

**National Plant Board Comments regarding:
USDA White Paper
Audit-based Certification
Section 10201(d) (1) of the 2008 Farm Bill**

The National Plant Board (NPB), Audit-based Nursery Certification Workgroup has reviewed this white paper on audit-based nursery certification. The NPB appreciates the US Congress and their recognition of the importance of properly certifying plant material for interstate and international trade and the threats of quarantine pest movement that may be facilitated by such movement. Likewise the NPB recognizes the efforts of USDA, APHIS in implementing the provision of sections 10201 and 10202 to aggressively manage quarantine and non-quarantine regulated pests and thereby safeguard all aspects of US agriculture. Finally, the NPB appreciates the collaborative approach by USDA in including state agencies, the nursery industry and other stakeholders in this enhancement of our plant product certification process, harmonization of standards, and the opportunity to provide comments on this document.

The workgroup finds this white paper to be a good summary of the USDA efforts through August 2010 and input appears to be well documented, although it would be helpful to better describe the noted meetings with a description of the organizers and participants. The following reflects the reaction of the workgroup members to this document and some recommendation as we proceed with this process.

- A. The general tone of the paper is somewhat disturbing in its implication that the current nursery certification system is broken, allowing for the movement of infested or infected material, and that there is a need for a completely new system. The workgroup and industry recognize that the current system is not perfect. Clearly we need a greater degree of consistency and we share USDA's concerns about the movement of both quarantine and non-quarantine pests. Like the Farm Bill language and numerous inputs described in this paper, we support the review and modification of the existing structures, including adoption of systems approaches, rather than development of entirely new ones.
- B. The paper currently promotes an audit based system as the solution to all pest problems while downplaying the critical importance of the current system. The workgroup recognizes that many of the components of the audit based system such as good science, training, oversight, tracking of sources and harmonized standards are critical to every certification system, however, a strict "unified audit-based certification framework" may not be feasible for all of the industry. Therefore the workgroup recommends a tiered approach that supports the expertise and economic means of individual producers and the market.
- C. Appendix 4 has some interesting and potentially good conclusions, however, suggesting that attendees to this meeting hosted by the Northeast-Midwest Institute speak for "all horticulture stakeholders" is a bit of a reach as many of the participants

are pretty remote horticulture stakeholders. Some of the measures of success expressed are solid particularly as they relate to reductions in pests and pest movement, levels of industry participation, and cost efficiencies and financial feasibility. However, measures such as net economies and benefits to society and nurseries and cost avoidance are difficult if not impossible to measure with any level of usefulness.

The stated short and long term goals in Appendix 4 are reasonable and supportable and reflect the need to include state and industry stakeholders in the process and the need to upgrade current programs. The suggestion to begin to establish baseline data and pest presence is a bit vague in terms of scope and ignores the fact this information is collected and presented annually to USDA and other plant board members by state regulatory officials at regional plant board meetings. With some clean up, this set of goals could be a significant part of the paper, perhaps supporting conclusions.

The workgroup recognizes that some progress and changes have been made since August, 2010 that may temper the conclusions of this white paper. For example the USDA/NPB *P. ramorum* regulatory workgroup has developed a set of regulatory guidelines that address concerns about the spread of this disease utilizing systems approach components such as tracking, staff training, source information management, and identification of critical control points and best management practices. This custom fitted, compliance agreement approach to managing systems is more in line with the views of this workgroup and the input of many contributors to this white paper.

The workgroup at its February 23 and 24, 2011 meeting in Riverdale, developed the following recommendations for upgrading the nursery certification process which could be incorporated into this document to make it more timely and complete:

1. ISO certification and strict HACCP systems are not appropriate or applicable in their entirety for the nursery industry. However, many of the concepts such as risk analysis, identification of CCPs and development of BMPs, audit provisions, training, documentation, role and responsibility identification are very important to any certification system. These concepts should be incorporated into baseline and quarantine compliance certification systems where ever possible.

2. The current baseline certification system for nursery stock is sound, but can be improved to make it more uniform, effective, and credible by implementation of the following measures:

- A. Incorporation of Risk Analysis to assist in identification of CCPs and development of BMPs where possible and appropriate for production nurseries and dealers.

- B. Providing uniform training for both regulatory officials and the nursery industry. This training should include short courses in such areas as auditing, pest risk

analysis, pest identification, and compliance agreements, CCP, and BMP development, etc. Opportunities exist for collaborative development of training materials between industry, the land grants, USDA, NPB, and Horticulture Inspection Society (HIS) members.

C. Updating the NPB Model Nursery Law. The original model law was crafted to provide a framework for comparison and potential harmonization of state laws. It should now be updated to incorporate language that would facilitate risk based, systems approaches to certification.

D. Development of Education and Outreach materials for both regulatory agencies and industry. This material would describe the components and benefits of the certification system, systems approaches, value of CCPs and BMPs, etc. in the context of improving existing effective programs, while promoting buy-in from the both regulators and industry.

3. The Quarantine Compliance Certification system provides that higher level of assurance required to meet state and federal quarantine pest concerns. There is an opportunity to reduce pest risk and improve assurances by utilization of risk based/ systems approach techniques in a step by step fashion over time. This can be accomplished by:

A. Transitioning to risk based/quality management systems utilizing such tools as compliance agreements, which include risk analyses, CCP's, BMP's, responsibility identification, and auditing for verification. Certification systems for gypsy moth, Japanese beetle, *P. ramorum*, and LBAM which already exist or are in stages of development, provide excellent opportunities for implementation of these audit based technology.

B. Transitioning away from load by load shipping point inspections. These inspections are a drain on agency resources and provide only a snap shot in time to support certification decisions. It is suggested that as much as possible, systems approach techniques such as risk analysis, CCP's, BMP's, etc., be incorporated in to these traditional inspection protocols.

4. Certification for international shipping will, for the near future, continue to utilize:

A. The United States Nursery Certification Program (USNCP) with its full audit based provisions or,

B. Phytosanitary certification utilizing load by load inspections. Again, it is desirable, where possible, to incorporate audit based techniques to help reduce pest risk.

5. The term Audit Based Nursery Certification seems onerous to some. Perhaps terms like Risk Based Quality Management or the like would be a better choice to describe this approach.

This NPB workgroup appreciates the efforts of USDA to work with stakeholders to mitigate pest risks, promote more consistent certification systems, and facilitate the trade of nursery commodities both from an interstate and international approach. The great progress that has been made in the area of clean plant production and certification using audit based components in the current pilot efforts provides evidence that we are on the right track to improving our certification capacities and effectiveness. We look forward to working with USDA in this critical endeavor.

Members - NPB Audit-base Certification Workgroup
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