

Kern/Tulare

GWSS Update



A project of the Glassy-winged Sharpshooter Task Force of Kern and Tulare Counties. Participants: Agricultural Commissioner's Offices of Kern and Tulare Counties, California Department of Food and Agriculture, University of California-Cooperative Extension, U.S. Department of Agriculture (APHIS and ARS Divisions).

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Beyond GWSS: Other pests threaten California grape production

Referendum could offer area-wide means to fight broader spectrum of vineyard pests and diseases

From his headquarters at the Kern County Farm Advisors' office in southeast Bakersfield, entomologist David Haviland tracks pests that threaten California's diverse, billion-dollar agricultural industry. He's followed the trail of several new Kern County pests, including the glassy-winged sharpshooter (GWSS), Texas citrus mite, Yuma spider mite, woolly whitefly and giant whitefly.

These days, he has his eyes on two insects of increasing pest status for the state's grape production: the vine mealybug (VMB) and a more recently emerged menace, the striped mealybug.

While neither is new in California nor considered as potentially destructive as GWSS, each is infesting the state in increasing population numbers. That's enough to concern Haviland—and thousands of growers across the state, where grapes are the second-leading agricultural commodity each year.

"The VMB has now spread to all parts of Kern County's grape-growing regions, to parts of Fresno County and, in 2004, was discovered in Tulare County," says



(Left) Dozens of vine mealybugs cluster on a grapevine. Once established in a vineyard, the pest is extremely difficult to control with insecticides. (Photo: David Haviland)



(Above) David Haviland studies the striped mealybug under his microscope. (Photo: Catherine Merlo)



(Left) Striped mealybugs not only feed on pistachios but almonds and grapes. (Photo: David Haviland)

Haviland, entomology and pest management farm advisor for the University of California-Cooperative Extension in Kern County.

In fact, female VMBs have been found in at least one vineyard in 17 different grape-growing counties in California, representing all of the state's major viticulture regions. The number of infested vineyards within each county is also on the rise.

Striped mealybug raises concerns. Unlike the VMB, the striped mealybug doesn't confine itself to grapes. The striped mealybug can be found in pistachio orchards, almond groves and, more recently, in a vineyard.

"The striped mealybug feeds on an extremely wide range of host plants," says Haviland. "It grabbed a good foothold on pistachios in Tulare County in the last two years."

Its penchant for numerous crops troubles Haviland, since vineyards often lie next to pistachio and almond groves.

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"We need to be careful and watch what's going on with the striped mealybug," he says. "All conditions are present for the potential for striped mealybug to be a significant pest in the San Joaquin Valley (SJV)," he says.

Both pests secrete honeydew, a sticky substance that not only contaminates grapes but fosters the growth of sooty mold on the fruit. Severe infestations can cause vines to decline as well. The result is reduced crop quality and yield.

Treatments to control mealybug infestation are effective under intense insecticide programs, Haviland says. But such efforts aren't cheap.

"It's not uncommon to find growers who have spent more than \$200 an acre in some years to treat the VMB," he says.

Referendum support. Costly treatments are one reason entomologist Gisela Wittenborn of Sunview Vineyards supports a new law that proposes pest control districts for California's table-grape growing regions. Located in the southern SJV near Delano, Sunview Vineyards produces both wine and table grapes.

"We're getting new pests into California at a steady pace," Wittenborn says. "Pierce's Disease (PD) and GWSS will not be the last. A pest control district will give early warning signals to alert the table grape community to new pests and diseases, protecting the industry from further large-scale outbreaks of costly critters."

The new legislation was signed earlier this year. Local referendums need 15 percent of a county's table-grape vineyard owners for a pest control district to be formed.

California Table Grape Commission seeks research project proposals

The California Table Grape Commission is accepting research project proposals for fiscal year 2005-06. Project proposals are due Jan. 31, 2005, and should be mailed directly to the CTGC office, as well as emailed to: ross@freshCaliforniagrapes.com.

Announcement of the outcome will be made in early May 2005.

Year-end/final reports for continuing projects should also be submitted by the

That county then would create a governing board of local table grape representatives to set budgets and assessment levels. Assessments must be agreed upon by 51 percent of the table grape acreage owners.

Currently, assessments paid by the state's wine grape growers fund a research and development program for PD and GWSS. It appears natural, Wittenborn

says, for the table grape industry also to put up money to solve the problems at hand.

"It's wonderful to have the agricultural commissioners' offices, the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Agriculture working on efforts like PD and GWSS," she says. "Proliferous disease and vector complexes with a wide host range cannot be controlled by an individual grower. They require an area-wide comprehensive approach."

Wittenborn adds, "Having pest control districts for table grapes will complement that. There is a need for table grape growers to stay on top of what's going on and to continue to be more proactive. With the pest control districts, the table grape industry will have legitimate representation and can sit at the same table with the government agencies."

— Catherine Merlo

Vine Mealybug Spread in California



Appearing first in Southern California's Coachella Valley in 1994, the vine mealybug quickly spread north. In 2004, it was found in Tulare County, one of the state's top grape producers. (Map courtesy of David Haviland)

Jan. 31, 2005, deadline.

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