

Growers, Florists Protest Chrysanthemum White Rust Quarantine

Society of American Florists

Both the Massachusetts Flower Growers Association and the Connecticut Florists Association have written to USDA asking the agency to remove Chrysanthemum White Rust's (CWR) quarantine status.

"Each year the quarantine is in place presents circumstances by which our growers and retail members face a large financial risk to their businesses," wrote the Massachusetts growers, as they called for "immediate action." [Their letter](#) continued: "We believe the change to a Regulated Non-Quarantine Pest status for CWR would be of benefit to our industry."

In the [Connecticut Florists letter](#) to the USDA, it argued that "as CWR outbreaks become more common and routine, the purpose of federal regulations for this pathogen become more unjustifiable and the costs of enforcement and compliance just keep adding up."

CWR has been a serious, quarantine-significant disease in the U.S. and Canada for many years; however, fungicides can prevent or control the disease. The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the industry generally agree that a complete removal of the quarantine could lead to increased disease pressure, greatly increasing the cost of control. On the other hand, however, some commercial growers – especially growers in the Mid-Atlantic States, Massachusetts and Connecticut -- have experienced significant financial losses over the past several years when subjected to quarantines that required them to hold their mum crops until the marketing season had passed. For their part, scientists are questioning whether the disease may actually survive winter temperatures and thus remain in the environment in those climates.

SAF, the American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA) and major chrysanthemum breeders have been discussing this problem with APHIS for several years, while continuing a major outreach effort to educate growers on disease prevention and look for a way to modify the quarantine without fully revoking it. Several state governments have now joined the discussion, with their representatives arguing that surveying for the disease and enforcing quarantines is prohibitively expensive and ineffective.

One possible solution has emerged: APHIS could propose a rule designating CWR as a "Regulated Non-Quarantine Pest." Under that scenario, the production of plant cuttings would be regulated, but in the production phase in the U.S., the disease would be treated as a "quality pest," and growers would not be subjected to quarantines. Imported cut chrysanthemum flowers would continue to be allowed.

Discussions are still in the very early stages, and a change in rulemaking would take several years, a timeline that would allow ample opportunity for public comment.

SAF will continue to work with the industry and with APHIS to try to resolve the issue.

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