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DON'T HELP HITCHHIKING BUGS

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Agricultural Research Service
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

DON'T HELP HITCHHIKING BUGS



Plant pests are spreading faster and farther across national borders in today's world of global travel and trade than they could in the slower world of yesterday. Every hour of every day, harmful insects and plant diseases threaten to invade this country. Many are intercepted at ports of entry hiding in harmless-looking fruits, vegetables, bulbs, and seeds.

Among the plant pests that are attacking American farms, forests, and gardens today are many that entered this country in past decades. These "undesirable aliens" include insects, mites, snails, nematodes, and plant diseases. Foreign and native plant pests together take a big bite out of our crops, gardens, forests, and ornamental plants each year. In addition to this, growers spend millions of dollars for control measures to prevent even greater losses and to check further spread of the pests. Entomologists estimate that there are about 10,000 kinds of insect pests in this country. However, only about 150 of these cause most of the damage.

How "Bugs" Travel

Plant pests often travel with people. The early colonists brought lice on their bodies, weevils in the grain they carried for feed and seed, and plant diseases on shrubs which they brought along to make the new country look more like home. Once on this continent these pests spread rapidly, producing millions of offspring that swept across the new land.

A number of plant diseases and insects, such as stem rust fungus and the hessian fly, two enemies of small grains that caused wheatless days in the United States during World War I, came to this country before 1800. During the 19th century plant pests continued to come—in passenger baggage, cargo, nursery stock, and shipments of grain.

Some 80 species of economically important insect pests were introduced into this country during the half century prior to 1912. These include such damaging ones as the horn fly, beet webworm, gypsy moth,

San Jose scale, European red mite, greenbug, Argentine ant, boll weevil, European corn borer, and the alfalfa weevil. Before the end of the 19th century, it became apparent that quarantines were needed to prevent this worldwide spread of plant pests. Most major European countries and many in Asia enacted plant quarantines before 1900.

U.S. Enacts Plant Quarantine

In 1912 Congress passed the Plant Quarantine Act. It gave the Secretary of Agriculture authority to issue quarantines, establish inspection procedures, apply treatments to remove pest hazards when plants are imported, and restrict or prohibit plant imports when no such treatments are available.

The Problem Today

In the half century since passage of the Plant Quarantine Act there has been a huge increase in international travel and trade. Ocean travel increased greatly and the air age arrived. Airplanes now bring over 7½ million persons to the United States from abroad annually, with modern jets spanning the ocean in a few hours' time. Pests that would have died during the long voyage of the sailing ship era now may arrive in this country healthy and ready to attack crops and shrubs.

Plant material brought in by tourists presents a very serious problem. So, it is necessary to inspect incoming baggage at ports of entry. During port inspections, plant quarantine officers work with Customs inspectors to prevent the entry of products that might harbor pests. Recently they have been inspecting an average of over 30 million pieces of incoming baggage per year.

That adds up to nearly one inspection every second around the clock. These baggage inspections resulted in the seizure of more than 200,000 lots of prohibited plant materials per year, or an average of one lot every 3 minutes.

The volume of cargo, mail, and ships' stores reaching this country has also increased in recent years. However, commercial shipments move through a system of permits, inspection, and treatment that removes the hazard of pest introduction. Similar safeguards are applied to mail and ships' stores. An average of around 200,000 lots of prohibited or restricted plant material is intercepted annually from cargo, mail, and ships' stores.

REMEMBER THESE IMPORTANT POINTS

- Fruits, plants, meats, and similar agricultural items cannot be taken or sent into the United States without permission. Consult the U.S. Department of Agriculture or the nearest U.S. foreign office overseas for details.
- An advance permit is needed to bring in most admissible plants and cuttings. Get such permits before you go abroad.
- Report all fruits, vegetables, plants, bulbs, seeds, cuttings, meats, or meat products you have to agricultural quarantine or customs inspectors upon arrival in the United States. This is necessary even if you have a permit.
- To obtain more information on plant quarantines or to apply for a permit to bring plant material to the United States, write to Agricultural Research Service, Federal Center Building, Hyattsville, Md., 20782.

Supersedes ARS 82-3, Don't Help Hitchhikers

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