



Southern Plant Board

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North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
1060 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1060

May 5, 2008

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

Dear Ms. Smith:

As President of the Southern Plant Board, I am writing you to express our support for adequate funding for the Citrus Health Response Program in Florida and other southern states. Citrus production is important to the agricultural economy of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Texas. In Florida alone it contributes \$9 billion annually to the state economy and in Texas it contributes over \$200 million each year. There is a growing Satsuma industry in Alabama and although seriously damaged by Hurricane Katrina, the Louisiana citrus industry is rebuilding.

Citrus fruit such as oranges, grapefruit, tangerines and other mandarin type fruit-like Satsumas are an important part of a healthy diet and enjoyed by people throughout the country. In some cultures, citrus is an important part of cultural traditions and ceremonies, such as giving bouquets of kumquats for Chinese New Year. Even in colder states, people enjoy having a citrus plant for their patio or greenhouse.

Unfortunately this vital industry and the enjoyment of U.S. produced citrus fruit and juice is threatened by the introduction and spread of serious exotic citrus pests and diseases such as citrus canker, citrus greening and the Asian citrus psyllid, the vector for greening. There are also other exotic pests likely to be introduced in the future. For over 10 years, the State of Florida and the USDA have attempted to eradicate citrus canker, but legal impediments and the 2004 and 2005 hurricanes resulted in disease spread beyond the point of economically feasible eradication. Also, it is not possible to eradicate citrus greening once introduced since infected plants can remain symptomless for several years. Florida citrus growers have now implemented management plans for these pests and diseases, and implemented strict new regulations governing the production of citrus nursery stock within protective structures so that they will be disease free. These measures are a result of an effort between regulators and growers in all U.S. citrus-producing states and the USDA, and they are outlined in the Citrus Health Response Plan. This plan has now been implemented into the Citrus Health Response Program in Florida, and even non-infested states are actively surveying for these pests.

Consequently, it is imperative that USDA, APHIS continue to adequately fund Citrus Health Response initiatives in all citrus producing states so that surveys for exotic citrus pests can continue for purposes of early detection and for pest and disease eradication or management purposes. It is also vital to these industries that biologically justified regulations be promulgated to allow for the orderly interstate movement of fresh citrus fruit, citrus nursery stock and other citrus products. Effective certification protocols have been developed and implemented in Florida and could be used as a guideline. The current federal prohibition on the interstate movement of citrus plants from Florida to non-citrus producing states, even though the plants are produced in disease-free nurseries, is particularly burdensome to Florida producers who lost important markets in the northeast and is not biologically justified.

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 appreciates your consideration of this request and looks forward to working cooperatively with USDA, APHIS on the many challenges facing us as we manage exotic plant pests and other invasive species.

Sincerely,

Gene Cross
President

GBC/cr

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