

Testimony of Carol Russell
State Operations Support Officer for the
U.S. Department of Agriculture's
Plant Protection and Quarantine Program in Hawaii

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Thank you. I am very happy to be here on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, or APHIS, to discuss invasive species in Hawaii. My name is Carol Russell, and I am the State Operations Support Officer for APHIS' Plant Protection and Quarantine program, or PPQ, here in Hawaii.

I know that in recent years, USDA officials, including, most recently, Dr. Chuck Lambert, Deputy Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs and USDA's point person for invasive species, have testified before you along with their colleagues from the Department of the Interior, the Department of Commerce, and other agencies regarding the cooperation and planning taking place within the Federal Government to develop strategic approaches to addressing invasive species in the United States. Dr. Lambert and others have shared with you how the National Invasive Species Council, the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, and other cooperative groups that pull together the expertise of different agencies and individuals are helping to improve communication and make strides in our fight against invasive species.

In similar fashion, a coordinated, cooperative approach to addressing invasive species here in Hawaii, one that involves and includes a host of different groups and individuals with different interests and expertise, is helping to improve communication, direct resources, and target not only the invasive species already here, but those that have the potential to make their way here through established pathways. Governor Lingle and her staff have brought a great deal of attention and leadership to these issues, and, as the Agency within USDA charged with safeguarding agriculture and the environment from exotic pests and diseases, APHIS is fortunate to work alongside such committed partners here in the State.

As we've heard from other panel members this morning, Hawaii's tropical climate and unique ecosystem leave the State particularly vulnerable to the introduction and spread of invasive species. APHIS has a number of different programs in place that are helping to prevent new invasive species from making their way to the Hawaiian Islands, as well as respond to detections of new ones that have been introduced into the environment and have the potential to impact different components of the State's economy.

APHIS has extensive authority under the law to address invasive species. The Plant Protection Act and Animal Health Protection Act, for example, give our Agency the authority to set import regulations that help keep exotic pests and diseases out of the United States. When necessary, we can also respond swiftly to detections of invasive species that potentially threaten agriculture industries or the environment. We can quarantine affected areas, remove affected or exposed plants or animals, and, in serious cases, pay compensation to growers and producers in an effort to prevent the further spread of the pest or disease.

For its part, PPQ monitors pest and disease situations around the world for potential threats to U.S. agriculture via trade and travel, and, in response to new outbreaks in other parts of the world, we can take appropriate actions, such as suspending import programs or requiring more intensive inspections of certain commodities, to increase our level of safeguarding. The program also conducts risk assessments and public rulemaking to determine if new plants and plant products can be safely imported into the United States from abroad, and we maintain specialized plant inspection stations at major ports of entry—including one here in Honolulu—that screen imports of live plants and identify pests collected during other port inspections.

APHIS' Veterinary Services program operates similarly in order to safeguard U.S. animal health; here in Hawaii, for instance, Veterinary Services helps to facilitate the movement of feeder calves to Canada by addressing the disease risks associated with feral pig populations on several of the Islands. Because these

feral pigs can spread swine brucellosis and bovine tuberculosis to cattle, Veterinary Services personnel cooperate with the Hawaii Department of Agriculture to conduct disease surveillance programs and ensure the health of calves exported to Canada. In other important areas, APHIS' Wildlife Services program helps to prevent the spread of the brown tree snake from Guam to the Hawaiian Islands, and is also involved in research and other efforts to address a relatively new invasive species here in Hawaii—the coqui frog. My colleague Mike Pitzler, Wildlife Services State Director for Hawaii, is here with me this morning and can address any of your questions on these issues; I'd like to focus the rest of my remarks on a few key examples of PPQ's efforts that highlight the importance of cooperative approaches to invasive species management in Hawaii.

I've been fortunate not only to serve the last several years as PPQ's liaison to the Hawaii Department of Agriculture on plant health safeguarding issues, but also, over the last year, to chair the Coordinating Group for Alien Pest Species. Formed in 1995, the coordinating group includes participants from every major State and Federal agency, as well as private industry, in Hawaii with a stake in managing or preventing the entry of invasive species into the State. Working in conjunction with my counterparts from the Hawaii Department of Agriculture, as well as having the opportunity to chair the coordinating group, I've seen firsthand that significant results can be achieved when lines of communication stay open and individuals bring their experiences and expertise to the table to devise innovative solutions to the problems associated with invasive species.

As one very recent example, I worked with my colleagues here in Hawaii, the U.S. mainland, and other Pacific Island nations to devise a regional approach to prevent the entry of red imported fire ant into Hawaii. Now that this highly invasive pest has been found in California, the risk to Hawaii's environment and several important industries, including ranching and tourism, is significantly higher. By evaluating all of the potential pathways available for the spread of imported fire ant into Hawaii, as well as the treatment and inspection measures that have shown to be effective against the pest in the continental United States, we developed a regional management approach that will help to better protect not only Hawaii, but neighboring islands as well. I am very happy to report that the prevention plan was just adopted at the regional biosecurity, plant protection, and animal health meeting held in Fiji in March, and should significantly increase our level of safeguarding here in Hawaii against this pest.

Another very important area of cooperation for PPQ in Hawaii is our relationship with the Department of Homeland Security, or DHS. In March 2003, about 2,600 inspectors with PPQ nationwide transferred to Homeland Security's Bureau of Customs and Border Protection. As they did when they were with PPQ, these personnel help prevent the entry of exotic pests and diseases that can endanger U.S. agriculture through inspections of people, cargo, and modes of transport at U.S. borders. While these inspectors now report to DHS, they remain closely linked to the agriculture mission and are available to assist PPQ should an emergency situation arise.

Again, from firsthand experience, I can share with you that here in Hawaii, PPQ and our colleagues with DHS are working extremely well with one another, to the continued benefit of agricultural industries and the environment. Agriculture inspectors with DHS inspect and clear shipments from abroad at ports of entry and refer shipments of live plants to PPQ's plant inspection station at Honolulu International Airport for more specialized inspection to ensure that these plants do not harbor pests or diseases that could threaten Hawaii.

Our inspection station handles an enormous volume of cargo—as just a few of many examples, in the last 3 months alone, over 4.5 million pineapples from the Philippines have passed through the station, along with 70,000 palms from Australia and 175,000 orchids from Taiwan—and our entomologists and plant pathologists stationed there have intercepted noxious weeds, exotic snails, and other pests that could jeopardize Hawaiian agriculture or the environment. Depending on the pest and other circumstances, infested plants are either destroyed, re-exported, or treated and released.

As the example of our plant inspection station illustrates, PPQ continues to be actively involved in secondary inspections and other safeguarding operations, even with the move of our port inspection force to DHS. Here in Hawaii, PPQ is now focusing more of our efforts on collaborating with the Hawaii Department of Agriculture to monitor and inspect for pests and diseases that are impacting agricultural industries on the mainland and on neighboring islands and could make their way to Hawaii. Recent detections of an exotic strain of Ralstonia bacteria in U.S. greenhouses, as well as sudden oak death in southern California, highlight that we need to stay in contact with nursery, greenhouse, and related industries here in Hawaii. Such communication is critical to providing our stakeholders with information on these developing situations, the safeguarding measures PPQ and State Agriculture Departments have taken, and prudent monitoring

measures to ensure that if pests somehow spread to Hawaii, we learn of them immediately and implement the emergency response plans we have prepared for such events. Members of PPQ's Safeguarding, Interdiction, and Trade Compliance program in Hawaii have been integral to these cooperative outreach, education, and inspection efforts.

I also want to let the Subcommittee know about our Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey, or CAPS, program. This is a nationwide initiative PPQ has undertaken to increase our surveillance for exotic pests and diseases. By targeting the significant pests that we know could make their way to the United States via established pathways, our goal is to detect any such incursions at an early stage when control and eradication operations are operationally—and economically—feasible. The CAPS program here in Hawaii has grown in scope, just as it has on the mainland. In 2000, the program received \$7,500; this year, PPQ is providing over \$200,000 to the Hawaii Department of Agriculture for survey efforts, as well as another \$100,000 for related efforts on Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa.

Targets for the CAPS program in Hawaii and other Pacific island nations include pests like pink hibiscus mealybug and imported fire ant, as well as noxious weeds like giant salvinia and plant diseases such as soybean rust. While some of these pests are invasives we are working to keep out of Hawaii, others have made their way to the Islands, and we're working to control their spread. A good example of such efforts is PPQ's contribution of funding to help address the invasive Miconia plant in the Maui area. While PPQ is contributing a relatively small amount of funding at this time, other participants, including, most significantly, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are helping to leverage the costs of the project and establish a solid foundation for the possible expansion of efforts in the coming years.

I'd like to conclude my remarks by mentioning that PPQ also works to help facilitate shipment of agricultural commodities from Hawaii to the U.S. mainland, especially when pests that are present here, such as different tropical fruit flies, are invasive species of great concern on the mainland. For example, in February 2003, APHIS published two final rules amending the Hawaiian fruits and vegetables regulations. One of these rules provided for the interstate movement of cut gardenia blooms from the State. The other allowed for the interstate movement of bell peppers, eggplant, mangoes, certain kinds of pineapple, Italian squash, and tomatoes, provided that shipments undergo irradiation treatment at an approved facility prior to export. Such treatment mitigates the risks associated with tropical fruit flies. Similarly, this past February APHIS affirmed an earlier interim rule in the Federal Register that allows for the use of irradiation as a treatment for sweet potatoes to be moved interstate from Hawaii, provided that certain other conditions are met as well. PPQ is currently renovating our sterile fruit fly rearing facility in Hilo, Hawaii, in order to significantly increase the number of flies available for release programs, and in this way, we are an active supporter of the Agricultural Research Service's fruit fly suppression program.

Mr. Chairman, this completes my statement. As I mentioned earlier, Mr. Mike Pitzler with APHIS' Wildlife Services program is here with me and is available to answer any questions you or the other members of the Subcommittee may have on his program's work, among other things, to keep brown tree snake from spreading to Hawaii via cargo shipments from Guam, as well as potential methods of addressing coqui frog populations here in the State. I would be happy to answer any other questions you might have regarding PPQ's involvement in the cooperative efforts I've described that are helping to prevent other invasive plant pests and diseases from entering Hawaii, as well as managing significant ones that are already here. Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today.