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Request for Information: APHIS Seeks Data on Small Aircraft's Risk of Introducing Invasive Pests As Compared to the Risk Posed by Commercial Aircraft

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Stakeholder Announcement

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The United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is issuing a Request for Information (RFI) to determine whether there is validity to statements that small commercial passenger aircraft have less chance of introducing plant pests and animal diseases into the United States than larger commercial aircraft. APHIS seeks data that proves whether small aircraft warrant reduced or no agricultural quarantine and inspection (AQI) user fees. These are the fees charged to inspect parts of the aircraft not associated with passengers (cargo hold, wheel wells, exterior of the aircraft), cargo, packages, parcels, international mail, and other products they carry into this country.

APHIS included aircraft with 64 or fewer seats in a revised AQI fee structure when the Agency's analysis revealed that the risk of introducing pests is not based on the number of seats in an aircraft. Rather, the risk is based on the country where the flight originated, which countries the aircraft traveled through before arriving in the U.S., the origin, type and volume of cargo it carries, and environmental conditions at the point of departure. These aircraft are capable of picking up hitchhiking pests and bringing them into the United States.

After the close of the proposed rule comment period, some small aircraft operators stated the aircrafts do not pose a risk of introducing plant and animal pests and diseases because they do not have cargo holds. Others said that, while they do not have the same level of risk as larger commercial aircraft, they should have a lower fee due to their claimed lower risk.

In this RFI, APHIS seeks specific, factual evidence that supports an alternate fee structure for smaller aircraft so that any new information can be considered before fees go into effect on June 2, 2025.

To respond to this RFI please visit www.regulations.gov. Enter APHIS-2022-0023 in the Search field. Select the Documents tab, review the documents to determine exactly what information APHIS is requesting in this RFI, then select the Comment button in the list of documents when you are ready to reply. Response to this RFI is voluntary. Each individual or institution is requested to submit only one response. Responses should include the name of the person(s) or organization(s) completing

the response. We will consider all comments that we receive on or before April 21, 2025.