

May 30, 2003

Kern/Tulare

# GWSS Update



A project of the Glassy-winged Sharpshooter Task Force of Kern and Tulare Counties. Participants: Agricultural Commissioner 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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## Bill to create GWSS pest control districts awaits approval

A legislative bill that would create pest control districts in California to combat the glassy-winged sharpshooter (GWSS) and Pierce's Disease (PD) is awaiting approval on the floor of the state Senate.

SB 633 would assess table grape growers not more than \$15 per acre to support research and aggressive treatment projects involving GWSS and PD.

"The bill has to be approved by June 6 in order to move on to the Assembly and then to the governor's desk for signing this year," says Alex Ott, director of government relations for the Fresno-based California Grape and Tree Fruit League, which is sponsoring the bill.

If the bill doesn't pass by then, it will have to wait until next year for another chance.

The proposed legislation carries an urgency clause, which means it would become law immediately if signed by the governor.

"So, far, it has passed through two committees without a 'no' vote," Ott says.

Last year, a similar bill, AB 2345, attempted to make it through the legislative process. But, Ott says, last-minute politics—specifically linked to the binding arbitration labor issue—prevented its passage as well as that of several other agricultural bills.

This year, however, the bill has met no resistance. Ott hopes the California Assembly will follow the smooth sailing seen so far in the Senate and that both will pass the bill.

**Bill basics.** SB 633, authored by State Senator Roy Ashburn (R), would create the Table Grape Pest and Disease Control District Law. Its provisions include the formation of Table Grape Pierce's Disease Pest Abatement Districts within local counties.

Spurred by the success of the General Beale Pilot Project southeast of Bakersfield, the bill "allows for the forma-

tion, organization, operation and dissolution of districts to respond to manage, control and disseminate information to producers" about the effects of GWSS and PD and other pests that attack table grapes.

The bill stipulates that pest control districts would require approval through grower referendum. If the referendum passes, each county's Board of Supervisors would appoint a board of five directors to administer the district's affairs. The district would be empowered to inspect vineyards. It would also be authorized to respond to the effects of PD and the spread of GWSS through control, eradication, removal of table grape vines or prevention.

**Growers' perspective.** Paul Giboney, ranch agronomist and pest control advisor with M. Caratan, Inc., a Delano-based producer of table grapes, oranges and almonds, supports the bill.

"If this bill is passed by the California Legislature, then we can begin to manage the GWSS/PD problem within the industry," Giboney says.

The GWSS Area-wide Management Program that began in Kern County in 2001 with the General Beale Pilot Project has given growers "real reason for optimism," Giboney says.

However, he believes the government funding that has helped support the program may not continue. "The next step is establishing our own pest management districts through this legislation," he says.

Also supportive of the legislation is Jack Pandol, a table grape grower with vineyards from Arvin in Kern County to Ducor in Tulare County.

"The idea is to pretty much take what we've been doing and create a grower-funded, professionally managed program through the pest control districts," says Pandol. "We've done the science and the management program. Now we have to move into longer-term management."

—Catherine Merlo

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