

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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## Table grape industry assesses new law on pest control districts, referendum

Leaders in California's table grape industry are working to educate growers about a new law that would establish Table Grape Disease Pest Abatement Districts within California's table-grape growing counties.

Known as Senate Bill 1604, the legislation was created to respond to and manage glassy-winged sharpshooters (GWSS), Pierce's Disease (PD) and other grapevine pests. It was signed by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in September 2004.

The new law fine-tunes procedures laid out in an earlier bill, SB 633. Also known as the Table Grape Pest and Disease Control District Law, that earlier bill established a procedure for organizing and operating districts to respond to, manage, and control the effects of the spread of GWSS and PD.

The new bill revised SB 633's provisions "to recognize that owners of table grape acreage, not just table grape growers, would have to be involved in the approval process, since this would be a potential assessment on the property," says Barry Bedwell, president of the California Grape and Tree Fruit League.

The new bill also clarified that the abatement districts apply to infestations of other designated pests and diseases in addition to GWSS and PD. SB 1604 also authorized each district to establish an assessment of up to \$15 per acre to be levied on the owners of acreage of fresh table grapes being grown in the district.



Barry Bedwell of the California Grape and Tree Fruit League.



With a positive referendum vote, says Barry Bedwell, "table grape growers would be sending a clear message that they are willing to leverage their own dollars, not just public dollars alone, in the fight against evasive pests and diseases." (Photo: Catherine Merlo)

### An industry point of view

Bedwell supports the new law. The League he heads is a voluntary, nonprofit trade organization that represents more than 85 percent of the volume of fresh market table grapes and deciduous tree fruit grown in California. Here, he offers his perspective.

### What's the process for implementing the new law?

*Bedwell:* It's a two-stage process. First, a petition must be presented to local boards of supervisors to create a pest abatement district in each county where table grapes are grown. Technically, only 15 percent of each county's table grape vineyard owners need to make the request to form a district. However, we expect that the percentage of owners petitioning the supervisors will be considerably higher than that. Then the supervisors decide whether to set up the district. If so, they will appoint a five-member board to set a budget and an assessment level up to a maximum of \$15 per acre. Second, a referendum vote will be held among the table grape owners of that county to approve the assessment level.

### What is the time frame for that?

*Bedwell:* There really is no set time  
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## Bush Taps Nebraska Governor For Ag Secretary

President Bush on Thursday chose Nebraska Governor Mike Johanns as secretary of agriculture to oversee the nation's farm and food programs, an administration official said.

Johanns, 54, would succeed Ann M. Veneman, who recently announced her resignation.

Born in Iowa and raised on a dairy farm, Johanns became a lawyer and served in county and city government before becoming mayor of Lincoln, Neb., in 1991. He won the governor's office in 1998, and in 2002 became the first Republican to win re-election in more than four decades.



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frame. We just want to make sure the table grape community is educated about the law and the process. It's important to answer all their questions. It's possible the petitions to the boards of supervisors to create the districts will take place in 2005, with the assessment vote a short time thereafter. Actual assessments would not be added to property tax bills until 2006.

#### How would the referendum's passage help members of the California Grape and Tree Fruit League?

*Bedwell:* The referendum is specially designed to assist table grape growers, which account for approximately one-half of our membership, combat not only GWSS but also other pests or diseases which impact their ability to succeed. In addition to the challenges of PD brought on by GWSS, growers are becoming more concerned about other pests such as the vine mealy bug, which has the potential to be as, or even more destructive, than GWSS.

#### How would its passage help the table grape industry? Why is it necessary?

*Bedwell:* The wine grape community has already instituted a mandatory funding program for GWSS on a statewide basis. This program would be specially designed for and by table grape growers. The successful passage of this referendum would signal to both state and federal officials and agencies that table grape growers, like their counterparts in the wine community, are strongly committed to addressing pest concerns on a cooperative basis. Table grape growers would be sending a clear message that they are willing to leverage their own dollars, not just public dollars alone, in the fight against evasive pests and diseases.

#### What would happen if the referendum did not pass?

*Bedwell:* The unfortunate message that would be sent to both state and federal agencies is that table grape growers are less concerned about these pests than are the wine grape growers, or that they are not willing to directly participate in the costs, as are some other commodity groups, associated with the effort to fight evasive pests and diseases. This could possibly nega-

tively impact future funding related to fighting pests and diseases for the table grape community.

#### What are some questions or misconceptions growers might have about this referendum?

*Bedwell:* The most common questions will concern:

- the amount to be assessed (not to exceed \$15 per acre for those vineyards growing fresh table grapes);
- how will the money be spent (once the district is formed, a board with five members who are either vineyard owners or designees of vineyard owners will propose a budget for the assessment district);
- how much money will be raised (based upon 70,000 to 80,000 estimated table grape acres in both Tulare and Kern counties, the maximum amount of money the assessment would raise would be approximately \$1 million to \$1.2 million combined for those two counties).

The misconceptions most likely revolve around the concern that the funds would be used strictly for one activity or another, such as spray programs exclusively, or that state and federal funding would be reduced from current levels by the amount of the assessment. The assessment is designed to complement and leverage, not replace, state and federal involvement.

#### What is your opinion of the PD/GWSS effort so far?

*Bedwell:* The coordinated effort is just beginning. While we believe that a majority of table grape growers understand the importance of this referendum and the benefits of a successful pest control district, we know that more education needs to be done. We are committed to accomplishing that educational process so table grape growers will have another necessary tool in fighting evasive pests and diseases. ■



*Under the new law, table grape growers would not only fund efforts to combat GWSS and PD but other pests such as the vine mealybug. (Photo: Catherine Merlo)*

### Annual PD Symposium set for Dec. 7-10

The 2004 Pierce's Disease Research Symposium will be held Dec. 7-10, 2004, at the Coronado Island Marriott Resort in Coronado, Calif. For more information, go to <http://www.cdffa.ca.gov/phppps/pdpc/>.

### A closer look at California's table grape industry

- California is the leading producer of table grapes in the United States, accounting for 97 percent of table grapes grown in this country.
- Table grapes are grown in 15 counties across the state.
- California produces more than 700,000 tons of table grapes per year from 170,000 acres. The table grape industry is valued at more than \$860 million with a direct and indirect impact on the state's economy that totals more than \$4 billion.