GROWERTALKS

Columns

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Growers, Florists Protest Chrysanthemum White Rust Quarantine

Society of American Florists

Both the Massachusetts Flower Growers Association and the Connecticut Florists Association have written to the USDA asking the agency to remove Chrysanthemum White Rust's (CWR) quarantine status.

"Each year the quarantine in place presents circumstances by which our growers and retail members face a large financial risk to their businesses," wrote the Massachusetts growers, as they called for "immediate action." Their letter continued: "We believe the change to a Regulated Non-Quarantine Pest status for CWR would be of benefit to our industry."

In the Connecticut Florists letter to the USDA, it argued that "as CWR outbreaks become more common and routine, the purpose of federal regulations for this pathogen becomes more unjustifiable and the costs of enforcement and compliance just keep adding up."

CWR has been a serious, quarantine-significant disease in the U.S. and Canada for many years; however, fungicides can prevent or control the disease. The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the industry generally agree that a complete removal of the quarantine could lead to increased disease pressure, greatly increasing the cost of control. On the other hand, however, some commercial growers—especially growers in the Mid-Atlantic States, Massachusetts and Connecticut—have experienced significant financial losses over the past several years when subjected to quarantines that required them to hold their mum crops until the marketing season had passed. For their part, scientists are questioning whether the disease may actually survive winter temperatures and thus remain in the environment in those climates.

SAF, the American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA) and major chrysanthemum breeders have been discussing this problem with APHIS for several years, while continuing a major outreach effort to educate growers on disease prevention and look for a way to modify the quarantine without fully revoking it. Several state governments have now joined the discussion, with their representatives arguing that surveying for the disease and enforcing quarantines is prohibitively expensive and ineffective.

One possible solution has emerged: APHIS could propose a rule designating CWR as a "Regulated Non-

Quarantine Pest." Under that scenario, the production of plant cuttings would be regulated, but in the production phase in the U.S., the disease would be treated as a "quality pest," and growers would not be subjected to quarantines. Imported cut chrysanthemum flowers would continue to be allowed.

Discussions are still in the very early stages, and a change in rulemaking would take several years, a timeline that would allow ample opportunity for public comment.

New Immigration Bill Unveiled—AgJOBS Included

SAF is evaluating the latest bill to tackle immigration reform—and, while the new legislation has several flaws, it does include AgJOBS.

Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-4-Ill.), and 92 Democratic co-sponsors at press time, unveiled the Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity Act of 2009 (CIR ASAP, H.R. 4321). Many of the co-sponsors are members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, a group that has criticized current reform efforts and the Obama administration's lack of leadership on the issue.

SAF is pleased that AgJOBS, which would streamline the H-2A agriculture-worker program, and allow for legalization of workers already here, is included in its entirety in CIR ASAP.

On Capitol Hill, immigration reform has fallen into the shadow of health care reform. While the Gutierrez bill is not perfect, SAF appreciates the congressman's efforts to reignite the debate. The Agriculture Coalition for Immigration Reform (ACIR) of which SAF is a member, put out a press release thanking Gutierrez and others for including AgJOBS in the bill.

Senate Will Move First

The CIR ASAP bill is the first move in an immigration debate that's likely to play out in Congress over the next several months. Sens. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), the leads in the Senate, are crafting a bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill. They are expected to introduce a detailed outline of their proposal early this year. SAF looks forward to working with the senators and their staff members to advance the new measure.

On the House side, Rep. Zoe Lofgren, (D-16-Calif.), chair of the House Judiciary Committee, also is drafting immigration legislation. Her bill will be the main reform vehicle moving through the House early this year. Given the upcoming mid-term elections and an unemployment rate of 10%, the timetable for moving a major comprehensive overhaul through Congress is uncertain. **GT**

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