



**Animal and Plant  
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# News Release

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## USDA Empowers Citizens with the Knowledge to Prevent Invasive Pests



WASHINGTON, April 2, 2014—The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today proclaimed April as Invasive Plant Pest and Disease Awareness Month. Each year during April, USDA amplifies its public outreach about the risks that invasive plant pests, diseases and harmful weeds pose to America's crops and forests—and how the public can prevent their spread. These non-native, destructive species can seriously harm the economy, environment, or even human health.

“Invasive species threaten the health and profitability of U.S. agriculture and forestry, and the many jobs these sectors support,” said Kevin Shea, Administrator of USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). “To protect that crucial value, USDA and its partners work hard every day to keep invasive pests and diseases out of the United States and to control those that may slip in. This April, we’re asking all Americans to be our partners in this critical work.”

Invasive plant pests and diseases can jeopardize entire industries such as U.S. citrus or hardwood timber. For just one disease—*huanglongbing* (HLB or citrus greening), in one state, Florida—the losses are alarming: more than \$4.5 billion in lost citrus production from the 2006/07 to 2010/11 production seasons. One invasive pest, the emerald ash borer beetle, has destroyed tens of millions of American ash trees in our forests and communities. Scientists have estimated the cost of all invasive species to all economic sectors to be approximately \$120 billion yearly.

With stakes this high, public awareness and action become key elements in protecting America’s agricultural and natural resources. APHIS created its Hungry Pests public outreach program to empower Americans with the knowledge they need to leave these “hungry pests” behind. For instance, invasive pests can hitchhike in and on the things we move and pack, such as firewood, plants, fruits and vegetables, outdoor furniture and agricultural products ordered online.

So this April, APHIS is asking Americans to visit [HungryPests.com](http://HungryPests.com) to learn what invasive plant pests and diseases [are in their state or threaten it](#). Get information about damaging pests that USDA and its partners are combatting right now, especially tree-killing pests that are beginning to emerge this spring and into the summer. Be on the lookout for the [emerald ash borer](#) and [Asian longhorned beetle](#), which starve trees to death by boring into them and eating their insides. Keep an eye out for the [gypsy moth](#), whose hungry caterpillars can strip trees and bushes bare. Not all tree threats are insects; [sudden oak death](#) disease, caused by a fungus-like organism, can kill many types of trees as well as many landscape plants, such as camellias and rhododendrons.

Most importantly, learn the “[Seven Ways to Leave Hungry Pests Behind](#),” such as buying firewood where you burn it, or only moving treated firewood if you must bring it with you. Such simple actions could save a forest or an entire industry from devastation by invasive species. Individual citizens play a vital role. This month, be on the lookout for videos, articles and social media buzz on invasive species and how to stop their spread. Start by joining the conversation on the [Hungry Pests Facebook Page](#).

For its part, APHIS has numerous partners at the federal, state, county and local levels, and at universities and nongovernmental organizations. Through its many safeguarding activities abroad, on the border and across the country, APHIS helps to ensure a diverse natural ecosystem and an abundant and healthy food supply for all Americans. Please join us in the effort to protect these vital resources.

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