

## Federal Agencies Unite To Fight Invasive Species

Red palm mites. Fruit flies. Citrus root weevils (*Diaprepes*). All are subjects of articles in this issue of *Agricultural Research*.

They also have another thing in common: They're destructive invasive pests, with origins far beyond our shores and borders, which have found one way or another to get into the United States and upset our agriculture.

The news in these stories ranges from harrowing to triumphant. There's the story on page 4 about the red palm mite. Its rapid, wind-assisted spread throughout the Caribbean is threatening ornamental and coconut-producing palm trees and perhaps presents an even wider danger to agriculture. On the other hand, the article on page 8 reports on how integrated pest management has led to dramatic reductions in pesticide use aimed at overcoming exotic fruit flies such as the dreaded medfly.

These articles serve to highlight ARS's focus on invasive pests in general—be they insects, weeds, or plant or animal pathogens and parasites.

The government defines "invasives," as they're commonly called, as species that are nonnative to a given ecosystem and whose introduction causes, or is likely to cause, economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.

Concern about invasives is well founded, as together they cost the United States more than \$137 billion annually in damage and control measures. That comes to over \$450 per U.S. citizen! Currently, there are more than 30,000 invasive species in the United States, and more are introduced every year.

Keeping such pests out of the country—or in check once they've made their way here—is an enormous challenge. And keeping up with invasive species becomes more difficult each year, as increased travel and trade, among other factors, have made it easier for them to get around.

Fortunately, an array of federal programs is in place that forms a protective—albeit not airtight—barrier against invasives.

Now, federal researchers and managers involved in this fight have an ally called the "Federal Interagency Committee on Invasive Terrestrial Animals and Pathogens" (ITAP) that will help them all be on the same page and aware of what each agency is doing.

ITAP complements two other federal efforts: the Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds and the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force. Together, the three provide technical support to the policy-intensive National Invasive Species Council.

This collaboration focuses on sharing information on invasive-species research and, in my view, represents an entirely new realm in interdepartmental networking on this subject.

ARS is the principal USDA research agency conducting in-house studies to help growers protect their crops. Other USDA agencies involved in invasives studies include the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; the Forest Service; and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The ARS research serves to complement USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's mission to document and contain these invaders.

And ARS knows that data sharing is a key part of problem-solving research. Circulating the latest news about our studies and results leads to widespread application of major findings.

There are 47 ARS locations nationwide involved in battling invasive pests. They all share and coordinate their work, either directly or through the agency's National Program Staff.

ITAP will make it easier for researchers and leaders in ARS not only to be aware of what's going on throughout the agency, but also to ensure coordination and awareness between colleagues throughout the government.

The initiative was established in 2004 by a memorandum of understanding between agencies of the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and of the Interior and the Smithsonian Institution. Collaborating partners include the U.S. Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, State, and Transportation as well as the Environmental Protection Agency and National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The ITAP mission is to ensure networking and sharing of technical data needed for effective, coordinated campaigns against invasive species. Keys to success include providing informational and technical input to resource managers and elected officials and keeping commercial interests, nongovernmental organizations, and the public informed.

The result is a better federal response to invasive terrestrial plants, animals, and pathogens made possible through coordination among agencies at earlier—and hence more effective and less costly—stages than in the past.

We'll never be able to declare victory in the battle against all invasive species. There will always be more of them out there. But ITAP will provide the informational power needed to keep researchers and administrators ahead in their struggle.

I look forward to seeing how these shared resources—when combined with communication channels already in place—will allow researchers at ARS and throughout the federal landscape to address invasive species issues.

We must do this not in a species-by-species manner but in a coordinated fashion that considers the cumulative impacts of invasives on ecosystems, native species, and humans.

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