TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

TODD STAPLES
COMMISSIONER

May 23, 2008

The Honorable Bruce Knight
Under Secretary
Marketing and Regulatory Programs

The Honorable Dr. Gale Buchanan
Under Secretary
Research, Education and Economics

U. S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Under Secretaries Knight and Buchanan:

You may have heard about the infestation of Crazy Rasberry Ants in the Houston area. Several news stories about the ants have circulated nationwide in recent weeks. While scientists have yet to agree upon the taxonomic status of this exotic ant, one thing is certain: the ant is a nuisance and is spreading. In five counties close to Houston, the ant has infested neighborhoods and caused short circuits in electrical outlets and appliances resulting in several thousand dollars in repair costs. This ant also occurs in such large numbers, some people have curtailed their outdoor activity. The ant does not sting, but it can bite humans and other animals.

Many of the tactics used for controlling the red imported fire ants are ineffective against this ant. Even spending several hundred dollars per property for control of this pest has proved unsatisfactory. Realizing the negative impact the ant causes to the environment and to humans, the Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) branch of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service recently recommended gathering more information on the ant's biology, agricultural importance and population trends in Texas.

It is unlikely this ant can be eradicated. However, it is crucial to slow its spread and reduce its numbers to a tolerable level. I applaud PPQ for establishing a policy of

P.O. Box 12847 Austin, Texas 78711 (512) 463-7476 Fax: (888) 223-8861
www.TexasAgriculture.gov

surveying for this pest in Texas and Florida, monitoring population trends, collaborating with the Texas A&M University in the development of effective insecticides, and investigating biological control options.

I urge you to expedite development of effective control strategies for these ants, including insecticides, and to support the relevant research needed to develop effective management strategies against this pest. The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) stands ready to assist PPQ and the Agricultural Research Service in developing management strategies against this ant, including registration of potential insecticides. Thank you for your attention to this pest. I look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely yours,

Todd Staples
Commissioner

TS/SN/cbl