

ACTION ITEM FORM

Subject of Action Item: **Transfer of Agriculture Quarantine Inspectors**



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Text:

Background. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 transferred Agricultural Quarantine Inspections (AQI) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). More than 1,800 agriculture specialists within USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) became DHS Customs and Border Protection (CBP) employees. Since the transfer, the agencies currently face management and coordination problems that increase the vulnerability of U.S. agriculture to foreign pests and diseases.

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office report, CBP has not developed sufficient performance measures that take into account the agency's expanded mission or consider all pathways by which prohibited agricultural items or foreign pests may enter the country, such as commercial aircraft, vessels, and truck cargo. Also, CBP has not yet developed or used a risk-based staffing model to ensure that adequate numbers of agriculture specialists are staffed to areas of greatest vulnerability. CBP also has not used available inspection and interception data to evaluate the performance of the AQI program.

USDA estimates that agricultural pests cost the American agricultural industry an annual loss of about \$41 billion. This amount includes crops lost in the quarantine, and the cost of measures taken to control and eradicate pest outbreaks. Our nation's agriculture is too important to leave open to the risk of invasion of agricultural pests.

Requested action. NASDA opposed the transfer of the AQI mission from APHIS to DHS in 2002 and further supports the transfer of Agriculture Quarantine Inspectors back from the Department of Homeland Security to USDA APHIS. NASDA supports Congressional actions to accomplish this transfer, through the Farm Bill or through stand alone legislation.