

Questions and Answers for Producers, Sellers, and Buyers of Baled Hay Moving From Areas Under Quarantine for Imported Fire Ant

Through its regulations to prevent the movement and establishment of the imported fire ant, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) seeks to facilitate the safe movement of agricultural products and commodities, including baled hay, out of areas under quarantine for the pest. USDA's goal is to help support commerce, while guarding against the further spread of the imported fire ant.

Weather conditions can prompt farmers to seek sources of hay for their livestock that may include hay from suppliers within areas of the country under quarantine for imported fire ant. While some hay produced in these areas is regulated from moving outside of the quarantine zone, most hay can move without restriction. In addition, there are simple steps hay growers and suppliers inside the quarantine area for imported fire ant can take to ensure their product can move quickly and easily to where it's needed by farmers and livestock. APHIS is providing the following information to help respond to questions from farmers, ranchers, hay growers, and suppliers, as well as our State plant health regulatory partners, as they work to respond to adverse weather conditions and find important feed sources for livestock.

Q. What is the quarantine zone for imported fire ant?

A. Most of the southeastern United States is currently under quarantine. In addition, most 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 are under quarantine. To determine whether you are in a quarantine area, visit USDA's Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/plant_health/plant_pest_info/fireants/zipcode.shtml and click the "Check your zip code now" link.

Q. Under what conditions can baled hay leave the quarantine area without restrictions?

A. Baled hay that meets any of the requirements below is not regulated and has no movement restrictions:

- For baled hay that is stacked, all bales **except** the bottom layer that is in direct contact with the ground.
- Hay that is cut, baled, loaded, and shipped without storage.
- Baled hay that is stored on an impervious surface such as hard pan (highly compressed soil), asphalt, concrete, etc.
- Baled hay that is stored elevated above the soil on pallets or tires or stored on landscaping cloth placed over the soil.

Q. What kind of hay is regulated in these areas for imported fire ant?

A. In quarantine areas, USDA only regulates baled hay and baled straw that are stored in direct contact with the ground, because it poses a risk for harboring imported fire ants. This hay can move anywhere within the quarantine area. In addition, hay or straw from inside the quarantine area that is stored in direct contact with the ground **can** move outside the quarantine area provided it has been inspected, found free of imported fire ant, and travels with a certificate or permit issued by the State department of agriculture or local USDA office. You can find contact information for State departments of agriculture on the National Plant Board's Web site at nationalplantboard.org/member/index.html. For local USDA offices, visit www.aphis.usda.gov/StateOffices. In addition, any hay that contains soil may not leave the quarantine area.

Q. What are some best management practices for baled hay storage that reduce the chance of fire ants infesting the hay?

A. The best management approach is to reduce or eliminate fire ants on the property annually. Your local Extension specialist can provide guidance on how to accomplish this. To find contact information for your local Extension office, visit www.nifa.usda.gov/Extension. In addition, the following storage practices can help reduce the risk of moving infested hay and straw:

- Applying fire ant bait (insecticide) around the outside of hay storage areas.

- Storing hay on an impervious surface such as asphalt, concrete, or hard pan.
- Elevating hay in the field onto a pallet or tire or placing it on landscaping cloth so it is not in direct contact with the ground.
- If available, requesting an inspection by a State inspector to certify that the hay is free of fire ants.

Before the hay leaves the quarantine area, the shipper should place food such as a hot dog or peanut butter on a card close to the loaded bales on the trailer and then check for ants after an hour or so.

Q. What should buyers do when purchasing hay produced within a quarantine area?

A. When placing the order, determine if the supplier is within the quarantine area for imported fire ant. To do so, visit USDA's Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/plant_health/plant_pest_info/fireants/zipcode.shtml and click the "Check your zip code now" link. Also, ask the supplier for hay that does not have fire ants, and visually inspect the hay bales when they are delivered to you. If possible, request that the hay be certified for movement by the State from which it is shipped.

If you find any ants, contact your State department of agriculture or local Extension office. You can find contact information for State departments of agriculture on the National Plant Board's Web site at nationalplantboard.org/member/index.html. For local Extension offices, visit www.nifa.usda.gov/Extension.

Q. What threat does the imported fire ant pose to agriculture?

A. Imported fire ants are destructive to agriculture and dangerous to animals and people. These ants will feed on the buds and fruits of numerous crop plants, especially corn, soybean, okra, and citrus. They can also girdle young trees. Large nests located in fields interfere with and damage equipment during cultivation and harvesting. Imported fire ants respond rapidly and aggressively to disturbances, and ant attacks inhibit field-worker activities. A single fire ant can sting its target repeatedly. Young and newborn animals are especially susceptible to the venom of these stings.

For more information on imported fire ants and APHIS' regulations, please visit www.aphis.usda.gov/plant_health/plant_pest_info/fireants/index.shtml.

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