



**Animal and Plant
Health Inspection Service**

4700 River Road
Riverdale, MD 20737-1234
Voice: (301) 851-4100
Web: www.aphis.usda.gov

Remarks

Remarks as Prepared for Administrator Kevin Shea National Invasive Species Achievement Awards NISAW Invasive Species Fair

WASHINGTON, DC, Feb. 25, 2015—Good morning. On behalf of Secretary Vilsack and the eight USDA agencies that work on invasive species, I'd like to welcome you here today.

This morning, in conjunction with National Invasive Species Awareness Week, we're celebrating some special people who have devoted themselves to preventing, detecting, and controlling invasive species. Our honorees have earned our profound thanks through their efforts to combat plants and animals that enter the United States and damage our native plants, animals, environment—and sometimes even threaten human health.

They are from all across the United States—from New Hampshire, to Texas, to Washington State. And they represent just a few of the many collaborations on invasive species that USDA and 45 other Federal agencies proudly maintain with partners in State, local, and Tribal governments; industry; academia; nongovernmental organizations; and more. Without this kind of cooperation, it would be impossible to effectively address the multi-faceted challenge invasive species represent.

Our collective challenge is, of course, enormous. As our world shrinks, as international movement of people and animals increases, and as our climate changes, invasive species pose a greater risk to our country's agriculture and prosperity than ever before. Estimates of the economic impact of invasive animals, pests, and pathogens range in the billions—in one case, to more than \$120 billion per year.

But just because the challenge is enormous doesn't mean it's insurmountable. To give you just two examples, we're well on the way to eradicating the boll weevil, an old scourge of cotton, and the European grapevine moth (EGVM), which threatens California's vineyards. The boll weevil has been eliminated from everywhere except a small pocket in Texas, and our surveys found just one EGVM in California last year—down from more than 100,000 moths just a few years ago.

But I need to stress that successes like these don't come easily, as the people we're honoring today well know, and they require considerable human and economic resources. Here at USDA, we spend about \$1.3 billion a year on every method and tool available to target particularly destructive invasive species.

I'm sure some of those species are all too familiar to you:

- the feral swine that are damaging crops, farm animals, and property in about 40 States;

- the varroa mites that threaten our dwindling populations of bee colonies, which are essential for pollinating agricultural and native plants;
- the Asian citrus psyllid, which carries a disease that sickens our Nation's citrus trees; and,
- forest pests such as the Asian longhorned beetle and emerald ash borer, which decimate forests and urban trees.

How do we deal with them? Well, let me give you just a few examples.

My Agency, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, works to ensure that agricultural imports are free of invasive species before they arrive here through preclearance programs abroad, risk assessments, and more to reduce the risk all along the way.

We also work with U.S. Customs and Border Protection at U.S. ports of entry to keep invasive “hitchhikers” from getting into our country on agricultural imports, and we strictly regulate the movements of potentially invasive plants and animals across State borders.

If invasives somehow evade our prevention efforts, we're out in the field with our partners conducting early detection and rapid response operations to stop them. And we educate the public about invasives through our Hungry Pests campaign, which reaches millions of people through TV and radio public service announcements, a Web site, and more.

Some of our work involves the U.S. Forest Service, which has technical assistance programs and funds to help State foresters and private landowners prevent and control invasive species. Among many other things, the Forest Service does research on invasive species; it also provides comprehensive management policy on preventing and controlling the invasives that threaten our 193 million-acre National Forest System.

All of USDA's invasive species work depends heavily on the expertise of our colleagues in the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), who are constantly looking for ways to mitigate invasives using biological controls, biopesticides, traps, and more. Among their many accomplishments, ARS scientists discovered a natural microbial product that controls cheatgrass, one of the worst invasive weeds in the West. ARS has submitted this organism to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for approval as a biopesticide; it should be an excellent tool for Federal and private land managers.

And ARS' National Agricultural Library supports two major invasive species information Web sites that were used by 750,000 visitors in fiscal year 2014 alone.

USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) sets priorities for research on invasive species and provides funding opportunities for such research to university scientists and others through competitive grant programs. NIFA and the Cooperative Extension System support the eXtension Invasive Species Community of Practice—it's

an Internet-based system that offers State officials, farmers, ranchers, and many others information and educational resources on invasive species.

I also want to mention USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, which provides technical knowledge and financial assistance to participating landowners in developing conservation plans. All of those plans include invasive species as an issue of concern. NRCS plans like these are also required for landowners who want to participate in many of the Farm Service Agency's agricultural conservation programs.

At the departmental level, USDA has a program to identify all invasive species that are causing extinction of endangered or threatened species, or species being considered for these designations. We provide detailed information on these invasives for the global Invasive Species Compendium. We also collaborate with the Smithsonian Institution to document all invasive plant species that affect Caribbean island flora in the Compendium. These efforts help land managers and others to prevent, detect, and control invasives.

All of these activities and many, many more comprise what USDA does, and will keep doing, to keep invasive species at bay. I believe that with the right strategies, sufficient funding, and above all vital partners like those here today, we will continue to make progress.

On behalf of my USDA colleagues, thank you again for joining us to celebrate the recipients of the 2015 Invasive Species Achievement Awards. I hope you enjoy the ceremony and the Invasive Species Fair that follows it.

Thank you.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Ave., SW., Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD).