

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).

Contact:

Don Luvisi
Project coordinator
(661) 868-6226
dluvisi@bak.rr.com

Web sites:

- www.co.kern.ca.us/kernag/
- http://cekern.ucdavis.edu/Custom_Program444/

Tulare County pursues GWSS in 2004 with broad industry cooperation

Tulare County agricultural officials are cautiously optimistic about their battle against the glassy-winged sharpshooter (GWSS) as they enter 2004.

"We hope to achieve the same success that Kern County has seen in its GWSS efforts," says Gary Kunkel, Tulare County's agricultural commissioner. "We are pretty much following Kern's same program."

Ever since GWSS was discovered in Tulare County in 2000, area officials have been working to control the insect's population and stop its spread among vineyards, citrus orchards, plant nurseries and urban areas. From their offices in Tulare, Kunkel and his staff have worked closely with county growers, the citrus, grape and nursery industries, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) and neighboring counties on a number of anti-GWSS programs.

Tulare County's efforts have included increased GWSS trapping density to monitor for the pest; ramped-up bulk load inspections; fall chemical applications in citrus groves to suppress GWSS populations; urban treatments; and biocontrol releases of GWSS natural enemies.

"Extraordinary" cooperation.

But what has impressed Kunkel most is the high degree of cooperation he has seen among government agencies, growers and industry. "It has been extraordinary," he says.

That cooperation is responsible for what Kunkel calls "a milestone effort" that Tulare County undertook last fall to treat local citrus groves infested with GWSS. Kunkel's office hired a project coordinator, Pest Management and Associates, to oversee grower notification, authorization, proper compliance and treatment coordination. In November and December 2003,

39,000 acres of citrus from Lindsay south to the Kern border were treated, predominantly with the insecticide, Assail®.

"The fall treatment is the big story of 2003 for us," says Kunkel. "It marked our first effort as part of the full, GWSS area-wide management program."

The treatments zeroed in on groves where trap findings had revealed GWSS were present. The pest was "fairly widely" distributed in relatively low numbers across the county's southeast citrus area, but there were also "hot spots," Kunkel says.

Earlier in 2003, Tulare County had increased its trapping grid from one trap for every 240 acres of citrus to one every 40 acres, or every quarter-mile. That boosted the number of county traps to 6,000. "It's no easy job reading those traps every week," says Kunkel.

It's hoped that the fall applications have been effective, since area trap numbers have been low, with most traps having no insects since the treatments.

GWSS are dormant at this time of year, however, so Kunkel and his colleagues will have to wait until spring, when the pest and its young offspring normally emerge, to see how effective their efforts were.

Citrus growers: "Real partners." "We have been very impressed with the cooperation of citrus growers in this county," Kunkel says. "The GWSS treatments are a major inconvenience for them, but they've been very tolerant and helpful. They know their efforts are critical to the project. They've also been real partners in the bulk citrus movement program."

Citrus growers are required to notify the Tulare County agricultural commissioner's office before harvest so their groves can be inspected for the presence of GWSS.

Their efforts to treat their citrus crop

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—Gary Kunkel,
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for GWSS are particularly noteworthy since the fruit is not adversely affected by the pest. Nor do GWSS transmit to citrus the bacterium that causes Pierce's Disease, as they do to vineyards.

Citrus acreage far outnumbers vineyards in Tulare County. More than 108,000 acres belong to citrus, compared to about 75,000 for grapes. "Tulare County is by far the largest citrus producer in California," says Kunkel.

The Tulare citrus industry is valued at about \$500 million, and includes about 50 major packinghouses.

Tulare County also has one of the largest plant nursery industries in the nation. The majority of the operations raise ornamentals and grape stock.

Still, Tulare County and its growers are helped in their battle against GWSS by \$6.646 million in funding from USDA and CDFA for fiscal 2003-04. "That's greater than our total budget," Kunkel says.

USDA's \$5.391 million is used to reimburse the county for compensating citrus growers for their GWSS treatments. The CDFA funds, totaling \$1.255 million, are used in several GWSS county efforts. These include the GWSS trapping program; treatments in urban areas such as Porterville, Terra Bella and Magnolia; and inspections of bulk shipments of citrus, grapes and nursery stock.

Success in bulk-load shipping.

"In 2003, the number of GWSS in bulk citrus dropped dramatically," says Dennis Haines, an agricultural biologist with the Tulare County agricultural commissioner's office.

Haines and Kunkel credit the drop to diligent efforts by Kern and Ventura counties. The two counties are large citrus producers that each season send thousands of loads of just-harvested fruit to Tulare County's packinghouses for cleaning, ship-

ping and marketing.

A change seen in citrus shipping regulations this season is the elimination of the green tags that were once used to indicate the load had originated in an area not considered infested by GWSS. "We wanted to make life easier for citrus growers," Kunkel says. "So far, it's working fairly well."

In 2003, Tulare County treated GWSS-infested urban areas of Porterville that are close to commercial agricultural production. The county used the chemical, Merit[®], which has a longer residual than a previously used material, Sevin[®]. Porterville was the center of early GWSS finds in Tulare County.

"Urban zones continue to be very supportive of our program," says Haines. "They understand the need to protect agriculture."

Gearing up for spring. Kunkel says that, in March, the county will return to the same citrus groves that received the fall treatment, this time to make a second knockdown application. The Admire[®] treatments will target any GWSS adults that survived the fall applications of Assail, as well as newly emerging nymphs.

For now, Kunkel's office and the project coordinators are coordinating meetings with government agencies, growers and industry to plan operations for the spring.

"Time will tell if our program will be successful," says Kunkel. "The fall treatments were exceedingly encouraging, but we know that GWSS lives on practically anything. With the same success in our spring treatments and the continued cooperation we've been seeing, I'm hopeful we'll slow the spread of GWSS in Tulare County."

You can reach Kunkel at skunkel@co.tulare.ca.us.

— Catherine Merlo

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