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USDA Protects Hundreds of Crops from Invasive Fruit Flies with Five-Year Strategy

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WASHINGTON, April 17, 2024 — The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has released “[Fruit Fly Exclusion and Detection Program Fiscal Years 2024-2028 Strategy](#).” APHIS worked with members of the National Plant Board to develop a unified roadmap for USDA and its partners to protect American agriculture from the threat of invasive fruit flies and measure our progress along the way.

“The United States is experiencing an unusually high number of invasive fruit fly detections - the worst of its kind in 70 years,” said Mark Davidson, USDA APHIS Deputy Administrator for the Plant Protection and Quarantine program. “Invasive fruit flies are a nuisance that drive up costs of producing fresh fruits and vegetables, which can hurt both producers and consumers. Our five-year plan lays out how Federal and State partners can continue to limit the flies’ spread as we further scientific research that will help us develop better pest management tools and options.”

The five-year strategy prioritizes strengthening the following goals for fruit flies of regulatory significance:

- Domestic surveillance to support early detection.
- Management and emergency response to ensure timely mitigation.
- Targeted and effective sterile insect technique for preventive release and eradication programs (assuring rearing facilities are maintained for efficiency and safety).
- International and import efforts to mitigate against the introduction and spread of invasive fruit flies in the United States.

To address the unprecedented outbreaks of exotic fruit flies, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently released \$103.5 million from the Commodity Credit Corporation to fund APHIS’ supplementary emergency response activities. These funds allow APHIS to reach beyond what the agency’s appropriated funding would be able to accomplish over the next few years.

Currently, there are exotic fruit fly quarantines in eight counties in California and five counties in New York. The California Department of Food and Agriculture and APHIS have established parallel quarantines and are working with the State’s

agricultural commissioners to eradicate and prevent the statewide spread of the Queensland fruit fly, Tau fruit fly, Mediterranean fruit fly, and Oriental fruit fly in California. APHIS is also working with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets to manage the European cherry fruit fly in upstate New York.

Invasive fruit flies feed on over 400 crops, including citrus and other fruits, nuts, vegetables, and berries. Fruit flies can damage fruits and vegetables when they lay their eggs under the skin of the produce. There, developing larvae make the fruits and vegetables unfit for human consumption. Infested produce may not look damaged from the outside but may take on a brown, mottled appearance as the larvae feed from the inside. Resources to combat invasive fruit fly threats are limited, so developing an efficient strategy to manage or eradicate invasive fruit flies is critical.

To reduce the spread, APHIS and affected states will work together to reduce, and to the extent possible, prevent human-assisted movement. Together, we will also promote public reporting to encourage early detection, and we will leverage the latest research and management tools available. The 5-Year Strategy drives Federal and State responders to explore new population suppression technologies, such as male annihilation technique, mass trapping, and the development of new and/or improved sterile fruit fly strains. Integrating these new technologies into the inter-agency response to invasive fruit flies will help improve the program's efficiency.

The new strategy also builds the capacity to combat invasive fruit flies in areas at high risk of introduction and will leverage the public's assistance to prevent further spread of these damaging agricultural pests.

Federal and State partners will also unite their research resources and share knowledge about fruit flies to limit their movement and distribution. While leveraging best practices in the field, State and Federal partners will prioritize more research on climate and host-plant suitability, as well as other effective management tools.

Federal and state fruit fly quarantines do not extend into Tribal lands, but the invasive fruit flies could impact Tribal communities near the quarantine areas. APHIS consulted with Tribes on the five-year strategy in August 2023 and will continue to engage Tribes and solicit feedback on the fruit fly management and outreach strategy.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.