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How is USDA responding to the Invasive Species Challenge?

Presentation by Hilda Diaz-Soltero,
USDA Senior Invasive Species Coordinator at the
USDA Agricultural Forum
Responding to the Challenge of Invasive Species Session
February 25, 2005, 2:15 to 4 PM

Thank you for your invitation to speak to you about the activities of USDA agencies related to invasive species.

- The Secretary of Agriculture is one of the three **Co-Chairs** to the National Invasive Species Council (NISC), an entity responsible for coordination and collaboration among 35 Federal agencies in 12 Federal departments, each with a role in invasive species. USDA has designated a “**Senior USDA Invasive Species Coordinator**” and liaison to NISC to ensure that collaboration.
- There are over 24 Federal laws that relate to invasive species, over 280 programs, 150 organizations and 130 groups that are directly involved with invasive species efforts or support them. Within the Federal government, most of the invasive species **programs reside at USDA, in 7 agencies**: the US Forest Service (FS), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Economic Research Service (ERS), Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES), and the Farm Service Agency (FSA). There are a myriad of activities related to invasive species in USDA.
- USDA and other Federal agencies are implementing activities in the **National Invasive Species Management Plan of 2001**. The Plan includes 57 Action items with 86 different subparts in 9 categories. **USDA has the major role** in the Federal government related to invasive species. USDA has the lead in 53% of the action items in the Plan and also actively participates in another 40% of the action items. We are making progress.

- The **funding for Federal agencies invasive species programs** continues to increase. In FY 2002 the budget was \$776 million dollars; in FY 2003 it was \$998 million; and in FY 2004 the enacted budget was \$1 billion 74 million. In FY 2005, the President's proposed budget was \$1 billion and 169 million, of which the majority, \$1 billion 23 million, was for USDA agencies. We are presently compiling the USDA fiscal data in the FY 2006 Proposed President's budget.
- USDA participates in the **Invasive Species Crosscut** sponsored by NISC. The FY 06 Proposed President's budget includes increased funds for USDA in 8 of the invasives initiatives.
- There are many **laws that provide USDA agencies authorities** to conduct research, provide technical assistance, control, manage, and regulate invasive species. For example, APHIS plays a key role in Federal invasive species efforts. Its programs are carried out under the most comprehensive set of authorities -- the Plant Protection Act, the Animal Health Protection Act, and the Animal Damage Control Act -- available to any Federal agency addressing invasive species. The most recent law is the Noxious Weed Control and Eradication Act, enacted on October 2004. It creates a new five-year program for USDA to provide Grants or make Agreements with weed management entities for control or eradication of noxious weeds. There are no funds appropriated for USDA to implement this legislation.
- USDA plays a major role in **education and outreach** related to invasive species. USDA sponsors the NISC web site, www.invasivespecies.gov and NISC's Director of Public Affairs. The web site has a lot of invasive species information. It features an "Invasive Species of the Month", provides scientific information on invasive species, funding opportunities, and the activities of Federal agencies, states, partners and stakeholders.

- Two USDA agencies have prepared **agency-wide strategic plans** to deal with invasive species: the “APHIS Strategic Plan” and the “Forest Service Invasive Species Strategy.” The plans focus the agency’s program areas to implement specific invasive species activities, all related back to the National Invasive Species Management Plan.
- USDA submitted the **first DO NO HARM report to NISC**, securing input from six of its agencies: FS, NRCS, APHIS, ARS, CSREES and ERS. USDA is the first department to comply with this mandate of the Invasive Species Executive Order. The report includes:
 - a) invasive species program activities the USDA agencies are carrying out to do no harm;
 - b) other program activities, which are also designed to do no harm; and
 - c) activities that are doing harm, and a statement about how the agency will modify the activities so that they do no harm.
- USDA compiled the most complete **list of funding opportunities** for work on research, technical assistance or management of invasive species. The document has been published and is available at the invasivespecies.gov web site. USDA will sponsor a workshop on these funding opportunities during the USDA Weeds Day of the 2005 National Invasive Weeds Awareness Week, on March 1, 2005.
- Let me now give you some **examples of invasive species activities** in USDA agencies.
- **APHIS** has developed **Webcrawler** technology that identifies sales of invasive species on the Internet, requests owners to stop sales of invasives, and refers persistent violators to APHIS enforcement for further action potentially resulting in fines and other regulatory measures.
- The Economic Research Service has a “**Program of Research on the Economics of Invasive Species Management**”

initiated in FY 2003. It supports economic research and the development of decision support tools that have direct implications for USDA policies and programs for invasive species. For example, ERS developed a pest-ranking decision tool for APHIS to determine which pests would be on its 2004 Federal-State Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey (CAPS) list, making transparent the basis for selecting the pests for which State cooperators could receive pest surveillance and detection funds. Also, the PREISM program has allocated \$3.4 million in extramural research cooperative agreements through a peer-reviewed competitive process from FY 2003 to 2005.

- The Agricultural Research Service's **(ARS) biological control program for tamarix** has been very successful this past year. The control agents are leaf-feeding beetles, *Diorhabda elongata*. They have spread 100 miles from some research sites. They are attacking only tamarix and have no negative impacts on non-target species or the environment. The beetles eat the leaves of tamarix, defoliating and gradually weakening plants over several years. This is the third year since the beetles were released, and severe defoliation over many hectares has occurred at research sites.
- APHIS, Forest Service, ARS and CSREES cooperated in responding to the *Phytophthora ramorum* (commonly known as **Sudden Oak Death** (SOD)) emergency. The SOD range expansion is a result of diseased plants being shipped from California, Oregon and Washington nurseries. In May 2004, the Secretary of Agriculture transferred \$15.5 million from the Commodity Credit Corporation to APHIS to conduct trace forward/trace back investigations, nationwide nursery surveys, surveys in natural areas around potentially affected nurseries, and regulatory and public outreach efforts. As of September 2004, SOD was confirmed in 21 states: AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, FL, GA, LA, MD, NC, NJ, NM, NY, OK, OR, PA, SC, TN, TX, VA and WA. *Phytophthora ramorum* can infect over 30 hosts in several plant families. Hosts or associated hosts include landscape plants (such as azalea, camellia, rhododendron, lilac), wood producing trees (Douglas fir, European Beech, Northern and Southern Red Oaks), agricultural species

(evergreen huckleberry), pharmaceutical species (witch hazel), and Christmas trees (Douglas fir).

- The national **Forest Inventory and Analysis** conducted by the **Forest Service** and states has been expanded to incorporate surveying for invasive species at the strategic scale, both in the trees and herbaceous layers. This will help identify the expansion or contraction of the invasive species range or the establishment of a new invasive species in a particular geographic area.
- The **Natural Resources Conservation Service** has 27 Plant Materials Centers across the Nation to propagate local native species for conservation and restoration of public and private lands. In a very successful partnership, NRCS provides native plants to restore national parks areas previously affected by invasives. The NRCS PLANTS database (<http://plants.usda.gov>) is a primary information source for aquatic and terrestrial plants. It includes an invasive species module with the Federal Noxious Weed list, State weed lists, and a composite list of 1,700 invasive plants. The site receives over 12 million hits and over 250,000 user sessions per month. The proposed President's budget for FY 2006 includes an increase of \$9.7 million to the NRCS Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative to provide technical assistance to land managers for enhanced prevention and management of invasive species and restoration activities on areas affected by invasives.
- CSREES in collaboration with APHIS, the Regional Integrated Pest Management Centers, and the National Plant Diagnostic Networks is facilitating a national effort for early detection and rapid response against the Pink Hibiscus Mealybug, which was potentially introduced into 36 states in the U.S. in 2004 from mealy-bug infested hibiscus plants from Florida.
- There are many examples of increased coordination and collaboration among USDA with Federal and state agencies and other partners.

- **USDA and NASA have formalized a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** for collaboration in using NASA's technology to meet USDA's operational needs. Invasive species is one of the *Focus Area Working Groups* agreed upon by USDA and NASA. A prospectus entitled "Watershed management of salt cedar and other invasive species infestations: remote sensing ecosystem modeling, and landscape-level habitat management" has been prepared and collaboration on the project has begun.
- CSREES is facilitating the development of an **Integrated Pest Management Training Consortium** to provide IPM training and certification to federal workers for various pest management themes.
- The **Invasive Species Weeds Awareness Week** includes over 200 stakeholders and Federal entities. USDA senior leaders host the **USDA Weeds Day** and discuss the agencies programs related to invasive plants. Also, USDA hosts the **Children's Weeds Day** at the National Botanical Garden to promote awareness about invasives in the younger generations.
- USDA scientists and technical experts are actively participating in ITAP, the **Federal Interagency Committee on Invasive Terrestrial Animals and Pathogens**. ITAP has Subcommittees working on Systematics, Invertebrates, Vertebrates, Plant Pathogens, International/bio-agro terrorism, and Protocols. ITAP members have made significant progress since last summer: DOI agencies signed the ITAP MOU; a white paper on the need for increased federal systematics capabilities—people, collections, facilities and bio informatics—is being prepared; and strategic plans were developed by the Vertebrate Subcommittee and the Systematics Subcommittee.

There are a lot of other activities in USDA agencies to deal with the invasives species challenge that time does not allow me to share with you today. Please feel free to contact me with any questions. Thank you.