Breadcrumb

1. Home
2. Print
3. Pdf
4. Node
5. Entity Print

USDA Holds Due to Potential Plant Health Risk

Last Modified:

Learn what a "USDA Hold" is, why shipments may be placed on hold, and what to expect if this happens to you.

USDA Hold: What It Means

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Customs and Border Protection (CBP) inspects goods entering the United States. When a CBP inspector needs to verify that a shipment has the appropriate entry documentation or sees a risk of a plant pest or disease, they will place that shipment on a USDA hold until they can inspect it more thoroughly. While the alert may say USDA, in most cases, CBP is actually placing the hold.

If your plant shipment—or shipments of non-plant products in wood packaging material—is delayed, you may receive notice that your shipment has been placed on this USDA hold. Your broker can also confirm its status.

What To Expect If Your Shipment Is On Hold

Inspections can sometimes take multiple business days to carry out at ports with high import volumes. The process varies depending on how the port is set up and what CBP is looking for.

Please be patient. The hold may likely mean that CBP hasn't gotten to it yet, and it could be temporary. If CBP or APHIS confirm a problem during inspection, they will issue an emergency action notice that communicates what they found and the options you have to resolve it.

What You Can Do

Commercial Importers

- The best person to contact is your broker. This person may be able to get you answers the fastest.
- Double check the entry requirements for your shipment to make sure you followed all directions.
- Double check your permit application to verify you accurately described the contents of your shipment. Your customs entry should provide a full and complete description of your shipment's contents and answer specific questions such as:
    1. The country of origin of the merchandise and manufacturer
    2. The composition of the merchandise
    3. The item's intended use
    4. Pricing and payment information (to properly determine the value of the shipment)

For more information on the classification of merchandise, consult the Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS). It contains the actual HTS number and tariff classification guidelines that explain how to properly classify merchandise.

Online Shoppers

If you bought plants or plant products online and your shipment hasn't arrived when you expected, there is no doubt you are enduring a frustrating experience. This is a common issue for online shoppers. Here's what you can do:

- Learn about the steps for buying plants or seeds online. If you didn't follow these steps, your shipment may be on hold due to a paperwork issue.

- Call your express courier (for example, DHL or FedEx). If a pest is found or the shipment doesn't meet U.S. import requirements, CBP will contact your courier via "emergency action notice" to discuss the issue and what your options are.

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