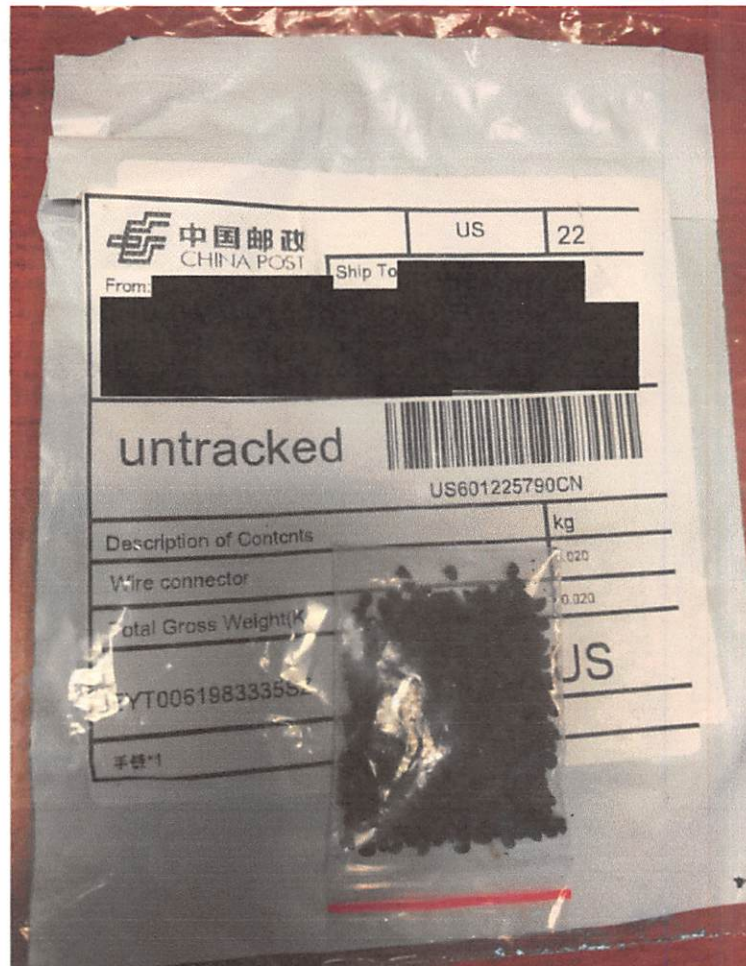


https://www.ivpressonline.com/news/local/farm/mysterious-seed-packets-prompt-warnings/article_4453058a-d1e3-11ea-a8c6-0f5a7430a72f.html

Mysterious seed packets prompt warnings

By IMPERIAL VALLEY PRESS STAFF
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Homeowners have reported receiving unsolicited packets of seeds that apparently originated in China. The California Department of Agriculture is asking anyone who receives such a package to leave it sealed and contact their local ag commissioner's office. COURTESY PHOTO

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the California Department of Food and Agriculture both recently issued advisories warning homeowners about unsolicited seed packets that appear to have come from China.

CDFA said it is communicating with USDA to determine any necessary actions for shipments received in California. In the meantime, CDFA is instructing residents not to open any unsolicited seed packets received and to contact their local county agricultural commissioner's office.

Seed packets should not be opened, shipped or disposed of by residents in order to prevent potential dispersal of invasive species and/or quarantine pests. Unopened seed packets should be held by the resident or county official until further instructions are provided.

"At this time, we don't have any evidence indicating this is something other than a 'brushing scam,' where people receive unsolicited items from a seller who then posts false customer reviews to boost sales," USDA said. "USDA is currently collecting seed packages from recipients and will test their contents and determine if they contain anything that could be of concern to U.S. agriculture or the environment."

USDA said its Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is working closely with the Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection, other federal agencies, and State departments of agriculture to investigate the situation.

The Imperial County Ag Commissioner's Office is currently closed to the public. Residents who find themselves in possession of a seed package from an unknown source should call (442) 265-1500.