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E-commerce: Spread the word, not the pests

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Canadian Food Inspection Agency

- Science-based regulatory agency with mandate to safeguard Canada's food supply, animals and plants
- Protects Canada's agriculture and forestry sectors and natural resources from the economic and environmental impacts of introduced pests
- Legislation → *Plant Protection Act*
- Plant protection requirements apply to e-commerce, but...





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Growing volumes of cross-border B2C and C2C E-Commerce shipments are presenting a number of challenges to Customs, other relevant government agencies and private sector stakeholders in terms of ensuring rapid release and clearance while managing safety and security risks, efficient revenue collection and statistical analysis. Additionally, traditional challenges such as illicit trade, illicit financial flows, intellectual property rights infringement, counterfeit, piracy, and commercial fraud continue to exist.





Compliance and enforcement challenges

- High volumes of small, low-value shipments (e.g. seeds, insects, wooden products)
- Interest for rapid release and clearance processes
- Limitations in data availability/accuracy
- Low targeting and inspection capacity

Compounding factors

- Anonymous nature of the on-line environment
- Reliance on exporters/sellers to declare contents of imported goods
- Ability to regulate entities/persons outside of Canada
- *Ease, accessibility and awareness of plant protection requirements...*



Awareness-raising campaign

- Advertisement
 - Programmatic (banner) ads
 - YouTube video ads
 - Mobile phone banner ads
 - Search engine marketing
- Social media
- Web content

Buying seeds or plants online? Know the dos and don'ts.

CAUTION

Plants

Just because something is sold online doesn't mean it is approved to enter Canada or be shipped within the country. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is Canada's national plant protection organization. The CFIA is entrusted with this responsibility as part of its overall mandate to protect Canada's food, plant and animal resources.

Plant pests such as insects, fungi and snails can cause damage that is costly and extensive for Canada. The most effective way to deal with plant or plant product pests is to prevent their entry into Canada.

How can you help?

- ✓ **DO** follow our tips when buying or selling plant products online.
- ✗ **DON'T** assume that all products available online meet CFIA regulatory requirements.

On this page

- [Plants, bulbs and seeds](#)
- [Insects and other invertebrates](#)
- [Handicrafts and other wooden products](#)

Buying, selling and trading of plants and other organisms

On this page

- [E-commerce requirements](#)
- [Import](#)
- [Domestic movement](#)
- [Export](#)
- [Failure to comply with requirements](#)
- [Contact us](#)

E-commerce requirements

E-commerce has opened up beneficial opportunities for both buyers and sellers. However, it has also increased risks to Canada's agriculture, forests and the environment. Potentially harmful organisms such as invasive plants, seeds and insects, as well as commodities or articles capable of carrying or spreading these pests, can easily be offered for sale and purchased from anywhere in the world.

The same requirements that apply to traditional types of commerce apply to online buying and trading of plants and other organisms. Through the Plant Protection Act, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has Plant Protection

Case study 6
Initiatives to raise awareness about e-commerce in Canada

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Legislation and timeline:
Canada, 2020-2021

Content of the case study:
Goods purchased online may originate from anywhere in the world and be sent directly to consumers who have ordered the goods online and who may not be familiar with import requirements. This presents a significant challenge to regulatory agencies in Canada, including the NPPD (the Canadian Food Inspection Agency).

Awareness-raising campaign
Online retail sales have been rising over time, with an appreciable increase since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Retail e-commerce sales in Canada grew nearly 21 percent in 2020, reaching over CAD 52 billion.

Starting in 2020, the NPPD implemented a compliance promotion campaign among online consumers in Canada (Government of Canada, n.d.(a)) to raise awareness about Canada's import requirements for food, plants and animals, and to encourage and promote the adoption of best practices when trading online (e.g. do your research, contact seller if needed, be aware of import requirements). The NPPD's communications and marketing products included social media, an e-commerce topic page (Government of Canada, n.d.(b)), articles (Government of Canada, n.d.(c)), and outreach to key partners and stakeholders to further the reach of the message.

That said, one of the challenges for the NPPD when communicating about e-commerce is identifying products online that were regulated by the NPPD for plant health, the focus of the campaign was on items that the NPPD deemed most likely to be purchased online and to possibly escape border scrutiny. This included the following products marketed online to consumers in Canada for direct shipping by postal or courier services, typically in small packages:

- plants and plant products, including seeds and other propagation material;
- living insects and other invertebrates, including snails and earthworms; and
- wooden handicrafts, such as carvings, baskets, boxes, bird houses, picture frames and pens.

The key message of the overarching campaign included the following:

- Check before checking out - know the rules and the potential risks before buying online;
- Just because an item is available for sale online, does not mean it is approved to be imported or that it meets Canadian requirements;
- Some goods could be harmful to Canada's natural resources and economy;
- Help ensure import requirements for plants, food, animals and related products are met.

Results
Overall, the awareness-raising campaign was considered successful. Some of the key findings are as follows:



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Results

- Overall, the awareness-raising campaign was considered successful:
 - good overall visibility
 - timing of the advertising campaign contributed to its performance
 - Canadians are generally aware that plant products, live insects and live snails present risks
 - Awareness about the roles and responsibilities of online buyers and sellers is generally low

Challenges

- Promotion and wide appeal
- Who and how to reach
- Buyer focussed
- How to make them “care” and change behaviour
- Leadership



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Thank you

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