

How APHIS Facilitates Agricultural Imports

Many nations have modified their ideas of protectionism and embraced such international trade agreements as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Countries have opened their doors a little wider to the prospects of new trade, particularly in the area of agriculture. With this increased interest in agricultural trade comes a bigger, more visible role for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

APHIS facilitates agricultural trade for both importers and exporters, and its Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) unit is central to the successful flow of healthy commodities into and out of the United States. PPQ safeguards agricultural and natural resources from the risks associated with the entry, establishment, or spread of animal and plant pests and noxious weeds. Fulfillment of its safeguarding role ensures an abundant, high-quality, and varied food supply, strengthens the marketability of U.S. agriculture in domestic and international commerce, and contributes to the preservation of the global environment.

Without PPQ's protection and safeguarding activities, production agriculture, and ultimately the Nation's affordable food supply is at risk. For example, if Mediterranean fruit fly, citrus canker, plum pox virus, Asian longhorned beetle, and other exotic plant pests/diseases remain unchecked by PPQ, annual production and marketing losses of several hundred million dollars would likely occur.

PPQ's technical expertise in assessing and regulating the risks associated with agricultural imports into the United States has resulted in a dramatic expansion of the Agency's protection function, especially the commercial protection role: Market access and retention of U.S. products in foreign countries. PPQ must now respond to other countries' plant health import requirements and negotiate science-based standards that ensure domestic agricultural exports are protected from unjustified trade restrictions.

In response to needs expressed by the U.S. public and Congress, PPQ's protection role also includes human health and safety issues and development of invasive pest exclusion techniques for vulnerable ecosystems.

APHIS' Veterinary Services (VS) unit ensures that animals and animal products, such as semen and embryos, can be imported into this country without threatening the health of U.S. animals.

APHIS' Role in Agriculture Importation

Over the years, Americans have come to count on a diverse array of agricultural products for their dinner table. In order to fulfill the ever-changing tastes of Americans, the United States imports commodities from around the globe. Local grocery stores now carry everything from Mexican artichokes to Italian zucchini. In FY 2003, the United States imported \$45.7 billion dollars worth of agricultural products.

Some foreign countries have agricultural pests and diseases that do not exist in this country. These pests and diseases can cause devastating damage to U.S. agriculture if introduced. Consequently, PPQ strives to ensure that imported products are free of harmful pests and diseases. PPQ does this by regulating the importation of agricultural products with phytosanitary (plant health) certificates, importation rules, and inspections.

A phytosanitary certificate is an official document issued by an exporting country, which certifies that the phytosanitary status of a shipment meets the phytosanitary regulations of the United States. Anyone wishing to import certain plants and plant products into the United States is required to have a phytosanitary certificate. PPQ employees advise importers on phytosanitary restrictions and provide information (including regulations, policies, and procedures) on bringing agricultural commodities into the United States.

The intended purpose of a phytosanitary certificate is to expedite the entry of plants or plant products into the United States while protecting American agriculture. Through its issuance of a phytosanitary certificate, an exporting country is verifying that the shipment has been inspected and conforms to the phytosanitary import requirements of the United States. In addition, the phytosanitary certificate indicates that the shipment is free of pests and diseases that do not exist in the United States.

Importers may obtain information or import permits by contacting:

USDA–APHIS–PPQ
Permit Unit
4700 River Road, Unit 136
Riverdale, MD 20737
Telephone: (877) 770-5990
Fax: (301) 734–5786

PPQ officers also work in some foreign countries inspecting agricultural commodities before shipment to the United States in order to facilitate the products' movement to markets. One of the most successful of these preclearance programs is in Holland, where PPQ officers have been inspecting flower bulbs since 1951. In Chile, PPQ has been inspecting all fruits and vegetables destined for U.S. consumers since 1983.

Balancing Homeland Security and Agricultural Trade

On November 21, 2002, President Bush signed legislation creating the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (USDHS) to unify Federal inspection forces and protect our Nation from a new host of terrorist threats. More than 22 Federal agencies were consolidated into the new department, including portions of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

After a long and distinguished history in USDA, approximately 2,600 employees from APHIS' Agriculture Quarantine and Inspection (AQI) force became part of the USDHS' Border and Transportation Security's Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) on March 1, 2003. APHIS' efforts to protect American agriculture have long been the first line of defense against the introduction of foreign plant and animal pests and diseases at our Nation's ports of entry. This critical port of entry inspection function will now be carried out by USDHS.

The transfer of AQI port inspection to USDHS brings together agricultural inspectors, as well as certain U.S. Customs and Immigration and Naturalization Service employees, in an effort to secure our borders and ports of entry, while still facilitating the movement of legitimate trade and travelers. Creating a consolidated border inspection organization allows for unprecedented information sharing, streamlined services, cross training among specialists, and innovative techniques that weren't previously possible when border inspection was the responsibility of three separate agencies.

Although USDHS is now responsible for conducting inspections at our Nation's borders, APHIS continues to determine what agricultural products can enter the country and what products pose a risk and should be kept out. Through risk assessments,

pathway analysis, and rulemaking, APHIS continues to set agricultural policy that is then carried out by USDHS. This complementary role fulfills the President's objectives for having a more unified border inspection force while at the same time affirming and preserving APHIS' expertise in setting agricultural import policies.

Importing CITES-Listed Plants

Many plants and animals whose populations are threatened in the wild are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The purpose of this treaty is to prevent international trade from threatening the survival of wild fauna and flora. This is done by regulating the trade of some species and prohibiting commercial trade of those species that are likely to become extinct.

PPQ enforces the plant provisions of CITES and inspects CITES-listed plants imported through any of its 14 plant inspection stations and facilities located nationwide. Importers should contact the PPQ Permit Unit if they have any questions about importing CITES-listed plants. If you have questions about importing CITES-listed animals or animal products, contact the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service at (800) 358–2104.

In FY 2003, more than 28 million CITES-listed plants were presented for clearance at PPQ's inspection stations. PPQ inspectors examine CITES-listed plants to ensure that the plant specimens match the description of the accompanying CITES documents. If importers do not have the proper documents, PPQ officers may seize the plants and offer them back to their country of origin at that country's expense, or they may place the plants in one of the many designated rescue centers in this country, where they may be displayed, propagated, or used for other purposes consistent with CITES. PPQ also requires that importers obtain a general permit costing \$70 from the PPQ Permit Unit for any commercial shipments of CITES-listed products they wish to bring into this country.

Importing Animals, Birds, and Animal Products

VS regulates the importation of live animals, poultry, pet birds, and animal products, such as meats, cheeses, casein, gelatins, certain animal hides and racks, and germ plasm—both semen and embryos. VS carefully monitors all of these commodities in case they are infected with foreign animal diseases, such as avian influenza or foot-and-mouth disease, that could threaten U.S. livestock populations. For example, countries that have outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease are not

allowed to export fresh, chilled, or frozen meats to the United States. However, such meat products can be shipped into this country if they have been heat processed or cured according to APHIS standards. VS establishes similar requirements for countries where other animal diseases exist. Certain live animals, including pet birds, imported from foreign countries may have to be quarantined in USDA animal import centers located in New York, Miami, or Los Angeles before entering the United States.

For permit applications and information about import requirements and user fees related to importing animals, birds, and animal products, contact

USDA-APHIS-VS-NCIE
National Center for Import/Export
4700 River Road, Unit 40
Riverdale, MD 20737-1231
Telephone: (301) 734-3277/8364
Fax: (301) 734-4704/8226

Facilitating Trade

These days, under the influences of trade agreements such as NAFTA and GATT, agricultural trade is booming. And APHIS' dual role of facilitating agricultural exports while protecting American agriculture has become even more crucial. PPQ's efforts to negotiate and resolve market access restrictions ensure enhanced market opportunities for U.S. exporters. In addition, PPQ and VS' export certification efforts inspire much-needed trust from foreign countries that they are receiving healthy, pest- and disease-free agricultural shipments. Moreover, APHIS' efforts on the homefront to protect American agriculture ensure that U.S. consumers can continue to enjoy the tastes of American products while still sampling the tastes of the rest of the world.

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