

AgTC: U.S. Zika outbreaks could hinder exports to China

Regional outbreaks of the Zika virus in the United States this summer could result in the Chinese government enforcing regulations regarding cargo imports, the Agriculture Transportation Coalition said.

By Mark Edward Nero |Friday, June 09, 2017

Regional outbreaks of the Zika virus in the United States during the warm summer months could result in the Chinese government imposing strict regulations regarding cargo containers being imported from the U.S., the Agriculture Transportation Coalition (AgTC) said.

On June 8, during the AgTC's annual conference, held in Long Beach, the coalition's program and policy manager, Abigail Struxness, explained to the assemblage that the Chinese government has a requirement that any country that's been classified by the World Health Organization as an active Zika area needs to either fumigate its containers before cargo is loaded, or somehow be able to prove that the containers being imported into China are mosquito-free.

Last August, the Chinese government placed the entire United States on this list due to a Zika outbreak in Miami, and for four weeks in August and early September, the government of China was requiring most containers imported from the United States to be fumigated or otherwise proven mosquito-free.

"We were looking at a couple hundred dollars for every container," Struxness said. "So we worked with the U.S Foreign Agricultural Service over in Beijing, they were able to talk to the Chinese Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine and come up with a compromise. So as of September of last year, only cargo that's originating in a Zika outbreak area needs that certification."

However, she said, the measure was taken informally, meaning that the full, formal regulation could be reinforced at any time.

Struxness then mentioned that according to the Centers for Disease Control, a Zika outbreak is currently active in Brownsville, Texas, while more areas around the country could be affected over the next several weeks, as the weather gets warmer.

"We're just coming up on the summer months, where mosquitoes tend to spread the most, and so there's concerns that Zika's going to spread up the East Coast, maybe into the Georgia areas, perhaps into the Gulf (Coast) a little bit more, and so we just need to be aware that this problem hasn't completely gone away; we kind of had it easy for the winter, but there's a chance that it's going to return," she said.

Struxness said she's talked to U.S. officials who say that everything is going smoothly with the Chinese for now and that the regionalization approach is expected to continue, but that could change if Zika spreads in the United States this summer.