



United States Department of Agriculture

# Plant Inspection Stations

## Protecting U.S. Agriculture From Pests and Diseases



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Cover Photo: A member of the plant inspection stations' staff inspects orchid plants for pests and diseases. Most orchids are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) treaty. (USDA, R. Anson Eaglin)

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**Each year, billions of plants, plant cuttings, seeds, and other plant materials** are carried, mailed, and shipped into the United States, contributing to the diversity of products available in the U.S. marketplace and enhancing our economy. Along with the benefits international trade affords us, the import of plant and agricultural products brings risks. Pests and diseases in infested shipments could threaten our native plants, agriculture, and natural resources. Helping to balance the benefits and risks of global plant trade is the responsibility of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and its plant inspection stations.



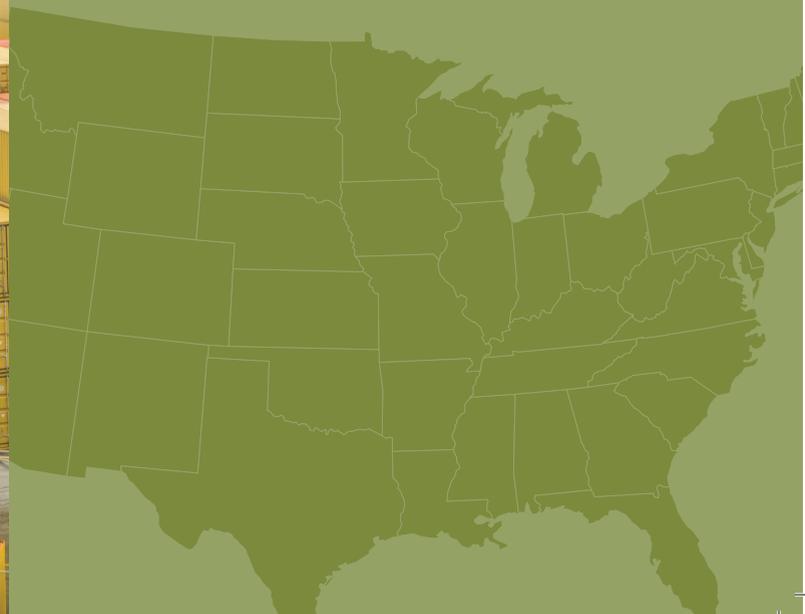
PPQ personnel provide information about plant inspection stations during local trade shows and plant clinics. Questions about agriculture import regulations, international travel, online purchases, permitting materials, and employment opportunities are common during outreach events. *(USDA file photo)*

## For More Information

Visit the **USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service** Web site:

[www.aphis.usda.gov](http://www.aphis.usda.gov)

[www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/pis](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/pis)



## Investing in Prospective Opportunities: Plant Germplasm Inspection Station

The USDA operates a specialized facility—the Plant Germplasm Inspection Station in Beltsville, MD—as part of the National Plant Germplasm Quarantine Center. The facility is uniquely designed for handling imported plant germplasm and other valuable plant materials for plant breeding and research programs that, under most circumstances, would not be permitted into the United States. These items must enter the United States under a specialty permit (controlled import permit) and are sent to the Beltsville inspection station. Here, they are examined and, if necessary, treated before being allowed to move forward to the USDA-approved facility listed on the permit.

## Sharing the Responsibility: You Can Help Protect American Agriculture

In today's global marketplace, the volume of international trade brings increased potential for the introduction of foreign pests, diseases, and noxious weeds that could threaten the safety of American agriculture. Whether mailing, shipping, or hand-carrying plants and seeds back into the United States, we all need to follow safeguarding practices for importing plants and plant products. In doing so, each of us can help defend American agriculture from foreign plant pests and diseases.

Most propagative plant imports move forward to a USDA plant inspection station upon arrival at the port of entry. The plant inspection stations' staff of scientists, plant health safeguarding specialists, and support personnel make sure the material is free of USDA-regulated pests and diseases and meets U.S. plant health import standards before releasing the shipment to its permitted destination. This is part of USDA's plant health safeguarding system at work.

A single outbreak of an exotic plant pest or disease could have a devastating impact on our food supply and natural resources. Even a small incident could have cascading effects and result in higher priced agricultural products for all of us. USDA plant inspection stations—with locations at or near major U.S. international airports, seaports, and border crossings—are a formidable line of defense in the fight against invasive pests and diseases.



Maritime containers arrive and are stacked at the port of entry. Each year, the volume of world trade increases and enhances the diversity of products available in our marketplace. (USDA, R. Anson Eaglin)

## Protecting U.S. Agriculture and Natural Resources Is a Critical Job

Plant inspection stations have many functions and incorporate many different disciplines to promote international trade and protect our markets. Navigating this complex safeguarding mission begins with a highly trained staff, using time-tested methods and modern technology. Staff at plant inspection stations work actively with industry to reduce and eliminate risks of pest introduction and to protect biodiversity.

The USDA requires permits for the import and transit of plants and plant products into and through the United States. The rules found in Title 7, part 319 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* prohibit or restrict the import of certain plants and plant products to keep from introducing exotic plant pests and diseases in our country.

You can apply for and receive permits online through USDA ePermits. This Web-based tool provides a single place to view and manage all of your applications, permits, and other related correspondence. Likewise, the system enables Federal regulatory officials to issue, track, and rapidly verify import permits. To learn more about ePermits, go to [www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/permits](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/permits).



A plant health safeguarding specialist reviews shipping documents before an inspection. (USDA, R. Anson Eaglin)



Plant health safeguarding specialists use a team approach to examine a large plant shipment, detect pests, and expedite the inspection process. (USDA, R. Anson Eaglin)

## Importing Plants for Planting

To learn more about the import of plants for planting, go to [www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/q37](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/q37).

## What Plant Material Requires a Permit?

To learn more about permits for importing plant material, go to [www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/permits](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/permits).

Plants, plant products, and seeds may be imported into the United States either by mail, freight, or passenger baggage and must be presented for inspection. U.S. importers should secure agricultural permits for shipments far in advance of their transport.

Our staff perform a wide range of duties. These include, among others:

- Physically inspecting propagative materials, such as plants, plant cuttings, and seeds;
- Conducting inspections with modern technology—
  - High-resolution digital imaging of intercepted pests,
  - Molecular detection tools (where applicable),
  - Remote pest identification techniques,
  - Seed x-ray to view internal feeding insects, and
  - Other technical tools and methods to extract pests from plant products;
- Identifying pests intercepted during cargo and plant material inspections;
- Cataloging port taxonomic collections of organisms for pest, pathogen, and disease identification;
- Monitoring chemical and nonchemical treatments to disinfect and disinfest plant material against pests and disease organisms; and
- Issuing USDA Phytosanitary Certificates for plants, seeds, and plant products for export from the United States to attest they are free of pests and diseases.



## Promoting Trade and Moving Products

Upon arrival at a U.S. port of entry, most imported plant material intended for propagation must first transit through 1 of 16 USDA plant inspection stations to complete clearance and processing. Plant inspection stations' staff use risk-based sampling methods, which focus resources on higher risk plants, facilitate cargo inspection, and maintain robust inspection protocols.

A phytosanitary certificate, issued by the exporting country, and an import permit, issued by USDA, must accompany nearly all propagative plant material imports into the United States. These documents identify the plant material by scientific name, verify that the shipment has been inspected by the exporting country's national plant protection organization and found to be free from regulated pests or diseases of concern prior to export, and confirm that the shipment meets applicable U.S. entry requirements.

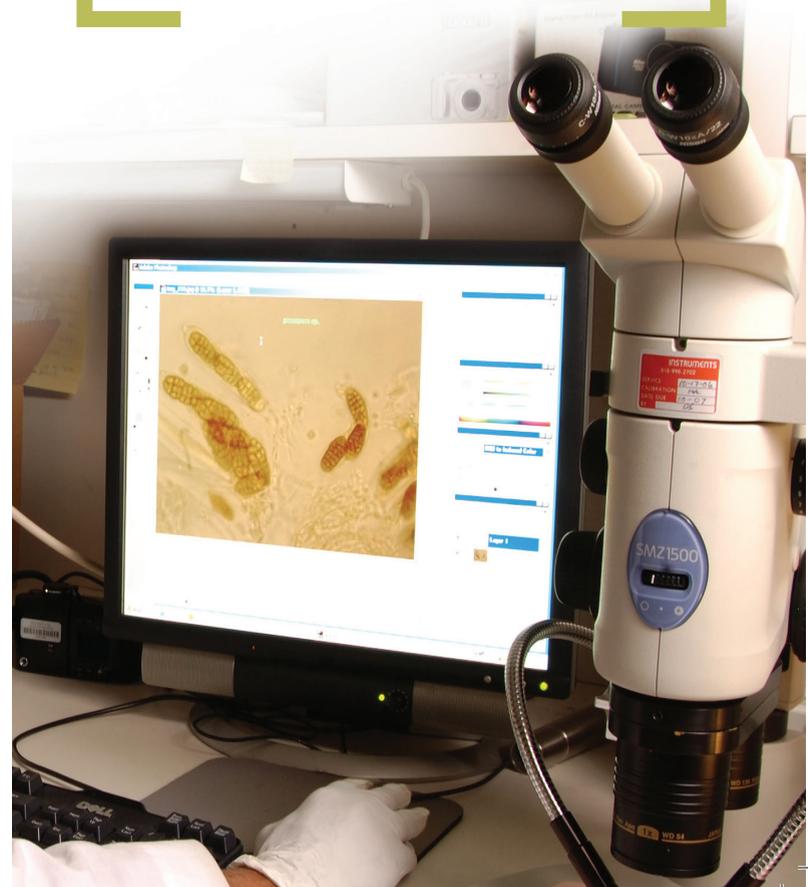
The **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora** is an international treaty, signed by the United States and 180 other countries. CITES regulates the trade in listed species and hybrids of plants and animals at risk of extinction because of overexploitation. The goal of CITES is to ensure that international trade in listed plant and animal specimens is legal and sustainable and that the extinction of those species is prevented.

The **Endangered Species Act of 1973** is intended to protect imperiled species and the critical habitats upon which they depend. The ESA protects listed species from extinction by controlling collection, possession, transportation, and trade in those species and by designating and protecting the critical habitats of those species.

To learn more about CITES and ESA, go to [www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/cites](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/cites).



A plant health safeguarding specialist issues a USDA Phytosanitary Certificate. This Federal document attests that agricultural commodities being shipped meet the health standards required of plants and plant products for export. (USDA, R. Anson Eaglin)

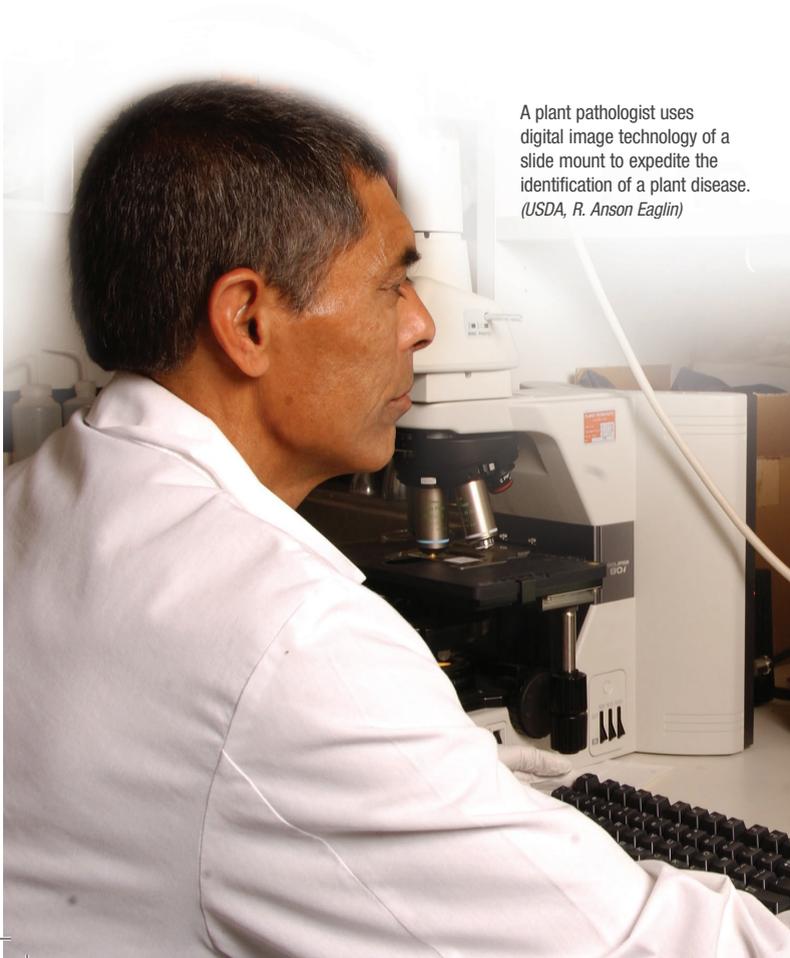


## Protecting Endangered Species and Biodiversity

USDA staff at plant inspection stations carry out regulations controlling the import and export of protected plant species. Responsibility to enforce the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) treaty has been delegated to the USDA. Using CITES and ESA, and the plant quarantine regulations, staff at the plant inspection stations check required permits and inspect plants and plant products being imported and exported. CITES-protected plants arriving at a plant inspection station without appropriate CITES documentation are subject to forfeiture.



X-ray technology enhances our ability to detect pests inside seeds that might not be visible during regular physical inspection (top). A dissected seed reveals the hidden insect pest (bottom). (USDA file photos)



A plant pathologist uses digital image technology of a slide mount to expedite the identification of a plant disease. (USDA, R. Anson Eaglin)



# Plant Inspection Stations

Visit [www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/pis](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/pis) for the mailing addresses and phone numbers of our locations.

## Genesis of Plant Inspection Stations

USDA plant inspection stations, which began operating in the first half of the 20th century, have evolved into one of our most visible assets in safeguarding American agriculture.

In 1910, a gift to the United States of 2,000 flowering cherry trees unknowingly included a number of exotic insects, diseases, and nematodes. When these were detected, the trees had to be destroyed to prevent the spread of these pests. Since then, a number of laws have been passed to better protect American agriculture. In 2000, the Plant Protection Act consolidated all or part of 10 existing plant health laws into one comprehensive law, which serves as our authority to regulate today.

