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Frigate Bay, St. Kitts and Nevis

"Reality and Potential of Food Security and Agricultural Diversification in Small Island Developing States"

"Realidad y Potencial de la Seguridad Alimentaria y la Diversificación Agrícola en Pequeños Estados Insulares en Desarollo"

"Sécurité alimentaire et diversification agricole dans les petits états insulaires en développement: réalisations et perspectives".

United States Department of Agriculture,
T-STAR Sponsored Invasive Species Symposium

INVASIVE SPECIES SAFEGUARDING: IMPERATIVE FOR CARIBBEAN REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL DIVERSIFICATION AND FOOD SECURITY

Special Symposium Edition
Edited by
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OVERVIEW OF THE NEW ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE (APHIS) GREATER CARIBBEAN SAFEGUARDING INITIATIVE (GCSI)

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ABSTRACT. GCSI's mission is to strengthen the safeguarding system in the Greater Caribbean Region (GCR) by establishing partnerships with countries in the GCR to prevent, detect, and control existing and emerging plant pest threats. GCSI provides APHIS, PPQ and its partners in the GCR, the opportunity to establish a perimeter defense against the introduction of high risk plant pests into the GCR through collaborative efforts to harmonize quarantines, exclusion strategies and other safeguarding initiatives before they reach the borders of our nations. GCSI seeks to support the implementation of plant health safeguarding activities in the GCR. GCSI is committed to ensuring that all GCSI initiatives are successful and sustainable over the long term. The expansion of GCSI into a National Program demonstrates APHIS' commitment to food security and sustainability of plant health in the Region. The GCSI program is supported by a Florida GCSI Program Manager (based in the greater Miami) that provides coordination and communication among collaborators within Florida, PPQ's Eastern Region, and PPQ Headquarters to strengthen pest exclusion and agricultural quarantine inspection activities in Florida and the Eastern Region of the USA.

KEY WORDS: perimeter defense, exclusion strategies, harmonization, quarantines, prevent, detect, control, high risk plant pest threats

INTRODUCTION

The 1999 Stakeholder Review of the APHIS-Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) Safeguarding System, "Safeguarding American Plant Resources" (National Plant Board, 1999) identified the need to harmonize pest exclusion strategies among countries, especially as countries continue to develop international standards on a regional basis. In the context of the Review, "regionalization" refers to the harmonization of quarantines, exclusion strategies, and other safeguarding initiatives among countries in geographic proximity to one another. Regionalization offers the promise of greater efficiency and shared success at excluding and managing invasive species, while facilitating a lively regional economy.

The Review recommended that "a longer term initiative be developed that included the plans for export of exclusion and detection capabilities, and specific pest and disease suppression activities, to apply the perimeter approach." Additionally, the Review cited that pest mitigation at the point of origin, i.e. offshore, is the most viable approach to pest exclusion and mitigation. "Necessary and associated activities include the identification of invasive plant pest and disease threats, development of preventative and control measures, and directed research with a mutual benefit to be received by the U.S. and the country of origin."

In January 2006, PPQ designated an Offshore Initiatives Coordinator in Florida (FL) for the Caribbean Safeguarding Initiative (CSI) pilot program (Dunkle, 2006). The goal of the pilot program was to bring coordination to PPQ-Florida's efforts and initiatives of targeting and reducing the risk of plant pests establishing in the United States through the Florida Pathway. The focus of the pilot program centered on projects and activities of interest and concern to Florida (De Chi et al., 2008). One major accomplishment was the establishment of a diverse and collaborative network that provides the foundation for the future of this program.

In July 2008, CSI was converted from a pilot program in Florida into the GCSI, a National Program coordinated by PPQ headquarters in Maryland (USDA/APHIS, 2009). Within APHIS, the permanent program provides overall coordination and strategy development of offshore safeguarding initiatives and activities in the GCR. The conversion was intended to refocus the mission of the initiative and redesign the program to enhance alignment with the APHIS' national mission and goals.

Key Elements of GCSI's Redesign

The redesign seeks to strengthen APHIS's partnership with countries[1] in the GCR for the on-going regional development of offshore pest detection and control activities, for the benefit of the GCR. The scope of the program has been broadened to include a perimeter approach that will strive to prevent the introduction and spread of high risk plant pests into the GCR, including the United States, through collaborative efforts to harmonize quarantines, exclusion strategies and other safeguarding initiatives among partners in the GCR. As to the scope of the GCSI program, the GCR is defined to include the Caribbean islands, portions of South America (Venezuela, Suriname, Guyana, and French Guiana) Central America, Panama and the United States: Florida (FL), Puerto Rico (PR) and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI).

GCSI seeks to support the implementation of plant health safeguarding activities in the GCR. GCSI is committed to ensuring that all GCSI initiatives are successful and sustainable over the long term. To that end, training and capacity building will be strategically incorporated in all GCSI sponsored projects and built on projects with a proven track record. The GCSI program strives to be creative, innovative, and strategic in its approaches towards addressing goals and challenges. GCSI will endorse projects and activities that are broadly considered to be necessary, feasible, and well-designed to ensure that the project outcomes will be transferrable and sustainable.

Through GCSI, APHIS seeks to continue building upon the existing efforts and foundation within the GCR by strategically enhancing and strengthening these efforts. Through GCSI, APHIS also offers a coordinated effort to bring issues of mutual concern in the GCR to the forefront within USDA and among other agencies. One advantage of creating a national offshore safeguarding program with an international focus is that a number of funding organizations and agencies often turn to APHIS for collaboration, guidance, direction and technical assistance of agricultural-related programs. This program is unique in the sense that

[1] Any reference to countries in this document is understood to also include other geographical entity, i.e., territory, colony, overseas department or commonwealth

there is no other similar safeguarding program within APHIS for any other region in the world. The expansion of GCSI into a National Program demonstrates APHIS's commitment to food security and sustainability of plant health in the Region.

Overview of GCSI Strategic Goals

The strategic goals are designed to support the development of the regional perimeter safeguarding approach to prevent the introduction of high-risk plant pests and invasive species into the GCR:

- Build a Coordinated GCSI Framework and Partnership Network
- Strengthen Regional and National Pest Exclusion Activities within the GCR
- Enhance Pest Detection Activities within the GCR
- Strengthen Pest Mitigation and Suppression Activities within the GCR

CONCLUSIONS

The key to success for the GCSI program will be the strength of its partnerships in the GCR. It is essential to increase collaboration, coordination and outreach with strategic partners in the GCR. It is also essential to strengthen the collaboration and communication within APHIS, as well as with other external agencies and stakeholders.

Although the GCSI program involves communication and outreach with many stakeholders in the GCR, including international and regional organizations, research institutions, associations, civil society and industry, a basic assumption is that the primary contact and partnership will be with each of the National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) in the GCR. GCSI will meet with the NPPOs, both individually and collectively, to explore potential cooperation and collaboration to identify strategies for partnerships and coordinated regional safeguarding, and to gain their input and observations during the planning process. All GCSI activities will actively seek coordination and collaborative involvement by the NPPO of each respective country in the GCR.

Federal and State plant health regulatory agencies within Florida, and their collaborators, continue to play a vital role in this program. For the continuation of coordinated efforts within Florida, there is a FL GCSI Program Manager based in the greater Miami area. To support the GCSI program, the primary focus of this position is to provide coordination and communication among the various collaborators within the State of Florida, PPQ's Eastern Region, and PPQ Headquarters for the purpose of strengthening pest exclusion and agricultural quarantine inspection activities in Florida and the Eastern Region.

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