



PPQ 2023 Annual Report

Strengthening Pest Exclusion Abroad

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Agricultural Quarantine Inspection

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program and the Department of Homeland Security’s Customs and Border Protection (CBP) safeguard U.S. agricultural and natural resources from the introduction of invasive pests and diseases through the Agricultural Quarantine Inspection (AQI) program. PPQ assesses the risks associated with international trade and specific imported agricultural products and develops import regulations to exclude foreign pests and diseases and protect U.S. agriculture.

In addition, the Agency conducts off-shore pest risk reduction activities, including foreign commodity pre-clearance programs; trains agricultural inspectors and detector dog teams to work at U.S. ports of entry; inspects and takes action as necessary on imported plant propagative materials; monitors the fumigation of arriving containers and cargo to mitigate pest risks; conducts trade compliance activities to detect violations of PPQ’ import regulations and prevent smuggling; and provides the scientific

support necessary to carry out these activities and those carried out by CBP, including, among other things, the authoritative and timely identification of pests necessary to determine whether regulatory actions on imported products are required.

PPQ collects AQI user fees under the authority of The Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990, to recover costs for services provided by APHIS and CBP associated with preclearance inspections of passengers and the port-of-entry arrival of commercial vessels, trucks, loaded railroad cars, aircraft, and passengers entering the United States from a foreign destination. In FY 2023 AQI user fee collections increased over the previous year as travel restrictions and requirements associated with COVID-19 were lifted or eased in many countries, including the United States. However, collections were still approximately 6 percent lower than in FY 2019, the last full fiscal year prior to the pandemic. However, the program's costs and operations have changed significantly since that time, as the program responded to changes in trade industries as well as increasing costs. To ensure that the program can continue to protect U.S. agriculture, APHIS published a proposal to update the user fee rates on August 11, 2023, based on APHIS and CBP evaluations of changing costs and operations for the program. APHIS held a series of six webinars for stakeholders impacted by the fee changes. The comment period closed on October 10, 2023.

PPQ inspectors oversee the preclearance of certain commodities by inspecting shipments for export in the country of origin, monitoring treatments where required, or by monitoring systems approaches for pest mitigation (a combination of integrated pest management practices used in the field and after harvest). In most cases, exporters of the pre-cleared commodity cover the costs of this PPQ service through trust funds established for this purpose.

Pre-Clearance and Offshore Risk Reduction

One of the most effective ways to facilitate the safe movement of commodities into the United States is to address pest threats where they originate. In FY 2023, PPQ precleared 3.31 billion pounds of 70 different fresh fruits and vegetables from 20 countries before they arrived in the United States.

Additionally, PPQ inspected 2.96 billion pounds of avocados in Mexico as a part of a systems approach to facilitate safe trade. PPQ has overseen this program since 1997, and the program accounts for about 88 percent of avocado imports to the United States. PPQ also precleared 1.9 million pounds of cut flowers, bulbs, and perennials from Chile and 858 million bulbs and perennials from the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Belgium, and South Africa. This offshore work, which importers fully fund, allows inspected and precleared perishable products to enter through the U.S. ports of entry without delay.

PPQ conducts certain inspections and certifications overseas to verify that treatment or production facilities meet our standards and regulatory requirements to help protect U.S. plant health from pests that could move into the United States with high-demand, large-volume commodity imports. In FY 2023, APHIS certified a total of 200 phytosanitary treatment facilities, including 81 facilities in Mexico, 10 facilities in Central America, 3 facilities in Caribbean, 112 facilities in South America, and 4 facilities in Asia. APHIS is currently tracking 297 offshore treatment facilities in 19 countries. Among the most common mitigation types are hot water treatment (112 active facilities) and methyl bromide fumigation (83 active facilities). The majority of these treatment facilities are part of the preclearance programs.

Through audit-based monitoring programs, APHIS oversees almost 90 commodity programs that mitigate pests before they reach U.S. ports. Of these, 12 programs require annual audits of all or a portion of their facilities. PPQ completed 60 audits and recertifications, including 18 *Ralstonia*

exclusion program facilities for annual geraniums, 6 offshore greenhouse certification program facilities, and 13 clean stock program facilities for *Dracaena* (a genus that includes many popular houseplants). These three programs alone allowed for the safe import of 318 million propagative plant units with a wholesale worth of \$75 million.

To help the U.S. military prevent the spread of foreign animal diseases and plant pests, PPQ worked with the U.S. Department of Defense to inspect 29,070 shipments of personal goods, 10 million pieces of military cargo, and 12,433 personal vehicles before they returned stateside. APHIS completed annual evaluations and recertifications of 110 military preclearance programs in 18 countries in Europe and Africa, ensuring that these programs meet all administrative, programmatic, and safeguarding requirements. APHIS trained 203 military service members to manage these programs locally in Europe and Africa.

Defoliating moth species from Asia, or the flighted spongy moth (FSM) species complex made up of five *Lymantria* species, present an existential threat to U.S. forests. These moths can lay their eggs on the superstructure of maritime vessels, posing a threat of spreading the pest into new territories. In partnership with CBP, PPQ coordinated the inspection in FY 2023 of approximately 4,080 vessels that had visited high-risk ports within the last 24 months. Vessels can request a predeparture FSM inspection certificate from 28 national plant protection organization (NPPO)-accredited certification bodies in high-risk countries, including Russia, China, Korea, or Japan. APHIS coordinates on the standard for these inspections with its counterparts in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Chile.

PPQ also helps keep plant pests and diseases offshore with cooperative programs like the Greater Caribbean Safeguarding Initiative (GCSI), the Don't Pack a Pest Program (DPAP), and the PestLens

website and early warning system. The GCSI is a cooperative framework of 42 NPPOs in the Caribbean region that funded 6 safeguarding projects to mitigate pest risk near U.S. borders in FY 2023. The DPAP provides traveler education materials in participating countries to stop the introduction of pests and diseases in personal baggage. PPQ added a tenth DPAP program this year and continues to work with 18 NPPO partners to develop programs in their countries. Finally, in cooperation with North Carolina State University, PPQ provided 17 pest alert notifications to more than 3,000 registered users of PestLens, including 54 new pest-related articles, and added 30 new pests to the Global Pest and Disease Database. These systems serve as a resource for PPQ and other plant health regulatory officials that conduct plant health risk assessments and develop inspection policies for imported goods, among other things.

[Risk Analysis and Methods Development for Pest Exclusion](#)

PPQ develops pest risk analyses and epidemiological approaches to support and improve pest exclusion programs and decision making. In FY 2023, PPQ's Plant Pest Risk Analysis (PPRA) unit completed approximately 200 risk analyses associated with imports, exports, invasive pest threats, and other programmatic requirements. This total includes 28 analyses to open, expand, or maintain export markets for U.S. producers and 48 risk assessments for import requests from foreign countries.

PPRA's work also included evaluations of 27 newly detected pests by the New Pest Advisory Group, 9 pathway analyses and spread models, 2 economic analyses supporting operational and policy decisions, and 8 New Pest Response Guidelines to proactively prepare for emergency responses. These products identify potentially harmful plant pests and diseases and help PPQ decide what mitigating actions to take in order to prevent their entry into or limit their spread or economic impact within the United States.

APHIS' Plant Pathogen Confirmatory Diagnostics Laboratory (PPCDL) develops, adapts, validates, and utilizes diagnostic methods for the detection of regulated plant pathogens. In FY 2023, PPCDL

expanded the use of molecular diagnostic tools to three additional plant inspection stations at ports of entry for *Ralstonia*, a pathogen that cannot be detected visually.