

The Asian Citrus Psyllid and Huanglongbing: A Threat for San Luis Obispo Citrus

Victoria Hornbaker, Manager of the Citrus Pest & Disease Prevention Program, California Department of Food and Agriculture;

Martin Settevendemie, Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer, San Luis Obispo County

Generations of San Luis Obispo County residents have enjoyed the ability to eat fresh citrus straight from their backyard trees. Unfortunately, these cherished memories may not be possible for future generations. A pest called the Asian citrus psyllid, which can spread a deadly citrus disease called Huanglongbing (HLB) from tree to tree as it feeds, was recently discovered just south of the county line in Santa Maria.

The only way to overcome this threat in San Luis Obispo County is to come together as a community and take preventative actions to ensure the Asian citrus psyllid and HLB do not become established in our county.

Once a tree is infected with HLB, it will die. There is no cure. HLB-infected trees produce bitter, hard and misshapen fruit. Slowly, the tree deteriorates, unripe fruit falls to the ground, and after a few years, the tree is dead. HLB has been detected in Los Angeles and we must prevent it from getting here. Thousands of backyard citrus trees and San Luis Obispo County's \$10.8 million citrus economy are at risk. One of the best ways to stop the spread of HLB is by controlling populations of the Asian citrus psyllid.

San Luis Obispo County residents can help save citrus trees by following these important tips:

- **Inspect your trees** — Look for signs of the pest each month or whenever watering, spraying, pruning or tending trees. Visit CaliforniaCitrusThreat.org to see photos that can help you identify the pest. If found, contact the California Department of Food and Agriculture hotline at 1-800-491-1899.
- **Cooperate** — Cooperate with agriculture officials on detection and suppression efforts of the Asian citrus psyllid and HLB.
- **Don't move citrus** — Do not bring any citrus plant material into the county from other areas because they might be carrying psyllids or be infected with HLB.
- **Plant responsibly** — Only buy citrus trees from reputable and licensed local nurseries.
- **Be mindful of clippings** — Dry or double bag citrus plant clippings prior to disposal to avoid the possibility of moving psyllids and HLB-infected plant materials.

The Asian citrus psyllid and HLB are the biggest threat ever to face California's \$2 billion citrus industry and our citrus heritage. Substantial efforts are underway by citrus growers, government officials, and others who cherish California citrus.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture and the San Luis Obispo agricultural commissioner's office are monitoring more than 1,100 Asian citrus psyllid detection traps in backyard citrus trees and commercial groves in San Luis Obispo County, visually inspecting traps biweekly to ensure any detections are responded to immediately. Additionally, citrus growers in San Luis Obispo County and across California collectively are investing millions of dollars annually to help pay for research to find a cure for HLB and reduce populations of the Asian citrus psyllid.

Citrus trees are an important part of San Luis Obispo County's economy and are a beloved part of the central coast landscape. We're doing everything we can to protect San Luis Obispo County citrus trees from this dangerous pest and the disease it can spread, and we need the community's help. Please stay informed and help educate others by visiting CaliforniaCitrusThreat.org or calling 1-800-491-1899 to report possible sightings of the Asian citrus psyllid.

s:\outreach\2013 media releases\acp slotribuneop-ed-final(2).docx