

Frequently Asked Questions about NPGS Germplasm Order Processing and Shipping

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1. How do I determine my order status?

Login to GRIN-Global. Select the menu option “**Your Profile.**” Then select “**Your Order History.**” Select the order number and review the details. The details include information on the actions taken by the site(s) that processed your germplasm request. When multiple sites are involved, each will generate a separate order. Each order will have a unique six-digit identifier and a description will be displayed for each action the NPGS has taken associated with the order.

2. When will my order be shipped?

Each NPGS site has different operational practices and constraints, especially during peak request times (February-May). Staffing devoted to order fulfillment is often limited. The NPGS cannot emulate the shipping speed typically achieved by e-commerce. Phytosanitary inspections may be required, and backlogs are not uncommon, especially for international orders.

We recommend that U.S. researchers request material at least four to six weeks before it is needed; international researchers should request material at least ten to twelve weeks in advance.

3. How do I know how many / which sites are responsible for the taxa in my web request?

In the confirmation email you received after submitting the request, germplasm items were grouped by genebank site.

Alternatively, login to GRIN-Global. Select the menu item “**Your Profile.**” Then select “**Your Order History.**” Open the order to review the details. When a request involves multiple genebank sites, the details indicate the actions taken by all sites involved in fulfilling the germplasm request. The genebank sites are identified by code names (e.g. W6, S9, NC7, etc.). When multiple sites are involved, each site will generate a separate order. Each order will have a unique six-digit identifier and a description will be displayed for each action the NPGS has taken associated with the order.

4. How will my order be shipped?

Domestic (within the U.S.) orders are generally shipped via the least expensive option to the U.S. government. The most frequently used couriers are U.S. Postal Service First Class mail, FedEx, and UPS. When submitting a request, the shopping cart checkout form includes an optional input field for you to designate your preferred shipper and account information. Shipping costs associated with the alternate method will be charged to the designated account.

International orders (outside the U.S.) are shipped via U.S. Postal Service whenever possible. When submitting a request, the shopping cart checkout includes an input field for the requestor to provide the preferred shipper and the related account information. Shipping costs associated with the alternate method will be charged to the designated account.

International commercial couriers (e.g. FedEx, UPS, DHL) may be used when a requestor recommends them in advanced communications as the most reliable means for shipping to their location. Additional courier companies can sometimes be used for international shipments if the requestor arranges for their parcel to be picked up from Beltsville, Maryland after the phytosanitary certificate has been issued.

5. How do I provide my preferred shipper and account information?

The shopping cart checkout includes input fields where you can indicate the preferred shipper and your account information. Please note: This shipping courier account information is not retained and must be supplied each time a request is submitted. If you do not provide this information, the NPGS will generally select the least expensive shipment option for your parcel, which may or may not be trackable in transit.

6. How many shipments will I receive to complete my order?

It depends on the taxa and accessions requested, which is reflective of the genebanks involved in fulfilling the request. The NPGS is comprised of genebanks at 20+ locations around the U.S. For more information see: <https://www.ars-grin.gov/Pages/Collections>.

Domestic (within the U.S.) orders are shipped separately by each individual genebank. If your domestic order will be fulfilled by multiple genebanks, you will receive multiple shipments. If you have provided courier account information, you may also have multiple charges, each representing a different sender location.

When international orders (outside the U.S.) are fulfilled by multiple genebanks, the NPGS will consolidate them whenever possible, through a single phytosanitary certificate and shipment. International NPGS orders are usually shipped from Beltsville, Maryland although a few NPGS genebanks ship material outside the U.S. directly from their location.

7. Can I track the status of my order after it has been shipped?

Domestic orders shipped by First-Class mail using the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) cannot be tracked in transit.

An order (U.S. or international) may be tracked using the vendor-provided tracking number when the requestor provides U.S. Postal Service Priority Mail or other commercial courier (e.g. FedEx, UPS, DHL) account information in the shopping cart checkout. process. The tracking number is included in the order's history details when the NPGS has access to this information. To review the details, when logged in to GRIN-Global, select the menu option **"Your Profile."** Then select the option **"Your Order History"** and the order number.

International orders shipped via the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) can generally be tracked using the U.S. Customs Declaration form number at https://tools.usps.com/go/TrackConfirmAction_input. Depending on the destination country, tracking information may not be available once the shipment has left the United States. The U.S. Customs Declaration number is included in the order history details. To review the details, when logged in, use the menu option **"Your Profile."** Then select **"Your Order History"** and review the details.

8. What should I do to cancel a request?

Please contact the NPGS immediately to cancel an order that is in-process. If the order is being fulfilled by a single site, contact them directly and provide the order number to cancel. If the order is being fulfilled by multiple sites, contact gringlobal-orders@usda.gov and provide the order number to cancel.

9. **If my order requires an import permit (shipped outside the U.S or regulated transport inside the U.S.), how and when should I submit it?**

The GRIN-Global shopping cart checkout process includes an option to upload an import permit (or other documents) when you initially submit the germplasm request. We recommend obtaining an import permit *before submitting* a request and attaching it with your submission. The following file extensions can be uploaded and attached to an order: .pdf; .docx; .txt; .csv; .xlsx; .jpg; and .jpeg.

An import permit (or other documents) can also be uploaded after a request has been submitted. Login; select the menu option “**Your Profile.**” Select “**Your Order History**” and then the order number. The **Upload** option will be displayed at the bottom of the page. The following file extensions can be uploaded and attached to an order: .pdf; .docx; .txt; .csv; .xlsx; .jpg; and .jpeg.

If dialogue between the requestor and the NPGS regarding phytosanitary regulations compliance is needed, we recommend this occur before submitting the online request. For all orders that will be shipped to a destination outside the U.S, an import permit is required before the order will be processed for agricultural inspection and issuance of a phytosanitary certificate.

10. **If my order requires a phytosanitary certificate, how will it be obtained?**

When phytosanitary certificates are required, NPGS staff will request an agricultural inspection. Almost all NPGS international shipments are accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate. In some cases, when required by U.S. state or territorial regulations, domestic orders may also require inspection and must be accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate.

In the U.S., phytosanitary certificates are issued by the USDA Animal Plant Health and Inspection Service (APHIS) or designated state regulatory authorities on behalf of APHIS. The phytosanitary regulations that must be met are determined by the *importing* country or other recipient administrative jurisdiction. These may be communicated to the NPGS through the import permit (for foreign requests), consultation with published export regulations known to the U.S., and/or communication with appropriate plant protection organization officials.

It is NPGS policy to distribute the requested germplasm only when the shipment complies with all import and export phytosanitary regulations as required by the final (and all intermediate) shipping destinations. It is the requestor’s responsibility to both know and be prepared to comply with applicable phytosanitary regulations before submitting a request to the NPGS.

11. **What documentation will be outside and inside packages in which the germplasm is shipped?**

A paper packing slip listing the included items will always be inside the shipment’s first package. Other original shipping documents and disclaimer statements may also be included inside this package.

If appropriate for the destination and/or regulatory requirements, the phytosanitary certificate, import permit, and other shipping documentation will be inside the package. Although many plant protection organizations are now accepting electronically transmitted phytosanitary certificates, the NPGS continues to include a paper copy inside the package.

If you need an electronic copy of the phytosanitary certificate and other shipping documentation in advance of the arrival of a package, please communicate this requirement when submitting your

order. Please also communicate if the original documents must be dispatched independently from the plant material shipment.

The exterior of the package may include up to three copies of all shipping documentation as well as the genebank's nursery inspection certificate or other labels as required by the destination.

12. For international (outside the U.S.) shipments, do you designate the value of the shipment's contents?

NPGS genebanks will indicate a nominal value (e.g. \$1.00 or \$10.00 USD) to for the parcel to comply with U.S. Customs requirements. Noncommercial shipments leaving the U.S. cannot have a declared U.S. Customs value more than \$250.00 USD.

The shipment valuation listed on an invoice does not represent a fee or intrinsic value of the germplasm and is provided for customs purposes only.

13. Why do I need to provide an English translation of my documents?

NPGS international shipments are preceded by an agricultural inspection. In the U.S., phytosanitary certificates are issued by the USDA Animal Plant Health and Inspection Service (APHIS) or designated state regulatory authorities on behalf of APHIS. APHIS requires the exporter to present an English translation of all documents to ensure the shipment complies with the stated terms of import.

14. Are shipments to and from U.S. territories and non-contiguous states considered domestic or international?

Shipments to inhabited U.S. territories (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands), Alaska, and Hawaii are considered domestic shipments for NPGS distribution tabulation and reporting purposes. However, U.S. territories, Alaska, and Hawaii may each have unique agricultural inspection and phytosanitary regulations for importing plant material. The NPGS will comply with all state or territorial procedures for shipping material to these locations.

Two NPGS genebanks (in Hawaii and Puerto Rico) are located on U.S. islands. Shipments from these genebanks to the contiguous U.S. are considered domestic shipments; they are handled as foreign shipments to all non-U.S. locations. There may be unique agricultural inspection and phytosanitary regulations for importing plant material from either of these locations.