



# PPQ 2023 Annual Report

## Strengthening Pest Exclusion at the Border

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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, PPQ:

- 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's import regulations and prevent smuggling
- 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 PPQ 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. Due to continuing impacts of travel reductions related to COVID-19, FY 2021 AQI user fee collections were approximately 25 percent lower than 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 through inspecting shipments for export, 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.

PPQ also receives appropriated funding for pre-departure inspections of passengers and cargo traveling from Hawaii and Puerto Rico to the continental United States to prevent the introduction of non-native agricultural pests and diseases into the continental United States while facilitating the movement of travelers and agricultural goods. PPQ inspects all passenger baggage leaving these islands because of the risks associated with pests of fruits and vegetables grown in these areas.

When inspectors identify an item that poses a specific risk, they take immediate action to prevent the entry of materials that could harbor the pest or disease in question. This action prevents damage to the country's agricultural industry and negates the need for costly control and eradication programs. PPQ also partners with industry groups and State and Commonwealth counterparts to facilitate the safe movement of cargo. In Hawaii, the State Department of Agriculture conducts nursery inspections and certifies nursery stock on PPQ's behalf for shipment to the continental United States.

### Cooperative Program Management

PPQ works with CBP to protect America's agricultural resources and food supply through inspecting international passenger baggage, cargo, and conveyances. PPQ and CBP share management of the program through working groups and daily collaboration. Senior leadership of both agencies meet frequently to develop joint plans and coordinate efforts in priority areas, ensure clear and balanced

decision-making, streamline effective outreach and communication, and improve organizational structure and leadership to support the shared work in the agriculture safeguarding mission.

In FY 2023, PPQ trained 359 new CBP Agriculture Specialists, conducted Basic Agricultural Threat Training for 1,440 first-line CBP officers, and provided Agriculture Fundamentals Training for 24 CBP Import Specialists. In addition, PPQ provided training support to CBP Agriculture Specialists who delivered military cooperator inspector training to certify 483 Department of Defense (DOD) cooperators who perform agriculture quarantine inspections in mainland U.S. military installations. These cooperators prevent the entry of agricultural pests and diseases associated with military equipment and/or personnel returning from overseas military installations to the United States. Additionally, PPQ trained 46 canine teams and 32 agriculture field trainers for CBP.

#### CBP-Facilitated Port-of-Entry Inspections

In FY 2023, approximately 382 million passengers and pedestrians entered the United States by air, bus, ship, train, or on foot. The program also conducted secondary agricultural inspections of 452,601 of the 72 million passenger vehicles entering the United States from Canada and Mexico in FY 2023. In addition, inspectors cleared 39 million ships and 1.3 million cargo, mail, and express carrier shipments, intercepting 56,061 pests.

#### Propagative Plant Inspection

Importations of nursery stock and other propagative plant materials can serve as significant pathways for invasive pests and diseases. To reduce the risks associated with such imports, PPQ requires that certain imported plant materials enter the United States through 16 plant inspection stations located at ports of

entry throughout the country and territories at major international airports and seaports, and at major crossings along the U.S.-Mexico border. Specialists at these stations inspect shipments to ensure that imported plants and seeds do not contain pests and diseases of regulatory significance.

In addition, they enforce the regulations that apply to the import and export of plant species protected by the Endangered Species Act and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. In FY 2023, inspectors cleared 27,235 imported shipments containing 1.87 billion plant units (cuttings, rooted plants, tissue culture, etc.) and over 670,811 kilograms of seeds of woody plants. Through these inspections, PPQ employees detected 5,293 pests of which 2,176 were quarantine-significant pests at the plant inspection stations. In addition, the stations conducted 3,753 treatments or other actions to remediate pests on more than 13 million plant units and 235,093 kilograms of seed.

### Pest Identification

When pests are detected in cargo, the program must identify them to determine if they are considered quarantine-significant under PPQ regulations (i.e., if they are exotic and could pose a significant threat to U.S. plant health, if the program can allow the cargo entry into the United States, and what, if any, mitigation measures would be required.) In FY 2023, PPQ processed and identified more than 92,000 pest interceptions, with approximately 45,000 being quarantine-significant.

PPQ continued its use of digital imaging technology for pest identification in FY 2023 to support limited staff presence in the pest identification laboratories to protect the health of employees from COVID-19 exposure. PPQ National Specialists performed 81 percent of their identification based on digital images, an increase of 4 percent over FY 2022. PPQ will continue the use of digital imaging technology as

means to improve the timeliness of pest identifications for urgent submissions (i.e., those for which cargo is on hold pending a pest identification).

PPQ and CBP use the Cargo Release Authority (CRA) program to reduce the numbers of pests that CBP must submit to PPQ for identification, speeding up the inspection process for shipments that contain no suspect quarantine pests. Through the CRA program, PPQ provides training and job aids that allow CBP Agriculture Specialists to recognize frequently intercepted, easily identifiable, low-risk organisms, and to release the cargo if the organism is not a quarantine-significant pest. PPQ grants CRA after the Agriculture Specialist has successfully identified a particular pest a certain number of times and submitted documentation to PPQ.

### Risk Analysis and Methods Development

PPQ develops pest risk analyses and epidemiological approaches to support and improve pest exclusion programs and decision making. In FY 2023, PPQ 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 26 risk assessments for import requests from foreign countries.

The laboratory'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 for preparedness purposes. These products identify potentially harmful plant pests and diseases and help PPQ decide what mitigating actions to take to prevent their entry into or limit their spread or economic impact within the United States.

## Pre-Departure Inspections

PPQ inspected the baggage of more than 15.9 million passengers prior to departing Hawaii and Puerto Rico and intercepted approximately 250,000 prohibited items and 2,000 quarantine-significant pests in FY 2023. APHIS conducts commodity certification and inspection programs to facilitate interstate trade between Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the continental United States. In FY 2023, the program conducted 100,087 inspections of regulated agricultural commodities shipped from Hawaii and Puerto Rico. In addition, the program oversaw or conducted 4,171 cargo treatments in Hawaii and Puerto Rico.

## Smuggling Interdiction and Trade Compliance (SITC)

SITC identifies and closes smuggling pathways for prohibited agricultural products into U.S. commerce. SITC works closely with CBP to identify and target agricultural risks at the ports of entry before they enter U.S. commerce. In FY 2023, SITC conducted over 16,820 market surveys and seized 3,028 prohibited agricultural items in retail commercial locations. In addition, SITC initiated 1,593 product traces including 67 items from internet sales and 447 from courier surveys. Those seizures totaled 294,779 pounds of prohibited and/or restricted plants, plant products, meat, and meat products valued at approximately \$1.1 million. Additionally, SITC conducted 24 recalls for restricted material, including noncompliant wooden handicrafts and grain products. Total seizures as a result of recalls weighed 65,024 pounds and had an estimated value of \$218,073.

## Treatment Program

PPQ supports U.S. imports of plants and plant products by facilitating and monitoring phytosanitary treatments. PPQ facilitated entry of regulated agricultural cargo through the monitoring of 15,310

fumigations, 40,161 cold treatments (24 commodities from 17 countries), 6,483 irradiation certifications (18 commodities at 11 facilities in 6 countries), and 164 heat treatments of Niger Seed to reduce pest risks on cargo that would not otherwise have been allowed entry. The treatment program expanded to allow cold treatment at a new port of entry and additional commodities to be treated at an established irradiation facility within the United States..

## Permitting

PPQ requires that importers apply for permits for the importation into the United States and transit through the United States of certain high-risk regulated plants and plant products for consumption or propagation. These products include regulated plants and plant products, pests, and pathogens for diagnostic and research, biological control agents, soil, and Federal noxious weeds. Permits notify importers of commodity import requirements to ensure products and commodities making entry into the United States will not harm American agriculture.

During FY 2023, PPQ issued 28,155 import permits for regulated plant material and issued 8,361 letters (Letters of Denial or Letters of No Jurisdiction) in response to permit application requests. In addition to permits and permit-related correspondences, the Plant Protection and Quarantine Customer Support Center responded to 33,286 customer support calls and emails to assist stakeholders with import-related questions.

PPQ continues to improve the customer experience through development and delivery of the new eFile permitting system. The new eFile system supports the implementation of automated permitting for more than 45 percent of all permit types and reduces the wait time for a permit to be issued to within minutes, as compared to 2 – 4 weeks using the current ePermits system.