

March 4, 2005

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

Catherine Merlo, Editor
(661) 588-0561
cmm55@aol.com

Web site:

http://cekern.ucdavis.edu/Custom_Program444/

Table grape district petitions head to Kern, Tulare boards of supervisors

Plans are progressing rapidly to develop California's Table Grape Pest and Disease Control Districts.

On March 8, Kern County's board of supervisors will review a petition submitted in February by local table grape growers. The petition showed that more than 15 percent of Kern County's table grape owners support establishing the pest and disease control district.

Tulare County's board of supervisors will consider a similar petition March 22.

According to Alex Ott, director of government relations for the California Grape and Tree Fruit League, the Kern County Agricultural Commissioner's Office will verify to county supervisors that the petition has met the required signature amount at the March 8 meeting.

If Kern supervisors accept the petition, they will appoint five members to form a local district board. The five, who must be local table grape owners or their representatives, will then develop an assessment level and budget for fighting table grape pests and diseases in the district. That information must be submitted April 1 to Kern's board of supervisors. If county supervisors approve the plan, ballots will be sent to Kern's table grape owners to vote on the assessment level.

If all goes smoothly, Ott says, "Ballots will be sent out around April 15 to Kern's table grape owners."

Under the law, a protest hearing will be held for any who object to the assessment. That would take place May 31.

"If the assessment is approved this year, it would go on to property taxes for the 2005-06 year," Ott says.

Tulare County's board of supervisors will appoint a district board March 22, with a May 1 deadline for a pest district budget.



Legislation to establish the Table Grape Pest and Disease Control Districts was passed last year. It lays out provisions to create county pest abatement districts with funding assessments by owners of table grape acreage. The districts are empowered to combat Pierce's Disease (PD), glassy-winged sharpshooter (GWSS), and any other pest or disease, such as the vine mealybug, that poses a threat to table-grape production.

"The law is broad enough to encompass present and future invasive species," Ott says.

The law also authorizes each district to assess table grape owners up to \$15 per acre to fund the districts.

So far, Kern and Tulare Counties are the only two to have developed table grape petitions for the pest and disease control districts.

"We're trying to establish a front line on districts that have significant GWSS populations," Ott says. "Kern is also where there are programs in place to contain and combat GWSS."

Kern launched its GWSS fight with the General Beale Pilot Program in 2000. From there, several government agencies, led by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, initiated
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The vine mealybug, a growing threat to vineyards, is one pest that could be pursued using funds from table grape assessments. (Photo: David Haviland)

Special thanks

A special thanks to the California Table Grape Commission for its support of this newsletter.



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an area-wide GWSS program to contain and control the sharpshooter. The area-wide program encompasses Kern, Tulare and Ventura Counties. Much of the funding has come from mandatory assessments of the state's wine grape growers and from USDA, the California Department of Food and Agriculture and county agricultural commissioners' offices.

"So far, \$137 million has been spent on GWSS and PD," Ott says. "Table grape growers want to do their part by funding a

mechanism that assists in combating all table grape pests and diseases, for now and the future."

"I hope my fellow grape growers will support the assessment," says Kern County table grape grower Jack Pandol. "It's extremely important. We have GWSS under control, but it will require a long-term commitment from the industry to maintain that control. The districts are vital to making that happen."

—by Catherine Merlo

PD Board dissolves bulk grape movement subcommittee, eliminates yellow tags

After more than five years of hunting unsuccessfully for glassy-winged sharpshooters among bulk grape shipments moving from California vineyards to processing facilities, the PD Advisory Task Force voted in late January to dissolve its bulk grape movement subcommittee.

The board also voted to eliminate the yellow tag certification program for bulk grape loads heading from GWSS-infested areas to non-infested areas during harvest. The yellow tag denoted a bulk grape load that originated in a GWSS infested area and was designated free of any GWSS life stages.

Roger Spencer of the California Department of Agriculture said no GWSS have been found in any grape loads since in-

spection and tagging began in 2000. For that reason, the subcommittee recommended disbanding itself and eliminating the yellow tag program. That will allow funds used for inspection and materials to be diverted to other program needs.

Spencer emphasized that bulk grape regulations will remain in place. "We will continue with compliance agreements between shippers and county agricultural commissioners to assure that all are still meeting the regulation requirement that loads be GWSS-free," he said. "We continue to encourage shipment receivers to inspect bulk loads at destination."

GWSS traps will continue to be required at all grape crush receiving facilities.

"I hope my fellow grape growers will support the assessment. It's extremely important. We have GWSS under control, but it will require a long-term commitment from the industry to maintain that control. The districts are vital to making that happen."

Jack Pandol,
Kern County table
grape grower