

Mystery Seeds Arrive in Texas

Tuesday, July 28, 2020 By Kay Ledbetter, AgriLife TODAY

Texas residents are now among those across the nation receiving mysterious seeds delivered by mail in tiny bags marked as jewelry. U.S. Department of Agriculture officials are on alert because these seeds are unsolicited.

Kevin Ong, Ph.D., Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service plant pathologist and director of the Texas Plant Disease Diagnostic Laboratory in College Station, said the concern arises because these packages have seeds in them instead of what is listed, and there is no information on what type they might be.

“We don’t know what kind of seeds they are,” Ong said. “Not knowing what the seeds are could potentially open our agriculture industry up to noxious weeds. If that proves to be the case, if they take hold, they could impact agriculture negatively.”

According to USDA-Animal, Plant Health Inspection Service, APHIS, the Plant Protection and Quarantine, PPQ, regulates the importation of plants and plant products under the authority of the Plant Protection Act. PPQ maintains its import program to safeguard U.S. agriculture and natural resources from the risks associated with the entry, establishment or spread of animal and plant pests and noxious weeds. These regulations prohibit or restrict the importation of living plants, plant parts and seeds for propagation.

“Seeds for planting can be produced all over the world and some you buy may come from other countries,” Ong said. “Companies that sell these seeds have the necessary permits. In this situation, the source is not readily known. What USDA wants to know is why are people getting these and are they noxious weeds.”

What to do with mystery seeds

Do not simply discard these seeds as they can potentially germinate and escape into nature, Ong said. All cases should be reported to USDA and all packages should be kept secure until USDA gives further instructions.

All incidences of receipt of these unrequested seeds in Texas should be reported to USDA-APHIS by sending an email to Carol Motloch, USDA-APHIS’ Texas PPQ state operations coordinator, at carol.m.motloch@usda.gov. Other states should send emails to SITCMail@usda.gov. The email should include a contact email and phone number as well as a description of package information. Sending a photo of the label and material would also be helpful.

“First, if you didn’t order it, we don’t want anyone planting these seeds or even opening the packages,” said Larry Stein, Ph.D., Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service horticulturist, Uvalde. “It could be a scam, or it very well could be dangerous.”

“We recommend anyone receiving the seeds send an email to USDA and then wait to see if they are asked to send them in,” Stein said. “We would not advise throwing them away until more information is known because they might contaminate the landfill.”

To date, packages containing these mystery seeds have also been received in Washington, Virginia, Utah, Kansas, Louisiana and Arizona.

Advice from Texas Department of Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller is that anyone receiving a foreign package containing seeds should not open it. Keep contents contained in their original sealed package.

“I am urging folks to take this matter seriously,” Miller said in a press release. “An invasive plant species might not sound threatening, but these small invaders could destroy Texas agriculture. TDA has been working closely with USDA to analyze these unknown seeds so we can protect Texas residents.”

An invasive species is an organism that is not native to a particular region. The introduction of this “alien species” can cause economic or environmental harm. In agriculture, an invasive species can destroy native crops, introduce disease to native plants and may be dangerous for livestock.

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USDA Appoints PCG’s Wade to Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics

Friday, July 31, 2020

By Mary Jane Buerkle

Shawn Wade, Director of Policy Analysis and Research for Plains Cotton Growers, Inc., recently was appointed to the USDA’s Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics.

The purpose of the Committee is to advise the Secretary of Agriculture on the scope, timing, content, etc., of the periodic censuses and surveys of agriculture, other related surveys, and the types of information to obtain from respondents concerning agriculture. The Committee is comprised of 22 members, representing a broad range of agricultural disciplines and interests, and meets annually. Wade is the only member on the Committee from Texas.

“It is an honor to be asked to serve on this committee,” Wade said. “The information that is gathered and distributed by NASS is extraordinarily important to producers and policy makers, and I am excited to have the opportunity to work with the Committee to ensure the quality and breadth of information that they provide continues to be of benefit to producers both here at home and across the nation.”

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