

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Offshore Farm Certification Goes Into Effect

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After several years of pilot testing, a plan to help streamline the inspection of cuttings coming in from offshore farms is going into effect this winter.

The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) announced it's launching its new Offshore Greenhouse Certification Program (OGCP) for the 2021 season and will conduct annual certification visits in January, February and March to offshore greenhouse facilities that ship unrooted plant cuttings into the U.S. The purpose of the inspections is to reduce the frequency of inspections at U.S. plant inspection stations, helping to expedite clearance and entry of cuttings coming through U.S. ports of entry.

Participating cutting farms must meet the program's minimum standards for greenhouse construction, security, production and sanitation, pest management, training and recordkeeping (a description of which can be found in the Offshore Greenhouse Certification Program Framework). The inspections will take place annually to ensure that farms remain in compliance.

The program was started about five years ago by four young plant suppliers (Ball Horticultural Company, Dümmen Orange, Syngenta and Proven Winners) working in partnership with APHIS and facilitated by AmericanHort. Their goal was to address phytosanitary risks at the offshore production facility rather than the clunky process where rooting stations have to get every single incoming shipment inspected, cleared and paid for.

APHIS will physically visit and certify all interested offshore facilities before March 31, 2021. Participating facilities, not the taxpayers, pay the cost of these certification visits, including travel, salary, benefits and overtime. The facilities will provide these funds through a trust fund established through a signed cooperative services agreement.

Karelyn Cruz, APHIS's Offshore Certification Specialist, says offshore facilities interested in participating can reach out to her at karelyn.cruz@usda.gov. **GT**