

Quarantine Inspectors Enjoy A Few Laughs

The difficult job of protecting our nation's resources has, at times, a lighter side for ARS quarantine inspectors, who form the first line of defense against damaging foreign pests.

As they examine baggage and cargo at ports of entry, the inspectors encounter unusual and sometimes humorous incidents in an atmosphere of serious business — that of keeping hitchhiking plant pests from entering the

United States in fruits, plants, and souvenirs:

An English exporter offered to eat any soil found on his tractors when they arrived in Seattle. The shipment looked clean, but inspectors found nearly a pound of soil containing oat cyst nematodes on a single tractor. The exporter had to eat his words — but not the soil.

A plant quarantine inspector in San Pedro, Calif., looking for pests in bird seed wondered why the cage contained fresh water and seed — but no bird. The woman

passenger repeated only, "No speak English." Then a parakeet the woman had stuffed under her coat let out a loud squawk. Both woman and bird were turned over to the Public Health Service, which has regulations applying to pets.

A 7-foot tiki almost got the ax at San Ysidro, Calif. Carved from a palm stump with roots as the hair, the idol was not allowed to enter the United States until its youthful owners removed all soil from the roots.

Although some people fail to cooperate, a few go overboard. A yacht captain in Miami dived after a lemon he had thrown into the water when he learned that damaging plant pests could invade Florida in fruits and plants from other countries.

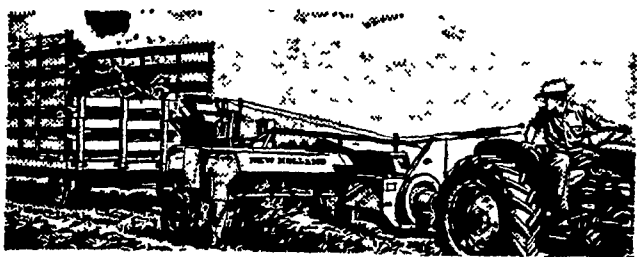
An obviously nervous woman whispered to an ARS inspector in Dallas that she suspected there was a bomb in her carryall bag. The bag was vibrating and the inspector, thinking a large, buzzing insect was hiding in it, opened the bag to find that the woman's electric toothbrush had accidentally switched on.

To avoid giving up his apricots in Chicago, one traveler began eating them. The passenger turned a sickish green after the inspector broke open one apricot and revealed insect larvae inside.

Golf shoes were found playing host to a party of plant parasites upon their arrival at Dulles International Airport, near Washington, D.C. Soil adhering to the shoes yielded the grass cyst nematode that attacks lawns and pastures in foreign countries. Undetected, the pest could have started an infestation on some luxurious greens in this country.

You cannot keep out of trouble by spending more than your income. — A. Lincoln.

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