases and protect U.S. agriculture.

In addition, the Agency conducts off-shore pest risk reduction activities, including foreign commodity pre-clearance programs; trains agricultural inspectors and detector dog teams to work at U.S. ports of entry; inspects and takes action as necessary on imported plant propagative materials; monitors the fumigation of arriving containers and cargo to mitigate pest risks; conducts trade compliance activities

to detect violations of PPQ' import regulations and prevent smuggling; and provides the scientific support necessary to carry out these activities and those carried out by CBP. These activities include, among other things, the authoritative and timely identification of pests necessary to determine whether regulatory actions on imported products are required.

PPQ collects AQI user fees under the authority of The Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990, to recover costs for services provided by APHIS and CBP associated with preclearance inspections of passengers and the port-of-entry arrival of commercial vessels, trucks, loaded railroad cars, aircraft, and passengers entering the United States from a foreign destination. AQI user fee collections for FY 2024 exceeded pre-pandemic levels ($867 million for FY 2024 compared to $825 million for FY 2019, the last full year before the pandemic). However, the program's costs and operations have changed significantly over the last five years due to changes in commercial transportation and travel patterns along with inflationary factors. On May 7, 2024, APHIS published a final rule in the *Federal Register* updating the user fee rates. Fees for the AQI program had last been updated in 2015. The new rates became effective on October 1, 2024, and will allow the AQI program to recover the full costs of carrying out the inspection and other safeguarding activities that protect U.S. agriculture and natural resources. However, the implementation of the commercial aircraft user fee for aircraft with 64 or fewer seats has been postponed from April 1, 2025, to June 2, 2025.

PPQ inspectors oversee the preclearance of certain commodities by inspecting shipments for export in the country of origin, monitoring treatments where required, or by monitoring systems approaches for pest mitigation (a combination of integrated pest management practices used in the field and after harvest). In most cases, exporters of the pre-cleared commodity cover the costs of this PPQ service through trust funds established for this purpose.

Pre-Clearance and Offshore Risk Reduction

One of the most effective ways to facilitate the safe movement of commodities into the United States is to address pest threats where they originate. In FY 2024, PPQ precleared 4.9 billion pounds of 68 different fresh fruits and vegetables from 19 countries before they arrived in the United States. Additionally, PPQ oversaw the inspection of 2.2 billion pounds of avocados in Mexico as a part of a systems approach to facilitate safe trade. PPQ has overseen this program since 1997, and the program accounts for about 80 percent of avocado imports to the United States. PPQ also precleared 1.7 million pounds of cut flowers, bulbs, and perennials from Chile and approximately 800 million bulbs and perennials from the Netherlands and South Africa.

PPQ conducts certain inspections and certifications overseas to verify that treatment or production facilities meet our standards and regulatory requirements to help protect U.S. plant health from pests that could move into the United States with high-demand, large-volume commodity imports. In FY 2024, APHIS certified 190 phytosanitary treatment facilities, including 83 facilities in Mexico, 6 facilities in Central America, 6 facilities in the Caribbean, 88 facilities in South America, and 7 facilities in Asia. APHIS is currently tracking 302 offshore treatment facilities in 19 countries. Among the most common mitigation types are hot water treatment (148 active facilities) and methyl bromide fumigation (82 active facilities). These actions ensure the efficacy of offshore treatments that protect American agriculture from potential pests on imported commodities before they arrive onshore.

Through audit-based monitoring programs, APHIS oversees almost 90 commodity programs that mitigate pests before they reach U.S. ports. Of these, 12 programs require annual audits of all or a portion of their facilities. PPQ completed 30 audits and recertifications, including 17 *Ralstonia*

exclusion program facilities for geranium cuttings and tomato plantlets in growing media, 5 offshore greenhouse certification program facilities, and 8 clean stock program facilities for *Dracaena* (a genus that includes many popular houseplants). These three programs alone allowed for the safe import of 266 million propagative plant units with a wholesale value of $83 million (based on industry-provided data).

To help the U.S. military prevent the spread of foreign animal diseases and plant pests, PPQ worked with the U.S. Department of Defense to inspect 22,426 shipments of personal goods, 3.6 million pieces of military cargo, and 7,568 personal vehicles from 16 countries before they returned stateside to prevent the introduction of foreign pests and disease. APHIS completed annual evaluations and recertifications of military preclearance programs in 111 countries in Europe and Africa, ensuring that these programs meet all administrative, programmatic, and safeguarding requirements. APHIS trained 176 military service members to manage these programs locally in Europe and Africa.

Defoliating moth species from Asia, or the flighted spongy moth complex (FSMC) made up of five *Lymantria* species and subspecies, present a significant threat to U.S. forests. These moths can lay their eggs on the superstructure of maritime vessels, allowing the pest to spread into new territories. In partnership with CBP, PPQ coordinated the inspection of approximately 4,620 vessels that had visited high-risk ports within in the last 24 months. Vessels can request a predeparture FSMC inspection certificate from 28 national plant protection organization (NPPO)-accredited certification bodies in high-risk countries, including China, Japan, Korea, and Russia. PPQ coordinates on these inspection standards with its counterparts in Australia, Canada, Chile, and New Zealand. Seventeen ships had FSMC infestations in FY 2024.

PPQ also helps keep plant pests and diseases offshore with cooperative programs like the Greater Caribbean Safeguarding Initiative (GCSI), the Don't Pack a Pest Program (DPAP), and the PestLens website and early warning system. The GCSI is a cooperative framework of 42 NPPOs and regional partner organizations in the Caribbean region that funded 9 safeguarding projects to mitigate pest risk near U.S. borders in FY 2024. The Don't Pack a Pest program provides traveler education materials in participating countries and territories to stop the introduction of pests and diseases travelers may bring in personal baggage. APHIS works with 19 partner countries and territories on the Don't Pack a Pest program, expanding to Mexico in FY 2024.

In cooperation with North Carolina State University, APHIS provided 26 pest alert notifications to more than 3,000 registered users of PestLens, including 78 new pest-related articles, and added 7 new pests and 47 new pest distribution records to the Global Pest and Disease Database. These systems serve as a resource for APHIS and other plant health regulatory officials that conduct plant health risk assessments and develop inspection policies for imported goods, among other things.

Risk Analysis and Methods Development for Pest Exclusion

PPQ's Plant Pest Risk Analysis (PPRA) develops pest risk analyses and epidemiological approaches to support and improve pest exclusion programs and decision making. In FY 2024, PPRA completed approximately 287 risk analyses associated with imports, exports, invasive pest threats, and other programmatic requirements. This total includes 28 analyses to open, expand, or maintain export markets for U.S. producers and 41 risk assessments for import requests from foreign countries. PPRA's work also included evaluations of 41 newly detected pests, 54 evaluations of offshore pests to identify the greatest threats and help prioritize resources, 12 pathway analyses and spread models, and 10 New Pest Response Guidelines to proactively prepare for emergency responses. These products identify

potentially harmful plant pests and diseases and help APHIS decide what mitigating actions to take in order to prevent their entry into or limit their spread or economic impact within the United States.