

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Offshore-Grown Cutting Certification Pilot Set to Launch in October

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AmericanHort and the Society of American Florists are collaborating with U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to initiate an offshore certification program for unrooted plant cuttings. A six-month pilot program is expected to be launched on October 1 and will include growing operations in six Latin American countries.

Each year, the United States imports more than 1 billion unrooted cuttings of mostly annual and perennial plant varieties. This is an important supply chain for U.S. rooting stations and finished-plant growers. Nearly half of all plants sold in U.S. retail stores start from cuttings produced offshore. The high volume of these imports, most of which enter between December and March, presents staffing challenges for APHIS and Customs and Border Protection as they inspect for plant pests and diseases.

We believe that these unrooted cuttings generally present a low risk of harboring pests and pathogens of regulatory concern. Because of their high perishability, expediting port clearance would help to ensure vitality and benefit offshore production facilities, rooting stations, and finished plant growers.

Beginning in October 2017, APHIS is expected to launch a six-month greenhouse certification pilot program. The pilot will include greenhouse facilities in Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Colombia that produce generally admissible, unrooted vegetative cuttings for import into the United States. The pilot is being designed to determine whether greenhouse certification could effectively mitigate at origin regulated pest and disease risks associated with plant cuttings produced in approved facilities.

For the duration of the pilot, facilities must adhere to the requirements outlined in the draft pilot framework. The framework includes standard plant pest exclusion procedures, sanitation and traceability protocols, a summary of the greenhouse certification process, an explanation of how shipments will be handled at U.S. ports of entry, and expected next steps after the pilot's conclusion in March, 2018.

Four companies—Ball Horticultural Company, Dümmen Orange, Proven Winners and Syngenta Flowers—will participate in the initial pilot. The four companies and the associations have participated in a working group process with APHIS for over a year to develop the pilot program framework. During the pilot, offshore-

produced cuttings from these companies' farms will be subject to the same inspection process as cuttings from other sources. The expectation is that a successful pilot will result in reduced inspections and expedited entry procedures thereafter. If successful, the program is expected to be opened to additional countries and producers.

To obtain additional information, contact Kelsey Branch, APHIS Foreign Inspection and Certification Coordinator, at Kelsey.Branch@aphis.usda.gov. Questions to the associations may be addressed to Craig Regelbrugge (AmericanHort), CraigR@AmericanHort.org or Drew Gruenburg (Society of American Florists), DGruenburg@SafNow.org. **GT**