

The official publication of Riverside County Farm Bureau, Inc.

A private, nonprofit organization serving farmers throughout Riverside County since 1917

RIVERSIDE COUNTY'S ATTACK ON RURAL CRIME

On February 4th and 5th, 2003, the Riverside County Sheriff's Department was the host for the 1st quarter meeting of the California Rural Crime Prevention Task Force. The meeting was held at the Miramonte Resort in Indian Wells and was attended by various Law Enforcement agencies throughout the state, along with members of the California Farm Bureau, the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the USDA, and other agriculture related businesses.

The Task Force was formed to target agricultural related crimes, and to share information between the members of the task force. It is also used to provide training which specifically deals with agricultural crime. Recently State Assembly Bill #374 defined what a "Rural" or "Agricultural" crime is, "Any property crime against a farmer, rancher, agricultural-related business or other designated industry which takes place in the unincorporated rural areas of the state, and impacts the victims' commercial production, distribution, or economic livelihood derived from agricultural products, livestock, petroleum, chemicals, farm implements and equipment."

Riverside County does over one billion dollars a year in agriculture. It is ranked 9th in California agriculture production and 10th in the nation.

At the February meeting, Sheriff Doyle was introduced to the task force and gave an opening greeting to the group, explaining how important it is to target rural crime, especially in Riverside County, since it is one of our counties' major sources of income. He has also been very supportive of our own agricultural crime program, which has slowly been expanded with several new programs that are being worked on to better track rural crimes and also for an equipment marking program that will soon be available to the local growers. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2...**



Bill Oesterlein, Riverside Deputy Agricultural Commissioner, speaks out at the meeting of the California Rural Crime Prevention Task Force. Over 150 professionals attended the conference.



RSO Liaison, Tim Leary, right, watches on as the Task Force meeting explains its approach.

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ATTACK ON RURAL CRIME CONT...

The February meeting was well received by all the attending members of the task force, which was made possible by generous donations from the Riverside Sheriff's Association, the Riverside County Farm Bureau, The Nursery Growers Association, and from several individual growers in the County.

Tim Leary and our CFBF Field Representative, Judi Fitzgerald, were both elected to serve on the California Rural Crime Prevention Task Force Board.

CALIFORNIA WATER AWARENESS MONTH

The California Water Awareness Campaign is a yearlong effort by organizations throughout California to heighten public awareness of water and the role water agencies and allied entities play in conservation, management, water supply, water quality and distribution.

The Campaign urges all Californians: "Use Water Wisely and Keep It Clean—It's a Way of Life." The California Farm Bureau serves as a cosponsor of the California Water Awareness Campaign and many county Farm Bureaus are also members.

This May, the Water Awareness Campaign launches new promotions showing Californians how they can save water right at home. Among the campaign's suggestions:

OUTDOORS

- Minimize evaporation by watering your yard in the early morning or late evening when it's cooler.
- Routinely check for broken, leaking or clogged sprinklers.
- When planning a yard or garden, group plants that have similar water needs; healthy trees and plants can easily withstand dry periods.

INDOORS

- Only run full loads in the washing machine and dishwasher.
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- Use a low-flow showerhead and take shorter showers.

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News in Brief...

CALIFORNIA EGG IMPORTS UP 41%

Egg imports to California have risen sharply, as a poultry disease reduces the state's population of laying hens. An analyst says California has imported 41 percent more eggs from other states, compared to the same period last year. A Southern California outbreak of exotic Newcastle disease has killed some three and a half million chickens. Egg demand peaked prior to Easter, with farmers earning about 60 cents a dozen.

SURVEY CHEEKS RETAIL FOOD PRICES

Springtime has brought lower average prices for many items at California supermarkets. A Farm Bureau survey found lower prices for comparable foods such as oranges, broccoli, milk and cheese, compared to the prior survey last autumn. When Easter approached, the survey found retail egg prices averaged about \$2 dollars a dozen. Volunteers conducted the survey at more than two-dozen stores around the state.

MILK CONSUMPTION HITS 10-YEAR HIGH

Californians drank more milk last year than in any year since 1992. The California Milk Processor Board says milk consumption reached 746 million gallons, up 2 percent from the previous year. Milk sales early this year have continued the increase. The board credits its "Got Milk?" advertising campaign for boosting demand. The campaign is now 10 years old, and the board says it has no plans to retire it.

EPA ENCOURAGES ENGINE REPLACEMENT

Federal air-quality regulators plan to give California farmers a new incentive to replace older diesel engines. The US Environmental Protection Agency says farmers may avoid new air-quality permit rules, if they replace old engines with newer, more-efficient ones. The EPA estimates more than 2,000 older engines remain in use in California, powering irrigation pumps and other equipment.

MILK VENDING MACHINES GO TO HIGH SCHOOL

Teenagers will have more opportunity to buy milk at school, through a project supported by the state's "Buy California" program. Local Future Farmers of America chapters in three Central Valley counties will install milk vending machines at high schools. The machines sell milk in a variety of flavors, contained in popular single-serving bottles. FFA members will stock the machines and use the profits to benefit local FFA programs.

DISEASE CONFIRMED IN TEXAS POULTRY FLOCK

Authorities have confirmed that a backyard poultry flock near El Paso, Texas, had exotic Newcastle disease. It was the first find in Texas. Officials said the DNA of the virus appeared similar to the strain found in Southern California, Nevada and Arizona. The infected flock in Texas was euthanized. Exotic Newcastle disease has killed more than 3-and-a-half million birds in Southern California, but it does not affect people.

COURT TO HEAR MILK CASE

The US Supreme Court will hear arguments later this month about California's milk pricing plan. Two Nevada dairies say the plan unfairly discriminates against out-of-state milk. So far, courts have upheld the California rules. In a legal brief supporting the rules, the farm group Western United Dairymen says the California system assures citizens of adequate supplies of high-quality milk.

RAIN HELPS RANGELAND, HURTS HAY

April showers may have done more good than harm on California farms and ranches. Cattle ranchers say the rain during April will improve pasture conditions. Southern California strawberry growers say gentle rain slowed harvest, but did little damage. But rain did damage hay in some areas, where farmers had cut it for drying. Scattered reports of hail and strong winds caused concerns for Central Valley tree-fruit and nut growers.

FLIES FOUND OUTSIDE QUARANTINE ZONE

The discovery of Mexican fruit flies outside an existing quarantine zone brought a quick response from pest fighters. Three flies were trapped last week in northern San Diego County, northwest of an infestation in Valley Center. Agricultural officials immediately treated the locations with an organic pesticide. They will also release sterile Mexican fruit flies there, in hopes of preventing a full-fledged infestation.

-- News items credited to California Farm Bureau Federation.

SOME 'QUARANTINE' CROPS HEAD TO MARKET

San Diego County avocado grower Al Stehly has 700,000 pounds of fruit hanging in his groves near Valley Center, but when he wants fresh avocado for a sandwich, he drives to Von's Supermarket.

That's because even though about 500 parcels of avocados in the Mexican fruit fly quarantine area are being harvested, fruit in the core area, where Stehly's groves are located, can't be moved-period.

No new flies or larvae have been found in the quarantine area since the first week of March. But officials said it's still too early to predict when either the quarantine or an aerial spraying program aimed at knocking out the fly might end.

The state has convened a science advisory panel to review protocols for treating Mexican fruit fly infestations. The group of national experts is expected to arrive in Valley Center on April 16 for first-hand evaluations of the terrain, local growing conditions and cultural practices.

The eradication effort is well under way in the heavily infested Valley Center area, where Stehly, a former president of San Diego County Farm Bureau, is located. Seven treatments with the soft chemical, spinosad, have been completed and an eighth is set for this week, weather permitting. Spinosad is approved for use on organic crops and many farmers within the quarantine area are organic growers.

Stehly said for now he's working on improving his golf swing, watering trees and hoping for the best. He said he'd just like to get "anything" for this year's crop. He hasn't had to lay off any workers yet, but things are getting tight.

California Department of Food and Agriculture spokesman Jay Van Rein said that, although officials are

encouraged, much depends on whether new flies are found in the next few weeks and on temperatures, which can speed up or slow down the flies' life cycle.

No running total on the cost of the quarantine and treatment effort is yet available, but Van Rein said projected costs for the entire program are about \$22 million. These costs will be split evenly between CDFG and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In the hardest hit area, the quarantine is expected to last into the fall, at least. Imposed Dec. 3 on a 117-square-mile area northwest of Valley Center following the discovery of dozens of adult fruit flies and larvae in several local groves, the quarantine was later expanded to include a total of 130 square miles.

The area stretches from Interstate 15 to the Pauma Valley and from the Riverside County line south to Woods Valley Road. As of March 6, 277 flies had been found. Fruit in a 12-square-mile "regulatory core" zone within the quarantine area, where Stehly's groves are located, cannot be harvested under any circumstances.

Growers whose groves are outside the core zone, but still inside the quarantine area, were given several options: destroy their crops, process fruit into juice or guacamole, or start ongoing treatment programs designed to kill the flies.

Grove owners outside the core area who began treating their trees in December are the ones now free to harvest. But some growers who are able to harvest are holding off because of late or out-of-season crops or other market considerations.

Hass avocados, navel oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, guavas and cherimoyas are among the fruits now heading to market from the affected

area. The bulk of the harvested commodities, however, are avocados.

Bob Siemer, who is a partner in Fallbrook's Del Rey Avocado packinghouse, told the local media that being able to harvest at least some fruit was a relief for the business. The packinghouse owns nearly 200 acres of avocado trees in both the core and noncore sections of the quarantine area.

Workers for the packinghouse are picking the largest avocados and leaving smaller ones on the trees for now, he added.

"As long as we continue our spraying every two weeks, we're allowed to harvest any time that we want," Siemer said.

Other growers said they are stripping their trees of late, immature crops so they can stop treating them or will wait until later in the season to proceed with their harvests.

Polito Family Farms chose another option for citrus. The quarantine calls for oranges, tangelos, grapefruit and other fruit from its groves to undergo irradiation to kill any flies. Approved for U.S. fruit last fall, the treatment

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meant the farm had to put a special, fly-proof covering and door on its barn, follow strict packing rules and drive its crops to Vernon-based Sunbeam Corp. for the two-hour treatments, said co-owner Rose Polito.

The extra effort involved with irradiation has paid off for her business, which sells its crops to farmers' markets in San Diego, Los Angeles and Riverside counties, Polito said.

"The fruit is selling very well," she said. "It is very well accepted by the regular customers that we have who have been waiting for this fruit."

San Diego County Farm Bureau Executive Director Eric Larson said that through April 3 nearly 190 growers had completed the Mexican fruit fly bait treatment process and received permission to harvest and market their fruit. He said that represents about 24.7 million pounds of fruit, primarily avocados, but also includes other fruit that goes to juicing and packing for fresh shipment.

But, he said, there are significant issues related to repeated infestations by non-native pests that must be addressed. Chief among them is trapping densities. Farmers have suggested that an increased number of traps might have helped detect the Mexican fruit fly infestation in a more timely manner. Some farmers suspect the infestation had been developing undetected for a few years.

CDFA's Van Rein said, "Of course, trapping densities in the area are much higher during the quarantine. After the quarantine, the previous monitoring program will be adjusted to reflect the recent suburbanization of the area around Valley Center, and the higher risks that come with that additional traffic.

"Historically, fruit fly infestations are found in urban-not agricultural-areas," he said. "In the future, trapping densities will likely be comparable to

those found in more urban areas in Southern California."

That's good news, Larson said, "because San Diego County farmers strongly believe that the trapping densities in the agricultural areas of San Diego County have to be increased. The issue is early detection. There's no doubt that increased traps will increase program costs and who will be responsible for those costs remains to be seen.

"We think it's a responsibility of both USDA and CDFA," he said. "USDA is responsible for keeping these insects from coming across the border and obviously they're still coming across. If that's the case, they need to help fund the second line of defense, which is trapping. But trapping clearly is a CDFA

responsibility, always has been."

Larson said that San Diego County, which is a border county, often acts as a buffer zone for California agriculture, frequently being the first county to suffer infestations by invasive, non-native species.

Another area of concern for farmers, Larson said, is that whatever material government officials choose to use as the eradication chemical needs to be available.

"We had a six-week lag between finding the flies and starting treatment," Larson said. "That's not acceptable. I think state agencies need to recognize that we've had two of these outbreaks in three years. They can't let themselves be caught by surprise by these infestations. You don't buy the firetruck

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6...



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'QUARANTINE' CROPS CONT...

after the fire starts.”

“We need to have our tools available ahead of time. This isn't just about spinosad. CDFA and the Department of Pesticide Regulation need to sit down and say, ‘Lets make certain that we have access to certain materials in the future.’”

“It's not a matter of having spinosad sitting on the shelf, it's a matter of not letting bureaucratic and technical rules keep them from having access to the chemicals they need,” Larson stressed. “The way needs to be cleared ahead of time.”

In addition, Larson said government is a long way from having a program that will help the growers who are damaged by these repeated quarantines. There is no crop insurance for specialty crops. There are no reimbursement programs for specialty

crops as there are for those involving replacement costs related to animal disease outbreaks such as exotic Newcastle disease or the outbreak of citrus canker.

“It's unfair for these growers to take the hit in the name of protecting every farmer in the state and the nation from infestations spreading,” Larson said. “Our problem is that there are growers in the core area of the quarantine zone who may never get this year's crop to market. That's an extraordinary penalty for those growers and we need to find a way to take care of those people.”

U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and Congressman Darrell Issa, R-Vista, have been closely monitoring the quarantine situation in San Diego County, Larson said. But he pointed out that world events and economic

conditions are making it difficult for farmers to press their message that quarantines hurt agriculture and there needs to be better procedures in place, as well as fair compensation for those who are damaged.

-- Article credited to the California Farm Bureau Federation.

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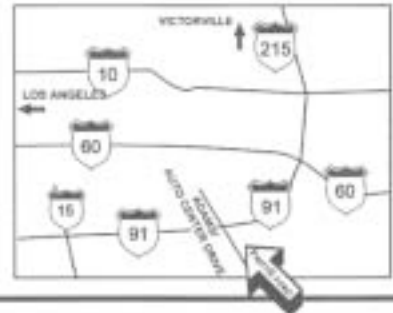
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MEXICAN FRUIT FLIES FOUND OUTSIDE SAN DIEGO QUARANTINE ZONE



The discovery of three flies trapped last week in northern San Diego County sent pest fighters into immediate action to hold the line against flies advancing into Riverside County.

Senator Dennis Hollingsworth, 36th Senatorial District, was quick to take action to request the State create a "Pre-Quarantine Treatment Plan" while other agricultural officials treated the locations with an organic pesticide.

County Supervisor Jim Venable announced his concern and pledge his support in helping to monitor the situation. Growers were also notified that sterile Mexican fruit flies will be released this week in hopes of preventing a full-fledged infestation in Riverside County.

Deputy Agricultural Commissioner, Bill Oesterlein, continues to be a stalwart resource and advisor to protect Riverside growers against this dreaded insect.

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