

SOUTHERN PLANT BOARD

April 10-13, 2005

St. Augustine, Florida

RESOLUTION # 3

**United States Department of Homeland Security
Customs and Border Protection
Vacant Positions at Ports of Entry**

It has long been a recognized fact that U. S. ports of entry are the first line of protection for the nation's agricultural and environmental resources. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 established the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and charged them with coordinating U.S. efforts to protect against terrorism including agroterrorism. Approximately 2,700 agricultural inspectors at the ports, appropriate support personnel, and AQI user fees were transferred from USDA to DHS in 2003. The National Plant Board, along with regional Plant Boards have aggressively encouraged the participation of Custom and Border Protection (CBP) in both national and regional plant board meetings. CBP employees Thomas Winkowske and Denise Crawford are to be commended for their participation in the Southern Plant Board Meeting held April 10-13, 2005.

In March of 2005, the U. S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report to Congress on the work Homeland Security is doing to protect agriculture from a terrorist attack. Although the main emphasis of the report was on agroterrorism, the main threat posed to plant resources is the inadvertent introduction of plant pests on plant products entering the U.S. in commercial freight shipments or in personal shipments that are hand-carried or mailed. Both commercial and personal shipments are either entering legally or are being smuggled into the U.S. Unfortunately, the number of newly introduced plant pests continues to grow at a historically high rate. The GAO report noted that since the transfer of agricultural inspectors from USDA to DHS-Customs and Border Protection in 2003, there have been fewer inspections of agricultural products at the nation's ports of entry. Also, when the transfer was made, there were 500 vacant agricultural inspector positions, and at the time of the GAO report there were approximately 800 vacancies nationwide. The vacant positions and resulting decrease in inspections make U.S. plant resources more vulnerable to the introduction of exotic plant pests as well as acts of willful agroterrorism.

Resolved: That the Southern Plant Board, at its annual meeting held in St. Augustine, Florida on April 13, 2005, requests that DHS-Customs and Border Protection make a concerted effort to quickly fill vacant agricultural inspector positions and that USDA-APHIS-PPQ and DHS determine the reasons for declining inspections and that DHS quickly increase inspections to appropriate levels. Further, the Southern Plant Board encourages Customs and Border Protection officials to attend both the regional and

national meetings of the Plant Board and to invite members of the Plant Board to Customs and Border Protection meetings.

Motion to Adopt: Richard Gaskalla

Seconded by: Harry Fulton

Distribution:

Michael Chertoff, Secretary, DHS

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National Plant Board, Board of Directors