

FOR INFORMATION
DA-2009-25
June 19, 2009

SUBJECT: Detections of the South American cactus moth (*Cactoblastis cactorum*) in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana

TO: STATE AND TERRITORY AGRICULTURAL REGULATORY OFFICIALS

On June 2, 2009, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) confirmed detections of the South American cactus moth (*Cactoblastis cactorum*) in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana. This is the first confirmed detection of this pest in Louisiana. *C. cactorum* was first found on Big Pine Key, Florida, in 1989. The pest eventually spread to the Florida peninsula by either natural dispersal from Caribbean islands or was imported on infected nursery stock. Subsequently, USDA and university researchers mapped its spread along Florida's coasts and, eventually, to Georgia and South Carolina. *C. cactorum* was also detected on Dauphin Island, Alabama, in the summer of 2004, Petit Bois Island, Mississippi, in January 2008, and Horn Island, Mississippi, in April 2008.

In 2003, APHIS initiated development of a strategic plan to control, contain, or mitigate the spread of *C. cactorum* from southeastern States into southwestern States and Mexico. APHIS is collaborating with USDA's Agriculture Research Service (ARS) to develop methods to detect and control *C. cactorum*, including the use of adult traps baited with synthetic lure, sterile insect technique (SIT), and biological control. The U.S. Department of Interior and non-governmental organizations are cooperating with APHIS on detection and monitoring. Officials with Mexico's Secretaria de Agricultura, Ganaderia, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca, y Alimentacion (SAGARPA) are providing funds and cooperating with USDA to stop the spread of this pest in Mexico, given the economic importance of prickly pear cactus there. APHIS has transferred detection and control technologies to Mexico, which allowed SAGARPA to eradicate two distinct populations of *C. cactorum* that had become established on islands off the Yucatan Peninsula.

The most urgent concern about *C. cactorum* is the pest's advance westward along the barrier islands in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and, most recently, into Louisiana. If this pest spreads into Texas, control options will be reduced because of the wider area of prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia*) distributions and densities. Researchers believe that a sustainable control strategy can be applied at the leading edge of the infestation by creating a barrier to halt further advance of this pest into the western United States.

APHIS is coordinating with ARS and local regulatory officials in Louisiana to survey the cactus in the infested area of Jefferson Parish to determine if this is an isolated incident. Since the infested cactus were found in a marshy area that can only be accessed by boat, control options such as SIT, mechanical removal of cactus, and controlled burning are being considered.

For additional details on the Federal response to the detection of *C. cactorum*, you may contact Robyn Rose, National Program Manager at (301) 734-7121.

/s/ John H. Payne for

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