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October 22, 2016

Osama El-Lissy,
Deputy Administrator
USDA APHIS PPQ
Washington DC

Dear Osama:

The Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey (CAPS) program provides the United States a critical line of defense for the introduction of exotic plant pests and diseases of regulatory concern; these pests can negatively impact our agricultural and environmental resources. Through the CAPS program, critical assistance is provided to State cooperators for early detection and rapid response of exotic pests and diseases. CAPS activities throughout the U.S. require a coordinated national response among all stakeholders in an effort to prevent and reduce the spread of these pests.

The most recently held national CAPS meeting occurred in 2010. Since 2010, significant personnel turnover of State Plant Regulatory Officials and State Survey Coordinators has occurred resulting in key state personnel who are not familiar with the CAPS mission or history.

The National Plant Board strongly believes that a regularly-scheduled and consistently-held national CAPS meeting is necessary to maintain the integrity of the CAPS program's mission. The meeting would enhance the CAPS program and should consist of workshops and trainings to determine high risk sites for pest introduction, pest identification/screening techniques, rapid response preparedness, changes in technology and stakeholder educational methods. The meeting will also provide harmonization between the regions on cooperative agreement writing/reporting and audit preparedness training.

The National Plant Board recommends that PPQ support and secure funding for a national CAPS meeting as soon as possible and schedule the meeting to occur a minimum of every three years. We request that the commitment of a national meeting be made in advance of the CAPS work plan submission process or allow states to amend their work plans to facilitate attendance by State Plant Regulatory Officials and State Survey Coordinators at the national CAPS meetings.

The National Plant Board also recommends that PPQ support the concurrent CAPS meetings at annual regional meetings.

Sincerely,

Joe Collins, President
National Plant Board

CC:

Paula Henstridge, Assistant Deputy Administrator, USDA APHIS PPQ

John Bowers, National Survey Coordinator, USDA APHIS PPQ

Lisa Jackson, National Operations Manager, USDA APHIS PPQ

Collin Wamsley, Central Plant Board President

Dana Rhodes, Eastern Plant Board President

Larry Nichols, Southern Plant Board President

Brad White, Western Plant Board President