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Plant Protection Today: What You Need to Know Before Shipping and Receiving Agricultural Items

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Spread Holiday Cheer, Not Invasive Pests and Diseases

By Greg Rosenthal, Communications Manager, USDA's Plant Protection and Quarantine

People ship and receive packages using express courier companies—like FedEx, UPS, DHL, and others—all the time. But when the package includes an agricultural item, things could get dangerous for U.S. agriculture and natural resources.

“You should know what could be hitchhiking in or on those items—invasive plant and animal diseases and pests,” said Dr. Mark Davidson, Deputy Administrator of USDA's Plant Protection and Quarantine. “Once these threats enter our country, they could harm our crops, livestock, and ecosystems. Left unchecked, they could devastate entire agricultural industries, eliminating jobs, threatening our food supply, and costing billions of dollars in losses and response costs.”



What Exactly Is an Agricultural Item?

Some people might be surprised to learn what USDA considers an agricultural item. Obvious examples spring to mind, like fruits, vegetables, plants, seeds, and meat. But what about:

- Dried and processed plant products like rice, herbs, and citrus peel
- Woodcarvings and handicrafts
- Live insects and snails

- Microorganisms
- Soil
- Pet food, chews and treats, as well as hides, bones, feathers, and hunting trophies from certain animals
- Snack food items that contain animal-origin ingredients like individually packaged meat snacks and mooncakes

These are all agricultural items. You can see a more extensive list on USDA's [contact page](#) for people shipping items via express courier.

Does This Apply to Me?

Many people who buy agricultural items online, receive them from family or friends, or ship these items themselves aren't aware of the agricultural risk and their legal obligations under USDA's regulations. If you ship or receive agricultural items via express courier, this applies to you. Here are common examples.

People who ship agricultural items:

- Customers in an express courier store (like FedEx, UPS, DHL, and others)
- Customers on an express courier website about to print a shipping label
- People in Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands shipping agricultural items to the continental United States
- Gardeners who ship homegrown produce to family or friends

People who receive agricultural items:

- E-commerce customers (using Amazon, eBay, Etsy, Facebook Market, etc.) buying plants or plant products—or animal products or byproducts—including handicrafts
- International students receiving care packages or gifts from home that include agricultural items
- Relatives or friends of people receiving a regulated article illegally shipped within the United States but out of a quarantine area

This Checklist Infographic Makes It Easy!

USDA and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) created a [checklist infographic](#) (884.89 KB) to help ensure agricultural items are safe to ship into the United States.

Sometimes people need to contact USDA for guidance. Other times they need to contact both USDA and CBP, our partner in keeping these threats out of our country at U.S. ports of entry.

The checklist makes it easy to figure out who to contact:

1. Look at the checklist and find the kind of agricultural item you're shipping or receiving via express courier.
2. See if you need to contact USDA/CBP before shipping.
3. Use the link or QR code to find the contact information.
4. Call or email the appropriate unit.



Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Checklist: Shipping Agricultural Items Via Express Courier

Protect U.S. agriculture from devastating invasive pests and diseases. Use the checklist below to know when to contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) or U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) before shipping plants or plant and animal products via express courier.



Agricultural Items from Hawaii, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands

USDA has a list of ag products available that can move (after meeting import requirements) from Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands to the U.S. mainland.

☒ **Contact [USDA](#)**



Plants and Seeds for Planting

Before you bring plants or seeds into the United States, you must first obtain a phytosanitary certificate issued by officials in the shipping country.

☒ **Contact [USDA](#) and [CBP](#)**



Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Many fresh fruits and vegetables are prohibited entry into the United

Protect What You Treasure

"USDA and CBP know that agricultural items shipped in express courier packages can be a dangerous pathway for invasive pests and diseases to enter our country," said Acting Executive Assistant Commissioner Diane Sabatino with CBP. "The good news is that the public can help us protect the things they love, like healthy animals and plants, fresh and affordable food, and lush forests. Just use the checklist before

you ship or receive using express couriers.”



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