

Breadcrumb

1. [Home](#)
2. Print
3. Pdf
4. Node
5. Entity Print

# Earthworms

Last Modified:

Earthworms ingest soil that may contain animal and plant pathogens that could be transported inside the worms, putting U.S. animals and plants at risk. In addition, APHIS considers some exotic earthworms plant pests because they disrupt the soil and may cause undesirable impacts on plant growth and diversity. Therefore, a PPQ 526 permit is required for the importation of earthworms into the United States from any country.

PPQ will only issue import permits for earthworms for U.S. environmental release from countries that are free from foot-and mouth disease and African swine fever. A PPQ 526 permit is not required for the domestic movement of earthworms within the Continental U.S.; although, it may be required for movement to Hawaii, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, and U.S. Territories. State and Territory approval is also required for all earthworm movement.

- [Apply for a Permit](#)

The PPQ 526 permit requires strict conditions for earthworm rearing and treatment prior to shipment to the United States. Below are some of the earthworm permit requirements:

- Earthworms must be reared on a diet free of soil or bedding containing pathogens. The diet may contain paper pulp, sawdust, or pasteurized

vegetables (vegetables that have been held at a temperature of 180°F (83°C) for a minimum of 30 minutes).

- At least 15 days prior to shipment, all imported earthworms must be placed on a cleansing diet that is free of any materials that may contain plant or animal pathogens.
- At no time during the rearing or packaging process are earthworms to be fed soil, uncooked or partially cooked vegetables.
- At all times during the rearing operation, worms must be kept separated from the ground by a heavy layer of plastic, fiberglass, metal, or other material that is not biodegradable.

PPQ officers may inspect shipments at any time to confirm the origin of the worms, and their genus and species using morphological and/or molecular testing. Officers may also confirm earthworm's gut contents, check that no soil is present in the shipping containers, and test for pathogens associated with or transported by earthworms.

Receipt of a PPQ permit does not relieve the applicant from the obligation to comply with regulations of other State and Federal agencies (e.g., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

Earthworm rearing facilities can be inspected by USDA at any time. This inspection is usually performed by USDA Foreign Service on behalf of APHIS.

## **General Information**

Importation of powdered, frozen or freeze-dried earthworms, their castings, and related products also require a permit. These products have the same restrictions and requirements as importation of living earthworms.

Once imported, APHIS does not require permits for subsequent distribution of the earthworms throughout the Continental U.S. Permits may be required for the movement of earthworms from the Continental U.S. to Hawaii, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, and the U.S. Territories. In addition, States and Territories may also regulate earthworms under their own statutes so you must also contact the State Department of Agriculture in each State or Territory where you plan to distribute them.

A USDA importation permit does not relieve you of your responsibility to comply with other authorities that may regulate sales and release of earthworms.

- [Information about Shipping Requirements and Red and White Labels](#)
- [Information about Inspections](#)

### [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

View a list of the commonly asked questions and concerns associated with the application process for importation of earthworms.

## **Contact**

For questions about permits for regulated organisms and soil:

Pest Permits Team

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