

APHIS-PPQ Comments Supporting Spotted Lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*) Program

Chairman Vogel, Chairwoman Schwank, Chairman Causer, and Chairman Pashinski, members of both the Senate and House Agriculture committees and other distinguished members, thank you for inviting the United States Department of Agriculture to speak with you about our role in addressing Spotted Lanternfly (SLF). My name is Matt Rhoads, and I am the Executive Director of Policy Management in USDA's Plant Protection and Quarantine (or PPQ) program. Also attending this hearing with me today is John Crowe, PPQ's acting Director of Pest Detection and Emergency Programs, and Timothy Newcamp, our State Plant Health Director for Pennsylvania. We will be happy to answer questions you have.

PPQ's mission is to safeguard U.S. agriculture and natural resources against the entry, establishment, and spread of economically and environmentally significant pests, and to facilitate the safe trade of agricultural products. I welcome the opportunity to share what we are doing about SLF and hope to help you better understand the nature of our collaboration with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in addressing this pest.

I would first like to say that I am a native Pennsylvanian. I grew up in Berks County, in Boyertown, where SLF was first detected in the United States. My father and much of my extended family live in the Boyertown area, so I want to emphasize that although I am here representing the Federal Government, I have a very strong personal interest in this as well.

PPQ remains concerned about SLF, especially as the pest's population has grown significantly, it has been found in new areas, and we have observed it feeding on valuable specialty crops such as apples and grapes.

I would like to start with a little background on PPQ (Plant Protection and Quarantine). We are part of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. As I mentioned earlier, our mission is to safeguard U.S. agriculture and facilitate safe trade. To accomplish the safeguarding part of our mission, we focus our work in two key areas: (1) Preventing pests from entering and becoming established in the United States; and (2) Combating any dangerous pests that are introduced. 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. In addition to our safeguarding mission, PPQ facilitates safe trade in three ways: (1) We promote the use of science-based international and regional trade standards to eliminate unfair or unjustified phytosanitary trade barriers, (2) we expand and maintain current

export markets and open new ones by resolving plant health barriers to trade; and (3) 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.

When a new pest like SLF gets in, PPQ works closely with State departments of agriculture and industry to respond. This includes surveying the area surrounding a new pest detection to determine the extent of the infestation; gathering information about the pest's biology, hosts, and how it will most likely spread; as well as assessing its potential environmental and economic impact, among other factors. We often convene technical working groups comprised of Federal, State, and academic experts to address key questions about a new pest.

When we determine that a reproducing population of a new pest is present in the United States, PPQ cooperates with the affected State(s) to determine an appropriate course of action. This ranges from establishing state or federal programs to control or eradicate the pest, establishing quarantines to slow the spread, providing information and technical support to affected individuals and organizations, or taking no action. Before we can set a program goal—whether that is to eradicate, contain, suppress, or slow the pest's spread, we must understand the risk the pest presents to our country's agriculture production or natural resources, our markets, and/or our economy. We must also determine what tools are available to control or eradicate the pest, including chemical treatments, biological controls, host removal, or other measures.

I want to make clear that PPQ is committed to pursuing the least drastic action but most effective option for managing the risks presented by a new pest. In some cases, especially when there is a lack of evidence that the pest will cause widespread harm or no imminent threat of foreign restrictions on US exports, the best option is to let the State take the lead.

In the case of SLF, after its initial detection, PPQ convened a technical working group composed of PPQ, State, and University scientists which gathered available information about SLF and produced recommendations for survey and control methods. To better inform our response, PPQ scientists visited Asian countries where SLF is native to learn about the pest's behavior and natural enemies. Also following the recommendations of the technical working group, PPQ elected to provide funding to PDA to survey for the pest and control it using a combination of pesticide treatments, herbicide treatments, and tree removals, which began in 2014.

As noted by PDA Secretary Redding, since 2014, PPQ has provided \$5.5 million in funding to PDA to support efforts to control SLF. While a portion of that funding supported PDA staff who conduct surveys for SLF, mark *Ailanthus altissima* (tree of heaven) for treatment or removal, and conduct outreach activities to affected communities, the majority of that funding has been used to pay for SLF treatments and tree removals. We have also provided approximately \$1.4 million over three years for methods development efforts by USDA-Agriculture Research Service, University, PA DCNR, and PPQ scientists. Three areas of methods development PPQ is focused are lures for more accurate early monitoring of SLF, biological control, and optimizing chemical treatment. Regarding specific outreach efforts; PPQ has supported PDA and Pennsylvania Extension service by providing nearly \$150k to optimize communication to industry and homeowners. PPQ has funded fact sheet development, other outreach materials, and public town hall meetings. This summer, PPQ provided a dozen federal staff to supplement PDA's survey efforts and in order to better enable the program to survey outside the core infested area in order to better define the leading edge of the infestation, bringing our total investment to date to approximately \$7.5 million.

Given the large population of SLF adults that we observed in southeastern PA this year, PPQ and PDA reconvened the technical working group in late September of this year to review the current situation and recommend strategies and resource requirements for managing the infestation. Based on the technical working group's findings, we reaffirmed that the best tools available to control SLF are pesticide and herbicide treatments of hosts, as well as tree removal, to the extent that tree removal is cost effective. The technical working group reaffirmed that *Ailanthus altissima* (tree of heaven) is SLF's preferred host and that it likely needs to return to *Ailanthus* at some point to complete its lifecycle, but also pointed out the need for a more comprehensive host list. The technical working group also recommended that PPQ complete ongoing work to develop an effective lure to aid in detection and delimiting surveys for SLF. A specific lure will provide a better tool to help measure SLF population density. The working group also recommended that we continue to explore options for biological control, which may provide a long-term solution for reducing SLF populations through control by natural enemies. Development of effective biological control methods often takes a decade or more, and may not ultimately prove effective.

During our last meeting with PDA on October 6, we discussed how our strategy for managing this pest should change in light of the latest information from the technical working group, and especially considering weekly reports of detections of SLF farther and farther outside previously known PDA

quarantine boundaries. While the particulars of the updated strategy and estimated resource needs to support the strategy are not final, we are recommending that we direct the vast majority of program resources (both PDA and PPQ) to the leading edge of the infestation. This approach will allow us to prevent further spread and contain the pest so that we can suppress the overall population. This approach is not without challenges, given the potential for the pest to hitchhike on conveyances originating from infested areas, so to the extent resources are available to reduce populations in the core of the infested area, that will be extremely helpful in protecting against the human-assisted spread of the pest—but our priority is to detect and delimit the leading edge of the infestation, and apply appropriate control methods to knock back the population in an attempt to stop further natural spread.

One of PPQ's key roles is to manage the trade implications of new pests. We have been and will continue to actively work with affected industries in Pennsylvania to minimize economic impacts associated with State or trading partner actions. Fortunately, no states or foreign trading partners have adopted restrictions on articles moving out of areas quarantined for SLF. However, restrictions are possible as States and trading partners learn more about the risks associated with this pest, and the costs of complying with any future requirements is unknown, but potentially significant.

PPQ is here today to demonstrate our commitment to collaboration with PDA and other cooperators to control, and we hope at some point, to eradicate, SLF. We very much appreciate the efforts of PDA to address this challenging new pest and thank these committees for inviting us to discuss the work still ahead. Thank you again for your time.