



News for Immediate Release

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Use Caution When Importing Hay or Straw from Fire Ant Infested Areas

Harrisburg – Farmers who purchase hay and straw from areas of the country that are under quarantine for imported fire ants are urged to take precautions to ensure human and animal safety.

“Drought conditions across much of the nation have centered the fall hay market in the southern United States,” said Agriculture Secretary George Greig. “Use precautions when buying from quarantined locations to protect human and animal populations and the state’s agriculture industry.”

More than 343 million acres are quarantined in southeastern United States, much of Texas, southern Oklahoma, all of Dona Ana County in New Mexico, all of Orange County and parts of Los Angeles and Riverside counties in California, and all of Puerto Rico.

Greig said when placing an order for hay or straw, buyers should first determine if the supplier is within the quarantine area. Visit www.aphis.usda.gov and click on “Plant Health” then “Plant Pest Information” and “Imported Fire Ant” to search by zip code. The hay or straw must be certified for movement by the state from which it is shipped if it is located in a quarantined area.

When bales are delivered, visually inspect them for evidence of fire ants. Fire ants are very aggressive and swarm to defend the colony and queen. Fire ant venom causes painful skin welts and, in rare cases, death to humans and animals.

Ants look similar to a common house or garden ant but have a copper brown head and body with a darker abdomen.

Though they may not survive freezing temperatures, fire ants can cause damage to crops in a short time. The ants feed on the buds and fruits of numerous crop plants, especially corn and soybeans, and can girdle young trees.

The aggressive insects infested much of the southern and southwestern United States after being accidentally introduced in the early 20th century through soil used as ballast in cargo ships.

If the presence of fire ants is suspected, contact the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture automated report line at 866-253-7189 or email badbug@pa.gov.

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