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USDA Urges Americans to Prevent Invasive Pests, Protect American Agriculture

WASHINGTON, APRIL 2, 2012—The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) today announced that it is dedicating the month of April to sharing information about the threat that <u>invasive plant pests</u>, <u>diseases and harmful weeds</u> pose to America's fruits, vegetables, trees, and other plants—and how the public can help prevent their spread. APHIS works each day to promote U.S. agricultural health and safeguard the nation's agriculture, fishing and forestry industries.

"Invasive pests hit close to home and threaten the things we value," said Rebecca A. Blue, Deputy Under Secretary for USDA's Marketing and Regulatory Programs. "We need the public's help because these hungry pests can have a huge impact on the items we use in everyday life, from the fabric in our clothing, the food on our table, the lumber used to build our home and the flowers in our garden. During one of the most successful periods in history for U.S. agriculture, it is important that we step up our efforts to educate Americans about USDA's good work to protect our nation's food, fiber, feed and fuel from invasive pests."

Invasive pests are non-native species that feed on America's agricultural crops, trees and other plants. These "hungry pests" have cost the United States billions of dollars and wreak havoc on the environment. USDA and U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection—working closely with state agriculture departments and industry—are dedicated to preventing the introduction and spread of invasive pests. The goal is to safeguard agriculture and natural resources from the entry, establishment and spread of animal and plant pests and noxious weeds.

But federal and state agencies can't do it alone. It requires everyone's help to stop the unintended introduction and spread of invasive pests. The number-one action someone can take is to leave hungry pests behind. USDA urges the public to visit www.HungryPests.com to learn more about invasive pests and what they can do to protect American agricultural resources by preventing the spread of these threats. Here are a few actions that people can take today:

- **Buy Local, Burn Local.** Invasive pests and larvae can hide and ride long distances in firewood. Don't give them a free ride to start a new infestation—buy firewood where you burn it.
- Plant Carefully. Buy your plants from a reputable source and avoid using invasive plant species at all costs.

- **Do Not Bring or Mail** fresh fruits, vegetables, or plants into your state or another state unless agricultural inspectors have cleared them beforehand.
- **Cooperate** with any agricultural quarantine restrictions and allow authorized agricultural workers access to your property for pest or disease surveys.
- **Keep It Clean.** Wash outdoor gear and tires between fishing, hunting or camping trips. Clean lawn furniture and other outdoor items when moving from one home to another.
- **Learn To Identify.** If you see signs of an invasive pest or disease, write down or take a picture of what you see, and then report it at www.HungryPests.com.
- **Speak Up.** Declare all agricultural items to customs officials when returning from international travel. Call USDA to find out what's allowed:
 - (301) 851-2046 for questions about plants
 - (301) 851-3300 for questions about animals

At www.HungryPests.com, a website available in both English and Spanish, visitors can access the interactive Pest Tracker to see what pests are threatening in a selected state, and to learn how to report suspected invasive pests. The public can also engage on the invasive pests issue via Facebook and Twitter. HungryPests.com is optimized for mobile devices. Public service announcements in both English and Spanish will air on television and radio throughout April and at peak times for domestic travel this summer. APHIS has also been actively collaborating with a number of state partners who will conduct targeted stakeholder engagement on invasive pest issues with state-specific outreach materials.

Added Blue: "The USDA and its partners are fighting invasive pests on three fronts: abroad, at the border, and across the homeland. We're also developing new tools, improving our systems, and working hard to educate the public on how they can join the fight and help stop the spread of invasive pests."

There has been success in the fight against invasive pests. The Asian longhorned beetle, detected in Illinois in 1998, was declared eradicated from Illinois in 2008 with the help of local, state and federal partners and Illinois residents. The beetle was also declared eradicated from Hudson County, NJ; and Islip, NY. Extensive efforts by USDA and its partners in California reduced European grapevine moth populations in 2011 by 99.9 percent. That pest was first detected in California in 2009.

With Agriculture Secretary Vilsack's leadership, APHIS works tirelessly to create and sustain opportunities for America's farmers, ranchers and producers. Each day, APHIS promotes U.S. agricultural health, regulates genetically engineered organisms, administers the Animal Welfare Act, and carries out wildlife damage management activities, all to safeguard the nation's agriculture, fishing and forestry industries. In the event that a pest or disease of concern is detected, APHIS implements emergency protocols and partners with affected states and other countries to quickly manage or eradicate the outbreak. To promote the health of U.S. agriculture in the international trade arena, APHIS develops and advances science-based standards with trading partners to ensure America's agricultural exports, valued at more than \$137 billion annually, are protected from unjustified restrictions.

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