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Policies and Procedures

Title: Minimizing Risks of Releasing Weedy or Poisonous Plants

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This Directive states guidelines to minimize the risk of releasing weedy or poisonous plants through the introduction and evaluation of exotic plant materials by SEA, AR.

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1. Summary

Guidelines have been developed to minimize the risk of releasing weedy or poisonous plants through the introduction and evaluation of exotic plant materials by SEA, AR.

Many of our most serious weeds were introduced into the United States either accidentally or intentionally as potential crop or ornamental plants. Serious weed species, such as Johnsongrass, Macartney rose, Japanese honeysuckle, and waterhyacinth were intentionally introduced. These were brought in many years ago, but they illustrate the potential risk of introducing species that may become weeds when exposed to a new environment and separated from their parasites.

2. Abbreviations

- APHIS - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
- AR - Agricultural Research
- EBL - Economic Botany Laboratory
- GRL - Germplasm Resources Laboratory
- PPQ - Plant Protection and Quarantine
- PTL - Plant Taxonomy Laboratory
- RPIS - Regional Plant Introduction Stations

3. Authorities

The Plant Quarantine Act of 1912 enforced by APHIS provides authority to regulate the entry of all plant material because of plant pests. The Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, also administered by APHIS, provides authority for a regulatory system designed to prevent the introduction of designated known noxious weeds from foreign countries.

The Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, was given responsibility of developing regulations to implement Executive Order 11987 (Exotic Organisms). When these rules and regulations have been developed, provisions of this Directive may need revision. All provisions for introduction of plants must meet relevant standards of the National Environmental Policy Act and Endangered Species Act.

4. Guidelines

The following guidelines allow for flexibility in the introduction of new germplasm sources not covered by the Federal Noxious Weed Act and, at the same time, minimize the risk of releasing plants that might become noxious weeds:

- Permits issued by PPQ are required for import of exotic plant and most seed germplasm. Two types of permits are available:
 - Permit #37-2100 is a blanket permit issued by PPQ to the GRL, AR, SEA, USDA, Beltsville, MD 20705. This permit is used by SEA, AR scientists for importing enterable types of plant material.
 - Departmental permits authorize the entry of prohibited plant material and are issued when importation can be properly safeguarded during propagation. Permits are obtained from the Permit Section, PPQ, APHIS, USDA, Room 636, Federal Building, 6505 Belcrest Road, Hyattsville, MD 20782.
- All plant germplasm is required to enter the United States through the PPQ Plant Germplasm Quarantine Center or PPQ authorized inspection station. Treatment may be required if significant pests or pathogens are found. Within SEA, AR, the GRL has the primary responsibility for the introduction and initial distribution of plant germplasm after release by APHIS.
- PPQ personnel have initial responsibility to detect and identify noxious weed species prohibited by the Federal Noxious Weed Act when inspecting plant and seed importations. Prohibited noxious weed species would be refused entry unless a Departmental permit had been issued by PPQ under authority of the Federal Noxious Weed Act. These actions may be based in part on information supplied by GRL, PTL, and other appropriate agencies.
- After release by PPQ, initial distribution of germplasm for evaluation is made by GRL to the RPIS and other appropriate cooperating agencies. The RPIS have the role of watching for weedy or toxic characteristics of imported germplasm grown at their stations and the cooperators' experimental plots.
- EBL in cooperation with the PTL will maintain files on ecological and geographic distribution of exotic weeds. Such files will be available to agencies involved with plant germplasm introduction. These laboratories will cooperate in the identification and risk analyses of proposed introductions and in the development of a list of exotic plants with high-risk weed potential.
- Field locations (RPIS and others) shall be responsible for close observation of exotic plants and shall determine which have characteristics indicating high-risks as potential weeds:
 - Plant characteristics:
 - Prolific reproduction potential
 - Aggressiveness and competitive ability
 - Winterhardiness
 - "Amphibious" nature

- Seed characteristics:
 - Amount
 - Adapted for wide dispersal (e.g., dandelion, cocklebur)
 - Dormancy
 - Volunteering ability
 - Longevity

- Additional factors to be determined before general release:
 - Competitive ability
 - Ease of control or eradication (cultural or chemical)
 - Toxicity
 - Allergenicity

- After introduction into the United States but before general release, if a species appears to have serious weed tendencies or is a poisonous weed hazard, SEA Staff Scientist for Weeds and APHIS Director, National Program Planning Staff, Plant Protection and Quarantine Programs, will review the situation for the purpose of cooperatively considering the eradication of the potential weed pest. If such species also appears to have especially useful attributes--such as value for forage to livestock or wildlife--a review of its valuable characteristics versus its weed potential may be instituted in agriculture and other Federal agencies (Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, etc.). A consensus is required for release of such species.

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