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

APHIS Reflects on 2023 Accomplishments, Looks Forward to 2024

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Press Release

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WASHINGTON, March 20, 2024 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) expertly navigated complex and evolving issues to protect U.S. agriculture and natural resources in 2023.

“Every day, APHIS enhances its mission of protecting American agriculture, boosting agricultural exports, and developing new and better tools to fight invasive pests and diseases. As the challenges and threats evolve, so do we. We learn better

surveillance techniques, use more sophisticated equipment, and access more advanced data analysis. We continue to build and strengthen partnerships across sectors and borders, deepening and enhancing our prevention and response capabilities. We do it all in earnest dedication to our mission and everyone who relies on us for their livelihoods and success,” said Marketing and Regulatory Programs Under Secretary Jenny Lester Moffitt.

Some of the Agency’s major accomplishments included:

Protecting and preserving American agriculture with innovative tools.

Our scientists worked tirelessly on behalf of America’s producers to protect American agriculture from pests and disease. This vital work included developing predictive models for plant pests, refining tools to eradicate the giant African snails from Florida, finding alternatives to ozone depleting methyl bromide for use in treating log exports, and using vacuum steam to treat fresh fruits for pests without damaging them. We also completed about 200 risk analyses and other science-based products to help us make sound policy and operational decisions that facilitate agricultural trade and ensure a risk-based focus for resource allocations and safeguarding.

Charting the course for the next 5 years.

Underpinning our work is a new [5-year strategic plan](#) that we published in April 2023. This plan charts a course for the future based on our examination of societal, environmental, and technological trends and several future scenarios that the Agency must be prepared to navigate as we continue to deliver our vital mission.

Enabling safe trade while protecting America from invasive pests.

USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) closed out another successful year of protecting domestic plants from invasive threats while enabling safe trade. In 2023, APHIS employees inspected at least 3.31 billion pounds of imported crops from 20 countries—a testament to the year-round effort. Collaborating with U.S. Customs and Border Protection at the ports, APHIS processed and identified approximately 92,000 plant pests at our borders.

Protecting the United States from African swine fever.

We continued to aggressively fight to keep [African swine fever](#) from entering the United States. With millions of people traveling into the United States each year and the volume of imported products entering our country, APHIS' work provides a critical protection to U.S. pigs. By enhancing existing safeguards, increasing swine disease surveillance and testing, and increasing awareness of ASF through the "Protect our Pigs" and "Pigs Don't Fly" campaigns, APHIS kept ASF out of the United States in 2023. APHIS also worked closely with States and industry to update and refine response plans, and worked with scientists at the National Veterinary Services Laboratories and across the National Animal Health Laboratory Network to be ready in case ASF reaches the United States.

Protecting American Livelihoods and Consumer Prices with Aggressive Response to HPAI.

APHIS continued its biosecurity approach to address [highly pathogenic avian influenza](#) (HPAI). This work included educating bird owners, so they knew how to keep HPAI out of their flocks, encouraging early reporting of sick birds, tracking where the virus was circulating in wild birds, and quickly containing and eradicating the virus when it was confirmed on farms. As a result, the number of birds affected in 2023 was significantly less than in 2022 with 144 cases in commercial poultry facilities in 2023, versus 306 in commercial facilities in 2022. These lower numbers mean fewer impacts to the availability of poultry and eggs and to the prices of these products in 2023. The U.S. poultry industry feeds the world and this work lessened negative impacts to them and countless others including hobby farm owners, zoos, and U.S. consumers.

Opening, expanding, retaining, and reopening live animal export markets.

In FY 2023, we negotiated science-based animal health requirements and removed potential trade barriers to open, expand, retain, or reopen 72 markets for U.S. live animal exports. This included retaining market access for poultry exports to numerous countries that imposed restrictions due to current outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza and previous outbreaks of virulent Newcastle disease.

Controlling and eradicating feral swine.

The APHIS National Feral Swine Damage Management Program continued to reduce the destructive impacts of invasive feral swine to American agriculture, natural resources, property, and human health and safety, declaring a 12th state (Indiana)

free of feral swine since the Program's inception in 2014. As part of the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program (funded in the 2018 Farm Bill), APHIS also provided direct feral swine control to over 6,700 landowners across approximately 7.3 million acres in 12 states.

A New Administrator for APHIS

Mission delivery in 2024 will occur with a new leader for APHIS. Dr. Mike Watson was named APHIS' new Administrator in December 2023 and brings a wide range of experience with including leadership positions, Plant Protection and Quarantine, Biotechnology Regulatory Services, and Marketing and Regulatory Programs - Business Services

"I am honored to continue my leadership in APHIS, now as Administrator" said Administrator Mike Watson. "I look forward to building on the legacies of partnership and excellent customer service that former Administrator Kevin Shea carried forward. Protecting plant and animal health brings new challenges every day. Our talented APHIS teams stand ready to innovate and partner with our stakeholders to meet these challenges with dedication and science-based solutions."