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## *Farm Bill Awards \$1 million for National Ornamentals Research Site for Studies into Sudden Oak Death Pathogen*

*Ribbon-cutting ceremony Oct. 26 on Dominican University of California campus*

(San Rafael, CA): Dominican University of California is receiving a \$989,798 grant from the 2008 Farm Bill to establish the National Ornamentals Research Site at Dominican University of California (NORS-DUC). Scientists from the national and international research community will conduct studies focused on understanding and controlling *Phytophthora ramorum*, the plant pathogen known to cause Sudden Oak Death (SOD) and ramorum blight on nursery stock.

NORS-DUC will be the first research site in the United States dedicated to the study of diseases of ornamental plants in a simulated nursery setting.

The grant is administered through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) Center for Plant Health Science and Technology (CPHST). The grant is the largest grant that CPHST has ever awarded to a single organization in one year. While the grant provides one-time funding, Dominican can re-apply each year through the 2008 Farm Bill for additional funds.

The grant and research site was recognized at a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Dominican on Oct. 26. The event will be attended by representatives from the USDA, including the Forest Service, as well as representatives from the nursery industry, and national, state and local government offices.

“We have been working closely with our partners to locate, secure and develop an ornamental crop research site that minimizes the potential introduction of plant pests into nursery trade,” said Rebecca Bech, deputy administrator for PPQ. “Thanks to all of the hard work of many cooperators, we have selected Dominican University of California as the premiere site. This initiative will contribute to PPQ's mission of safeguarding U.S. agriculture and natural resources by identifying nursery growers' key issues and reducing risks to the nation's forests.”

“The positive economic impact that research conducted at this site will have on the nursery industry cannot be overstated,” said Dr. Sibdas Ghosh, associate dean for academic development in Dominican's

School of Health and Natural Sciences. “This site will provide valuable data that will aid in reducing long-range spread of *Phytophthora ramorum* through infested nursery stock shipments.”

A number of international, national and state groups are collaborating with Dominican and the USDA, including the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the Marin County Agricultural Commissioner, the National Plant Board, the USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station, the California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers, the American Nursery and Landscape Association, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the United Kingdom’s Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Food and Environment Research Agency, the California Oak Mortality Task Force, The Nature Conservancy, and the Society of American Florists.

First identified in Marin County, *Phytophthora ramorum* poses a threat to woodlands across the United States and internationally. The host list has since grown to more than 100 plants, and federal regulations restrict the movement of nursery stock from the West. Research at NORS-DUC will provide measures designed to prevent infested nursery stock from being inadvertently outplanted into susceptible environments that have not yet been exposed to the pathogen.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture has found that SOD presents a clear and present danger to California’s forests, the nursery industry and other agricultural commodities and plant life. The importance of understanding the movement of the pathogen in nursery stock was underscored in March of 2004 when a large number of shipments of infected camellia plants were inadvertently shipped nationwide from a California nursery. By the end of 2004, potentially infected plants were found to have been shipped to nearly half the states in the country.

In California, *P. ramorum* does have a major economic impact on the forest, horticultural and other agricultural industries. California is the industry’s leading producer of horticultural plants – valued at \$2 billion a year, with a national farm gate value of more than \$17 billion. The potential impact of *P. ramorum* to the nursery industry’s national and international market exceeds that of any other disease.

NORS-DUC will be a secure site modeled to reflect a nursery for the purpose of performing studies on nursery stock in a “real world” environment while ensuring high level safeguards to reduce the possibility of the escape of pathogens.

In addition to supplying data to reduce the long range spread of *P. ramorum* and other plant pests and pathogens, the research site will provide validation of established Best Management Practices (BMPs) and development of new BMPs for nursery stock production; new treatment or remediation options for soil, water and plant materials to exclude, contain and eradicate *P. ramorum* and other plant pathogens and pests; valuable epidemiological data on new and emerging pests and pathogens on ornamentals; and outreach through reporting results of studies and by engaging students in research activities.

The ornamental research site will be located near the Forest Meadows amphitheater at Dominican then expanded to a yet-to-be developed site on University property near Deer Park and Locust avenues.

A research committee – comprised of representatives from national and regional nursery industries, land grant universities, California Department of Food and Agriculture, California Department of Forestry, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Agency, USDA Agricultural Research Service, USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station and the Marin County Agricultural Commissioner's Office – will review and prioritize all project proposals submitted to ensure they meet specified criteria.

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