



Animal and Plant
Health Inspection
Service

June 17, 2015

Office of the
Administrator

Dear Stakeholders:

1400 Independence
Avenue SW
Washington, DC
20250

Among the many facets of APHIS' mission is our vital role facilitating the safe flow of agricultural trade. We ensure imported agricultural products meet requirements that protect against the introduction of harmful pests and diseases, and certify that millions of U.S. agricultural exports destined for markets abroad meet foreign entry requirements. APHIS is not alone in our trade responsibilities; a total of 48 Federal Agencies have import/export oversight. Together, we are working to launch a new electronic system, known as the International Trade Data System (ITDS) to streamline the import/export process.

The goal is to create a single, electronic window to submit trade documents to the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Currently, this process is largely paper based, and the new ITDS single window is expected to save stakeholders and the government time and money.

DHS is taking the lead role in building ITDS, and they have set a firm launch date of November 1, 2015*. In addition to reducing paper, APHIS and other Agencies will have earlier access to shipment data. This should expedite import/export processes at the border while also improving the security, health and safety of the cargo. In the event CBP places an agricultural hold on an arriving shipment, APHIS will also be able to access ITDS to find out why the shipment is being held and whenever possible assist the importer with bringing the shipment into compliance. Currently, this critical information is only available on a hard-copy document maintained by CBP.

While ITDS offers many benefits, this is a huge undertaking for APHIS. For the November launch, we are focusing on import documentation. Given the diversity of our Agency, we have a total of 33 licenses, permits, certificates and other entry documents—more than any other participating Federal Agency—that must be compatible with the new system. When ITDS goes live, importers will continue to come to APHIS to apply for and obtain official documents as they always have. But instead of providing them to CBP in hard copy, most import documents will be uploaded into ITDS, and customs brokers will communicate with CBP through the new system.

Because most foreign trading partners do not yet have the capability to provide electronic certification, APHIS will continue to use paper forms for all government-to-government certifications. However, electronic certification is something we are working to implement with interested trading partners.

In the next couple of months, CBP will be hosting Webinars and workshops at ports around the country to educate customs brokers and importers about ITDS and the new electronic single window. APHIS will also be participating in these

events to answer questions from stakeholders. Information about upcoming workshops and Webinars is available on the [APHIS ITDS Web page](#).

We recognize not all of our stakeholders need to know the technical details of this transition, but we do want to make sure you know this important change is underway, and that APHIS is committed to fostering trade and streamlining our processes to improve efficiencies. We will continue to share information about ITDS through our Web page and the APHIS [Stakeholder Registry](#) where we have created a new topic just for ITDS. If you have specific questions about ITDS and APHIS' participation, you can also contact Hallie Zimmers at 202-799-7029 or by email at hallie.zimmers@aphis.usda.gov.

Sincerely,



Kevin Shea
APHIS Administrator

** Based on input from brokers, importers and carriers, CBP and its Federal partners are providing industry with more time to update their business processes and software to transition to ITDS. As a result, we are updating our November 1, milestone when all electronic filings would have been required to go through ITDS to provide industry with greater flexibility. The hard work and momentum already underway will continue, and CBP and its Federal partners will closely monitor industry adoption and system performance rates in advance of a new February 27, 2016 transition milestone when ITDS will become the only system used for submission of trade data.*