

Plant Protection and Quarantine

Online Certificate System Streamlines Exports of Plants and Plant Products

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program is facilitating trade for U.S. exporters by issuing phytosanitary certificates faster and more reliably than ever before—preventing delays for exporters and labor costs for many levels of government. PPQ's Phytosanitary Certificate and Issuance Tracking (PCIT) system automates the issuance of phytosanitary certificates, including collection and tracking of information for agricultural commodities exported to foreign countries. The PCIT system started in 2005 as a basic tracking system and has rapidly improved in recent years through user adoption and feedback.

Today, thousands of industry users and hundreds of Federal and State duty stations are actively using PCIT. In fiscal year (FY) 2011, APHIS, State, and County governments issued more than 530,000 export certificates for individuals and businesses through the PCIT system.

PCIT: Saving Time and Money

State and County Authorized Certification Officials, who issue approximately 75 percent of the phytosanitary certificates for U.S. exporters, have found that PCIT is also saving them a significant amount of time and money. No longer do issuing authorities need to fill out paper certificates with redundant information, maintain records, or collect fees.

In response to requests from the National Plant Board, APHIS created the ability for customers to pay for all fees (Federal, State, and/or county) at one time through the PCIT system. APHIS collects and distributes fees to the appropriate authority on a monthly basis, eliminating the time associated with fee collection and tracking. In FY 2011, APHIS collected and remitted more than \$6 million to State and County governments. Some State and County governments have reported that PCIT has allowed them to shift personnel responsibilities from fee collection to other revenue-producing duties.

PCIT has also incorporated the ability to create State phytosanitary certificates. This provides a "one stop shop" for industry transporting agricultural products to foreign or domestic locations and saves Federal, State, and County government resources and time.

For exporters, the streamlining of phytosanitary certificates through PCIT can prevent shipping delays. PCIT allows APHIS to quickly access a certificate and verify authenticity for foreign governments. Exporters can also track their applications from any location, view and print copies of applications and issued certificates, and securely pay for certificates online. Foreign export regulations, formerly housed in a subscription-based system, are now housed and accessed within PCIT. No subscription fees are required.

What Our Customers Say

"...(our) office processed nearly 5,000 certificates last year.... The costs saved on FedEx, local couriers, paper, toner, and envelopes has been huge for us. Not to mention the time saved for USDA matching up applications with import permits, etc. All (documents) are attached and scanned into the PCIT Web site."

~ Cotton freight forwarder, who tested PCIT's user-printed phytosanitary certificate function (soon to be widely released) and estimated a savings of more than \$10,000 in 5 months

"We have realized a significant savings since beginning to use PCIT fee collection. No more compiling certificates each month and issuing invoices, then (dealing with) disputed charges.... The change has been well received by industry."

~ Nick Oliver, Supervising Ag and Standards Biologist, Sutter County, CA

"(Our officials estimate a) real cost savings of at least \$100,000.... As for (labor) savings, PCIT has allowed me to transfer 1.75 FTE (full-time equivalent) from the old billing and auditing systems to other revenue-generating programs."

~ Bill Oesterlein, Deputy Agricultural Commissioner, Riverside County, CA

"As far as I am concerned, (PCIT) has been a huge success and time saver for me."

~ Sue Nash, Oregon Department of Agriculture (Nursery and Christmas Tree Program), who estimates that she saves 40 hours per month

Customer Driven Success

Since implementation, APHIS has made more than 1,500 changes to the PCIT system—all driven by user suggestions. Among several upcoming changes:

- PCIT will automatically transfer certificates to foreign countries receiving U.S. exports, allowing them to reduce delays for paperwork verification.
- APHIS is expanding the implementation of user-printed phytosanitary certificates, eliminating the need for users to pay for shipped documents.

The PCIT system is one of the most recognized systems in government, honored by such organizations as Government Computer News and InfoWorld. More importantly, PCIT users tell us the system allows them to conduct their business more efficiently. APHIS considers PCIT one of our greatest assets in facilitating trade for U.S. exporters.

An Award-Winning Innovation

2008 Government Computer News (GCN) Awards: GCN recognizes PCIT as one of the best government information technology initiatives of 2008 and is named an Agency award winner.

2008 Computerworld 21st Century Achievement Awards: PCIT is named an award finalist. The Computerworld Honors Program recognizes the achievements of individuals and organizations that use information technology to benefit the world.

2007 InfoWorld100 Awards: Infoworld names PCIT as an award recipient, InfoWorld's highest honor. InfoWorld recognizes excellence in IT projects around the globe.

What Our Customers Say

"Before Kentucky had the option to use the pay.gov payment process, our office spent as much as 40 hours per month processing all of the individual invoices for each company.... Now, I spend approximately 2–3 hours per month."

~ Carl Harper, Senior Nursery Inspector, University of Kentucky, Office of State Entomologist

"Using PCIT as our repository of (phytosanitary certificate) data is more accurate than our previous logs, where data entry errors were a problem."

~ David Nelson, State Entomologist with the North Dakota Department of Agriculture, who estimates his office saves at least 100 hours per year in fee collection time and 200 hours per year on data management—with a cost savings of at least \$7,500

"I've been involved with the PCIT system from the beginning and continue to be impressed with how far it has come and the great work everyone involved has done."

~ Greg Helmbrecht, seed control specialist, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection