

**Deputy Administrator's Remarks for the
Seventh Annual Chapman Phytosanitary Irradiation Forum
Chapman University, via Video Teleconference
March 21, 2017, 12:15 to 12:30 a.m. Eastern**

Introduction

Good morning, everyone. I wish I could be at the Chapman forum in person today, but I am pleased to join you live by video.

First, let me thank Dr. Anuradha Prakash and Chapman University for hosting this forum, and for the many years this university has supported the field of phytosanitary irradiation through information sharing and research.

Dr. Prakash has committed nearly 2 decades of her career to researching and advancing this field.

I also want to thank the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and the International Atomic Energy Agency, for helping to organize this event. Your active engagement here truly underscores the global significance of this technology.

Phytosanitary irradiation has become increasingly important to the mission of the USDA program I lead, which is Plant Protection and Quarantine—or PPQ.

PPQ's Mission

PPQ's mission is quite simple to communicate: We safeguard agriculture while facilitating safe trade.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is our core objective; it's what the U.S. Congress has directed us to do. This is an enormous responsibility—one that we take very seriously.

To accomplish the safeguarding part of our mission, we focus our work in two key areas:

- Preventing pests from entering the United States and becoming established; and,
- Fighting back against any pests that do get in.

This work spans a wide spectrum of activities, including offshore programs, permitting, port and border inspection, pest identification and mitigation, and smuggling interdiction and trade compliance—as well as pest detection, response, management, and eradication programs.

Facilitating Safe Trade

We take the second part of our mission—facilitating safe agricultural trade—just as seriously. Our goal is to help create a fair and predictable global trade system. That is good for the United States and good for the world.

PPQ achieves this in three ways:

- We promote the use of science-based international and regional trade standards to eliminate unfair or unjustified trade barriers;
- We expand and maintain current export markets, and open new ones by resolving plant health barriers to trade; and,
- We certify the health of U.S. exports to make sure that we—the United States—are presenting clean products that meet the importing countries' requirements.

This work is crucial because U.S. agricultural exports help to fuel our Nation's economic growth.

In fact, since 2009, our country has exported more than \$1 trillion in agricultural products. That has energized our rural economies and strengthened our balance of trade.

Exports are responsible for 20 percent of U.S. farm income. And this global market has plenty of room to grow given that 95 percent of consumers worldwide live outside the United States.

PPQ sees phytosanitary irradiation as an additional tool in expanding our export successes. It is also an effective way to safeguard our country's crops and ecosystems against invasive pests that otherwise could infest imported commodities.

Phytosanitary Irradiation: 30 Years of Progress

This past September marked the 30th anniversary of the first commercial phytosanitary irradiation treatment—when Puerto Rico sent irradiated mangoes to Florida. We have come a long way since then.

It's no secret that, initially, neither U.S. consumers nor industry were quick to embrace the irradiation of fresh fruits and produce. But after international irradiation guidelines were implemented, it eventually became widely accepted as a safe and effective treatment option.

And during this period of acceptance, PPQ exercised considerable flexibility in our policies and regulations to help make irradiation a safe and practical phytosanitary option.

Most importantly, we approved a generic dose for all commodities that covered a wide range of related pests.

The results of our efforts over the decades have been significant.

Phytosanitary Irradiation's Role in *Imports*

Let's look at the import side first. To date, PPQ has approved 3 irradiation facilities in the continental United States and 11 facilities offshore—in India, South Asia, Mexico, and Hawaii.

Certain U.S.-bound commodities from overseas can be irradiated and pre-cleared before they depart. Because we know that the treated commodities pose a negligible plant-pest risk, they can move through U.S. ports of entry without further inspection—an enormous benefit to importers.

And certain **un**-treated imported fruits can be irradiated at the U.S. facilities before being released into domestic commerce to ensure that they pose a negligible plant-pest risk.

Phytosanitary Irradiation's Role in *Exports*

On the export side, PPQ created a historic moment in August 2015. It was the first commercial shipment of irradiated fresh produce ever exported from the United States—South Carolina peaches bound for Mexico.

The peaches were irradiated at Gateway America in Gulfport, MS. That treatment was conducted in accordance with a bilateral agreement between the United States and Mexico. A PPQ team had been working since 2011 to lay the groundwork for this success.

That's why our Agency's Administrator, Kevin Shea, presented the team with an Administrator's Award, which recognizes the significance of this work in increasing global food security.

Then in April 2016, our irradiation options for exports increased when PPQ and Mexico established another protocol. This one allows South Carolina and Georgia peaches to be irradiated upon arrival **in** Mexico.

In June, the first commercial shipment was successfully irradiated at the Benebion facility in San Luis Potosi, Mexico. That marked the first time that U.S. exported fresh produce was irradiated on arrival in a foreign country.

Both pre- and post-export treatment options are now available for Mexico-bound peaches from South Carolina and Georgia. That opened an export market worth \$250,000.

I must mention that Chapman University's research directly supported the option of using phytosanitary irradiation for this commodity. The work was funded by USDA's Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops program.

In 2009, Dr. Anuradha Prakash conducted produce quality research demonstrating that the phytosanitary irradiation of fresh peaches did not impact quality. This finding assured industry that the phytosanitary treatment option would be useful in trade—and you have heard the results.

Many Other Benefits of Phytosanitary Irradiation

Phytosanitary irradiation offers several other benefits of interest to PPQ.

At this time, many nations and stakeholder groups are looking for alternatives to methyl bromide fumigation as a phytosanitary measure. In many cases, irradiation can be that alternative because it effectively neutralizes such a wide range of pests.

In addition, the process may extend the shelf life of a commodity by reducing the organisms that could otherwise spoil it.

And without question, American consumers are now enjoying a more abundant supply of affordable tropical fruits thanks to irradiated imports.

Conclusion

PPQ is encouraged by the many recent successes in the commercial use of phytosanitary irradiation. We will see many more in the years ahead. And these Chapman forums are helping this technology to reach its full potential on a global scale.

I am pleased that many talented and dedicated PPQ experts are with you to share their perspectives, experiences, and insights over the next 2 days. I want to thank all of them for their participation at this Forum.

And I am impressed by all of the other experts who are participating. They come from the IAEA, FAO, academia, industry, and other government agencies.

The diversity of their organizations truly underscores the value of this field. You will learn so much from each other.

I thank you all for your commitment to plant health protection.