Science Societies

Making the most of the international year of plant health

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Citrus greening, one of the most significant citrus diseases, was first detected in Florida in 2005. It is spread by the Asian citrus psyllid (ACP), its insect vector. Photo courtesy of R. Anson Eaglin, USDA-APHIS

Plants are critical to life on earth. They produce the food we eat, make the oxygen we breathe, and give us shelter. We literally can't live without them. But plants face an ever-growing threat: invasive pests. Today, global trade and travel are helping pests spread farther and faster than ever before. According to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, these pests destroy up to 40% of food crops globally and cause $220 billion in trade losses annually. They can also throw ecosystems out of balance and devastate biodiversity.

To help focus much-needed attention on this important issue, the United Nations has declared 2020 the International Year of Plant Health. They are calling on everyone in the plant health protection community to join in a worldwide campaign to promote the value of plants and the need to protect them against invasive pests.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to raise global awareness about how protecting crops, forests, and farms from invasive pests and stopping the spread of pests through trade can help end hunger, reduce poverty, protect the environment, and boost economic development. It's also a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to highlight the vital work of national and regional plant health organizations and their many partners in protecting plants from devastating pests and diseases.

I have the extraordinary opportunity to lead an agency within USDA that is responsible for safeguarding U.S. agriculture and natural resources against invasive pests. We also

facilitate the safe trade of agricultural products, helping to make sure the goods the United States imports and exports do not spread damaging pests. Our work is vitally important because it promotes a healthy, abundant food supply here in the United States and around the world. It helps to sustain a vibrant, biologically diverse natural environment. And it supports our nation's economic growth by helping U.S. growers and producers deliver high-quality food and agricultural products to the world.

Creating a Shared Vision

I think it is appropriate that the International Year of Plant Heath will happen in 2020. As you know, “20/20” is a term that describes perfect vision. I can't think of a better time for my agency and our many partners, cooperators, and stakeholders to come together and create a common vision about how we will collaborate in the coming years to better safeguard agriculture and facilitate safe agricultural trade.

That's why we've decided to host, with assistance from the North American Plant Protection Organization, a large-scale conference on plant health safeguarding and safe trade this August in Washington, DC. Through this event, we will bring together leaders from U.S. and foreign governments, academia, agricultural industries, domestic and international non-governmental organizations, and private companies. Together, we will look at the plant health safeguarding and safe-trade challenges and opportunities facing the United States, the North American region, and the world at large.

We will explore the agriculture supply chain from a plant health perspective and learn about new and emerging methods, tools, and technologies that could be used to safeguard plant health and facilitate safe trade. We will do all of this with the singular goal of identifying strategic activities and investments that public and private entities

could undertake to ensure sustainable and profitable agriculture, healthy forests and ecosystems, and a safe and prosperous global trade system in the next decade.

Our Collective Opportunity

Our goal is ambitious, but achievable—especially with your help. To plan this event, we have engaged a number of government, industry, and academic organizations, including ASA, CSSA, and SSSA. Although we are hosting this conference, I firmly believe that it belongs to all of us. This conference is our collective opportunity to bring our future into focus and build a shared vision for how we will collaborate on the most important and pressing issues facing agriculture and trade in the next 10 years.

Our work to improve safeguarding and make trade safer helps not only the United States, it helps the world. As we develop smarter, more effective ways of safeguarding, we share them with others around the world to help build their capacity. The more we share, the more tools we all have to boost sustainable agricultural production and chip away at global hunger and poverty.

Thank you, again, to the members of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA for willingly sharing your knowledge, expertise, experience, and insights to help us build this vital conference. It is because industry, academia, and government work together that the United States has one of the most robust safeguarding systems. That is also why we are leading global efforts in creating a predictable, rules-based trade system. When we work together to protect plant health, we protect people. And nothing could be more important than that.

Societies Activities during International Year of Plant Health

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA are celebrating the International Year of Plant Health in 2020! The Societies are engaging with USDA-APHIS and the North American Plant Protection Organization (NAPPO) to organize sessions for their summer conference, "**Safeguarding Plant Health**." Additionally, the Science Policy Office will host congressional briefings and events, and proposals for plant health-related sessions at the 2020 Annual Meeting in Phoenix, "**Translating Visionary Science to Practice**" are encouraged! Please check out our *Sustainable, Secure Food* blog at **https://sustainable-secure-food-blog.com/** to follow along on the journey of plant health.

What are the threats to plant health that you see in your work? Get involved by contacting Elizabeth Stulberg, Send Message.



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