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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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Pilot program to give new GWSS nursery protocol the real-world test

Several Northern California wine grape-growing counties will refrain from participating

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) will launch a pilot program this spring to test the real-world effectiveness of a one-time chemical treatment that eradicates glassy-winged sharpshooters (GWSS) in commercial nursery stock.

Although its procedures are not expected to be finalized for a couple of months, the pilot program will incorporate applications of carbaryl, known by its trade name Sevin®, and fenprothrin, known as Tame®. Studies completed last year by Dr. Rick Redak of the University of California-Riverside showed a single treatment of either chemical was highly effective in killing GWSS nymphs as they emerged from egg masses on nursery plants.

The success of the pilot program could substantially change the extensive inspection process now used to hunt for GWSS on plants at shipping and receiving nurseries. That could considerably cut inspection time, manpower and costs.

"We're looking at a significant opportunity to return to where nurseries were doing business before," says John Ellis, deputy agricultural commissioner for Orange County. "The one-time treatment is extremely promising."

Counties that ship under the current program's Master Permit may benefit from the single chemical treatment, allowing them more flexibility in staging, treating and shipping nursery stock, says Ellis.

"They won't have to go through inspections at the level they have to now," he says.

It's expected CDFA will conduct the pilot program for a year or more to allow agricultural commissioners and wine grape growers to gain confidence in the treatment before it's carried out on a larger scale.

California currently follows a "Contain the Spread" program

to prevent the spread of GWSS on articles and commodities shipped from areas infested by the sharpshooter. Nursery stock is considered a high-risk commodity for spreading GWSS. Egg masses are the most frequently discovered life stage of GWSS in nursery stock. In 2004, 76,744 nursery stock shipments were transported from infested to non-infested areas of California. That's up from 63,000 shipments in 2003.

Since the inspection and certification program began in 2001, discoveries of GWSS in nursery stock have dropped sharply. County agricultural commissioners and their trained staffs monitor shipments and inspect leaf by leaf for GWSS. Plant nurseries fund their own pre-inspections and chemical treatments to prepare for visits by county staff. GWSS finds result in rejected shipments or destruction of plants.

Under the projected pilot program, the current system of intense inspections will continue. Several egg masses will be permitted on a shipment; participants will apply the one-time chemical treatment at the nursery before shipment. The application must be witnessed by a county inspector. Plants will then be loaded in a controlled monitoring area and shipped directly to their destination, with no stops in between.

When the trial shipment arrives, the nursery must notify the local agricultural commissioner's office. Plants will be un-



Inspectors from the Napa County Agricultural Commissioner's Office inspect plants for GWSS at Whiting's Nursery in St. Helena. From left are Don Jamison, Jeff Erwin and Terry Keiser. (Photo: Jeff Erwin)

(continued on page 2)



Kern-Tulare **GWSS Update**

Pilot program to give new GWSS nursery protocol the real-world test *(continued from page 1)*

loaded to allow for egg mass development. Another GWSS inspection will be performed. In addition, the destination nursery must cover treated plants with sleeves as an added precaution against any surviving nymphs. How long those sleeves will remain on plants is not yet known.

The pilot program will place heavy emphasis on monitoring shipments from origin to destination.

"Plants will be monitored every step of the way, ensuring that no window is left open for the insect to escape," says CDFA spokesman Jay Van Rein. "CDFA will take very measured steps in implementing this pilot program."

CDFA is seeking candidates for the pilot program.

"The Department has begun working with counties to identify which are interested in the pilot program and which nurseries would participate," Van Rein says. "We're assembling the building blocks of the program."

CDFA will likely work with a "fairly limited" number of nurseries for the pilot program, Van Rein says. Ideally, CDFA would like to work with nursery companies that have facilities in Southern California who ship to their own, or sister, facilities in Northern California.

"That would be the most secure option," says Van Rein.

Several North Coast wine grape-growing counties are choosing not to participate in the pilot program. They include Napa, Mendocino, Sonoma, Monterey and Lake Counties.

Napa County Agricultural Commissioner Dave Whitmer supports the pilot program but says, "Napa County will not be the proving ground for this treatment protocol."

"Napa County will wait to see how the pilot program works out before we consider whether to get on board," adds Jeff Erwin, county deputy agricultural commissioner.

With a monoculture agricultural base dependent on its prized vineyards, Napa County has much more at risk, Erwin says. The GWSS danger to vineyards is that the sharpshooter transmits a bacterium to grape vines that results in Pierce's Disease (PD), which kills the plants and has no cure.

"We're concerned that until we know how the treatment works in the real world, we can't be certain it would be 100 percent

effective," says Erwin.

One fear Napa County has is whether the chemical application reaches all parts of the plant. Plants with smaller, denser leaves, such as vinca, pose more challenges for complete application coverage. Redak's research revealed that chemical control was always poorest on bedding plants.

Erwin acknowledges such plants pose challenges for hand inspections too. Still, he believes Napa County's current GWSS inspection and trapping program has worked well.

"We've proven it works because we have no GWSS infestation here," Erwin says.

Napa inspectors did discover a GWSS egg mass last week on a polygala, or sweet pea shrub. "That was an eye-opener because we found no egg masses at all in 2004," he says.

George Gutman of Bordier's Nursery in Irvine understands the concerns of California's northern counties. Bordier's Nursery was one of the trial sites for Redak's research.

"Our goal is to have a protocol that suffices to protect Northern California to their expectations," says Gutman, general manager of technical and regulatory services for Bordier's, an ornamental nursery grower with locations in Southern California.

He supports the proposed nursery protocol and chemical treatment "100 percent," Gutman says. The new protocol would save Bordier's \$250,000 a year from the current system.

While Orange County's Ellis says Southern California is "champing at the bit" to get the program started, he also understands the northern apprehension.

"They have legitimate financial concerns," says Ellis. "It will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to turn away from a viable egg mass, even if it's been sprayed."

"Our nursery shipping industry down here has been successful but not fool-proof," Ellis adds. "To rely on a chemical application means a real change in the process, and it's not necessarily human nature to accept change. The receiving destinations must have confidence that we're doing all that we can."

—by Catherine Merlo

March 14 meeting to cover proposed nursery protocol

The Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner's office will host an open meeting March 14 in Salinas on changes to the GWSS nursery stock inspection program. The meeting will run from 9 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. at the Richard W. Nutter Agricultural Conference Center at 1432 Abbott Street.

The agenda will include:

- a GWSS program update from Bob Wynn, CDFA PD/GWSS program coordinator
- a presentation by Dr. Rick Redak of the University of California-Riverside on his nursery treatment research
- a look at proposed components of the nursery pilot program by Greg Morris, CDFA PD-GWSS program supervisor
- an overview of Santa Clara County's GWSS control program by Santa Clara Agricultural Commissioner Greg Van Wassenhove, and deputy ag commissioner Kevin O'Day.

Wine grape growers and plant nursery operators are encouraged to attend.