

## Testimony Notes for the House Agriculture Committee Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture

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Good morning, and thank you for the invitation to testify before the subcommittee today. My name is Kurt Reichert and I am the Fumigation Director for Western Fumigation. I have worked for Western for over 28 years, starting as a fumigation technician and working my way up through the company to become a Director. I have been a multi-state licensed professional applicator since 1991. I oversee the activities I will talk about here today on a daily basis. I also work closely with many of the state and federal regulatory agencies which govern the manufacture, transportation and use of the fumigants which are available to our industry today.

Western Fumigation is a Division of Western Pest Services, which is a full-service Pest Control company based in Parsippany, New Jersey. Western was founded in 1928 as a family business, and has deep roots in the East Coast from Virginia to New England. Our Fumigation Division was spun off in the 1980's to be a standalone Division better suited to the unique process and regulatory requirements of import / export quarantine treatments.

Quarantine inspections are a critical tool in our nation's efforts for protecting U.S. agriculture from invasive and non-native species, a program critical to the American economy. Western Fumigation works closely with both the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Plant Protection and Quarantine Inspectors to help safeguard United States agriculture against the introduction of pests of significance.

With regard to imports, we fumigate perishable commodities such as grapes, citrus, blueberries, asparagus, kiwi, pineapples and bananas to eliminate invasive species which may be hidden within the shipment. We also fumigate non-perishable cargo such as imported tile, machinery, military equipment and cocoa beans. Some of these items require mandatory fumigation, and some require fumigation if an actionable pest is found. Export treatments are frequently required for logs destined for Europe or Asia, cars and machinery enroute to Australia and New Zealand, and citrus and broccoli exported from California.

Fumigation is often the only treatment method which can effectively eliminate these pests without damaging the cargo. Without fumigation, the availability of certain imported fruits and vegetables grown in South America would be significantly reduced during the winter, potentially leading to shortages and high prices for American families.

Once an invasive species makes it into the U.S., its further spread can be devastating, costly and unstoppable. Over the years, the United States has seen several invasive species gain a foothold, causing widespread economic damage to domestic agriculture. Most recently, we have seen the introduction and establishment of the Asian Longhorn Beetle, the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug and the Spotted Lanternfly. Firstly, these pests have caused immense damage and hardship by damaging crops and at times, entire farms. And, even when crops can be salvaged, these species have increased costs and reduced the competitiveness of U.S. agriculture and industry because foreign countries now require us to fumigate U.S. exports to prevent the further world-wide spread of these pests.

APHIS, CBP and the various fumigation companies which operate at our US ports of entry are literally on the front lines with regards to stopping invasive species. All invasive pests can be traced back to a port of entry where it must have slipped by undetected, possibly due to the limited number of inspectors being unable to keep up with the volume of goods entering the port. CBP and APHIS personnel are true professionals and are dedicated to their core missions, but they are human and can be over tasked at times. For example, APHIS Inspectors regularly work their day shifts at their home ports and then work as late as midnight supervising fumigation operations.

CBP and APHIS Agricultural Inspectors have two powerful tools to use in the defense against invasive species. The first is by direct inspection of goods and commodities. Direct inspection is a targeted physical examination of a specified portion of a cargo which might be targeted due to the possible presence of an invasive species from the exporting country, or a hitchhiking pest which may have been inadvertently picked up during transit to the United States. But inspectors can only examine so many containers or vessels in a single day, and inspectors can often not physically examine every single piece of cargo in a shipment. The second tool is to require mandatory treatments for high risk shipments. Mandatory treatments are required for imports from certain countries or regions where a known invasive pest is established and prevalent, or if a commodity is imported in such a volume as to make thorough inspections impractical.

Both of these tools require a minimum number of CBP and APHIS personnel at each port of entry. Proper staffing must be in place for inspections during the day, as well as for fumigation treatments which occur after normal business hours. The increased cost of staffing will often be a fraction of the cost of an effective eradication effort after an invasive species becomes established.

We urge Congress to support our land and water ports in places like Texas, North Carolina, California, Pennsylvania and New Jersey which stand as our nation's first and only line of defense against invasive species. Many of these ports are understaffed to handle the growing amount of imported goods which pass through them. Current staffing cannot reasonably be expected to be able to examine the amount of cargo they handle in a thorough manner. The ever increasing amount of goods imported from China are of particular concern, as most of the recent invasive species have originated from there.

Treatments such as fumigation are an important tool in safeguarding US agriculture from invasive species, as well as protecting US trade with our partners around the world. Treatments can be applied to cargoes from questionable regions in lieu of requiring physical inspections by APHIS or CBP personnel. This allows APHIS and CBP to be more efficient and targeted with their inspection programs until staffing is brought up to full strength.

For these reasons, Western and our partner fumigation companies around the US support increased APHIS and CBP staffing efforts such as House Resolutions 4482 and 3244 which will appropriate funding to better staff our ports of entry and guard American agriculture against invasive species.

I again want to thank the subcommittee for the opportunity to testify here today. I have additional remarks which have been submitted to the record, but I will be happy to answer any questions which you may have at this time.