



Southern Plant Board

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May 5, 2008

Ms. Cindy Smith
Administrator
United States Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
1400 Independence Avenue SW, Room 312-E
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Ms. Smith:

At the recent meeting of the Southern Plant Board, the full membership discussed in detail the current USDA compliance agreement program. Based on this discussion, the membership recommended that USDA, in cooperation with its state partners, implement a comprehensive review of the existing program. As part of the review, a series of recommendations would be developed to ensure that an effective and consistent compliance agreement program is implemented nationwide.

Currently, USDA, APHIS, PPQ develops and enters into hundreds of compliance agreements each year. As you are aware, the primary objective for each of these compliance agreements is to eliminate or significantly reduce the risk of moving plant pests from an infested area to a non-infested area via commercial movement of articles. In the absence of adequate staffing, the concept of utilizing compliance agreements is a sound one; however, there have been at least three documented quarantine violations associated with the emerald ash borer quarantine program alone. Apparently, the follow-up and response for each of these violations was inconsistent. It is expected that each of these violations could have been addressed and handled in a more prompt and effective manner with proper operational procedures in place.

The Southern Plant Board suggests that USDA, APHIS, PPQ consider several key components as part of the review process. Initially, there is a critical need to centralize compliance agreements. This function might be best accomplished by utilizing a system such as ePermits. Both SPHDs and SPROs already have access to this system and there is clearly a comfort level in utilizing this system. This system might provide standard text for general agreements and perhaps a notification feature that would notify multiple recipient states with information regarding potential or expected movements. Finally, USDA should strongly consider implementing a quality control program that might incorporate, for example, minimum numbers of facility inspections, along with outlined timeframes for completion.

Member States

Alabama – Arkansas – Florida – Georgia – Kentucky – Louisiana – Mississippi
North Carolina – Oklahoma – Puerto Rico – South Carolina – Tennessee – Texas – Virginia

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The Southern Plant Board sincerely appreciates your consideration of this request and looks forward to working cooperatively in the review process.

Sincerely,

Gene B. Cross
President

c: Rebecca Bech, Deputy Administrator, USDA, APHIS, PPQ
Vic Harabin, Eastern Region Director, USDA, APHIS, PPQ
Phil Garcia, Western Region Director, USDA, APHIS, PPQ
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