APHIS Releases Ralstonia Exclusion Program’s Updated Framework Requirements

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) announces updated requirements for facilities that export hosts of the select agent *Ralstonia solanacearum* race 3 biovar 2 (Rs R3bv2) to the United States. Program participants must begin implementing the Ralstonia Exclusion Program’s (REP) framework requirements by October 1, 2024, before their certification or recertification for the 2024–2025 season. The updated REP framework provides unified offshore facility standards to address Rs R3bv2 for all propagative hosts. It also improves sanitation and testing measures and clarifies roles and responsibilities of all program participants. In addition, the REP provides updated standard operating procedures to execute following an Rs R3bv2 detection.

Rs R3bv2 is a select agent under the USDA Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2002 due to risks it poses to the U.S. potato and tomato industries (7 CFR 331.3). Its primary hosts are *Pelargonium* spp. (geranium) as well as plants in the genus *Solanum*, which includes tomatoes and potatoes. APHIS regulates the importation of Rs R3bv2 host commodities to protect American agriculture and natural resources from the introduction of quarantine plant pathogens (7 CFR 319 Subpart H).

In 2005, APHIS amended the regulations by establishing a certification program for articles of *Pelargonium* spp. and *Solanum* spp. (including hybrids) imported from countries where the bacterium Rs R3bv2 is known to occur (70 FR 61351). APHIS

implemented the *Minimum Sanitation Protocol for Offshore Geranium Cutting Production* in response to the 1999 and 2003 introductions of Rs R3bv2 via imported geranium cuttings, provisionally adding the certification program to the regulations with an April 2004 interim rule. In 2016, the United States approved imports of tomato plantlets (*Solanum lycopersicon*) in APHIS-approved growing media with minimum phytosanitary measures to prevent introduction of Rs R3bv2 per the 2005 rule.

APHIS works closely with industry to ensure these facilities are compliant with APHIS requirements. Program participants who are unable to meet updated requirements in time for the 2024-2025 season may contact APHIS to submit a request for deviation from the REP. Requests must be received at least two months before the facility certification or recertification audit.

For additional information, please refer to the Ralstonia Exclusion Program Framework (769.81 KB), review the Frequently Asked Questions or contact the program manager at pop.rep@usda.gov.

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