

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 13, 2017

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Red Imported Fire Ant

In response to the recent northwest Oklahoma wildland fires, an outpouring of hay donations to help feed the many farm animals is being experienced in the area. We are thankful for this continued outstanding show of support from not only Oklahomans, but also friends from across the nation.

During this time, we also want to take steps to prevent any unwanted consequences such as movement of red imported fire ants (RIFA) from restricted areas.

As a result, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFF) along with Oklahoma State University Extension will be surveying sites for the red imported fire ant where this hay is stored. This will consist of placing RIFA bait tubes when temperatures are between 65°F and 95°F. This is important because if temperatures are too cold or too hot, the fire ants will not be as active.

In about 40 to 45 days when the wildland fire situation has hopefully settled some and when the weather is more appropriate, ODAFF will hold a public meeting with producers to help educate them about the eradication of fire ants in order to keep the area free of fire ant restrictions.

As a reminder, stored hay bales not touching the soil are assumed to be free of fire ants.

The red imported fire ant was imported into the USA around the 1930's and has spread to infest more than 260 million acres of land primarily in 11 southeastern states, including all or portions of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Texas and Oklahoma. In Texas, the red imported fire ant is thought to have an estimated economic impact of \$1.2 billion annually. These fire ants are pests of urban, agricultural and wildlife areas and can pose a serious health threat to plants and animals including humans.

As a result of the impact that the red imported fire ant poses, U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has established a quarantine.

Under that quarantine, the following are regulated items:

- Imported fire ant queens and reproducing colonies of imported fire ants.
- Soil, separately or with other things, except soil samples shipped to approved laboratories. Potting soil is exempt, if commercially prepared, packaged, and shipped in original containers.
- Plants with roots with soil attached (containerized nursery stock, field grown and balled and burlapped nursery stock), except houseplants maintained indoors and not for sale (personal items).
- Grass sod.
- Baled hay and straw that have been stored in contact with the soil.
- Used soil moving equipment, unless cleaned of all noncompacted soil.
- Any other products, articles, or means of conveyance when it is determined by an inspector that they present a risk of spread of imported fire ants due to its proximity to an infestation of imported fire ants.

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