

Notes from the CEO

By John Krist

There's bad news for Ventura County citrus growers in the latest data from California's Huanglongbing survey and testing program. Clusters of Asian citrus psyllid samples collected in three areas of the county between July 2015 and April 2016 returned "inconclusive" results when tested for presence of DNA from the bacteria that causes HLB. These test results may indicate that there are HLB-infected trees in those areas.

Two of the clusters are in urban Simi Valley and Newbury Park. This is not too surprising; those were areas where Asian citrus psyllid showed up fairly early in the invasion, and they track with the advancing front of ACP spread out of suburban Los Angeles into eastern Ventura County.

The other cluster, however, centers on the intersection of Highway 118 and Lewis Road in Somis – the heart of one of our major citrus production areas, the Las Posas Valley. That could well represent a population introduced via bulk citrus movement. Aside from Somis itself, there's little urban development in the valley, but

it is bisected by a major transportation corridor that cuts through thousands of acres of commercial groves. And it's where several ACP were trapped in orchards in 2011, a year before the population began to surge countywide. That means it's probably the area with the longest-established ACP population in or adjacent to commercial citrus.

It's important to note that regulatory agencies do not regard these test results as positive confirmation of HLB.

But the work of USDA entomologist Dave Bartels, who revealed the unsettling news about the Ventura County clusters at a University of California Research summit in Riverside on Oct. 4, provides ample reason for us to behave as if they are.

Dave's work has focused on mapping the locations of ACP collected and tested for HLB as part of the California Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Program's statewide HLB surveillance project.

Although most of those ACP test negative for presence of the HLB bacteria's DNA, a significant fraction produce "inconclusive" results – the test indicates bacterial DNA is present, but the signal is faint and does not reach the threshold state and federal regulatory agencies accept as reliably positive.

If these results were random – the result of lab errors, sample contamination or other flaws in the process – the locations where the inconclusive samples were collected should be distributed randomly across the landscape. Dave's analysis, however, shows that these "inconclusive" ACP tend to be collected in geographic clusters – a pattern that suggests the insects have been feeding and were trapped in an area that likely has one or more infected trees.

When this pattern was observed in Texas in 2010 and 2011, it predicted fairly accurately the locations where, in 2012 and later, trees would be confirmed positive for HLB through DNA testing of their stems and leaves – the regulatory gold standard for conclusively determining that the disease is present.

Unfortunately, the significant lag time between infection of a tree and confirmation of that infection through conventional DNA analysis of plant material makes this protocol useless as a tool for stopping or slowing the spread of HLB. By the time the test proves the tree is infected, it has had the disease – and has been spreading the bacteria via infected psyllids – for two to three years or more. In contrast, Dave's work is intended to give growers early warning of HLB's likely presence, to help focus intensive surveillance and ramp up psyllid suppression.

Dave's most recent mapping includes test results from three cycles of ACP collection and testing for HLB in California. Results of the first two showed hot spot clusters in at least a dozen sites scattered across every California county south of Ventura; results of the third cycle revealed the clusters in Somis, Simi and Newbury Park. A fourth cycle was completed here in August, but the data from that round have not been mapped yet.

In the four years since HLB was confirmed in Texas – which has about the same total citrus acreage as Ventura County – the disease has spread like wildfire. It has now been confirmed in more than 1,100 backyard trees and 200 commercial groves, encompassing a significant portion of the state's production area. Texas growers

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Mechanical strawberry transplanter helps address labor shortage

By Surendra K. Dara

Strawberries are a crop with high input costs, and labor is one of the major expenses in production. Both nursery and fruit production operations require a high volume of manual labor for planting, tending to the plants, processing of transplants, and harvesting fruit. Shortage of skilled farmworkers is a major challenge that strawberry industry is currently facing and it is even a bigger problem for summer planting, when help is also needed for fruit harvesting from previous year's fall plantings.

Chris Jenkins at Driscoll's, in collaboration with Chris Waldron at Plantel Nurseries, Matt Phillips at Solex, and Tim McDonald at Guadalupe Hardware, have developed a strawberry transplanter. It is a significant advancement in mechanization of transplanting, one of the two major manual operations in strawberry production.

The mechanical strawberry transplanter is a vegetable transplanter manufactured by Cecchi e Magli, modified to plant strawberries on three beds at a time. The total cost of the tractor and the transplanter unit is estimated to be about \$120,000.

It is estimated that when planting a traditional bare-root transplant, 10 farmworkers (including a plant distributor, a forklift driver, and a crew boss) are required to work an eight-hour day to transplant one acre of strawberry, which typically has 28,000 plants for a 4-row/bed configuration. The mechanical transplanter can plant 10 acres in a day with the help of a 19-member crew, which includes the tractor driver, a plant handler/loader, 12 planters (one per each plant line loading the transplants into the planting slots), and five people checking the transplanted plants on the bed.

Whereas it used to take 100 people to manually transplant 10 acres, the same can now be done with just 19 people using the machine.

Some of the advantages of the mechanical transplanter include:

- Efficient and uniform transplanting that requires less time and manpower.
- Avoidance of human errors in plant-



ing depth, j-roots, and other such issues in manual planting of bare-root transplants.

- The machine utilizes misted-tip transplants, which are actively growing and are not dormant like bare-root transplants. They are also in an advanced growth stage compared to bare-root transplants and will likely start fruit production two to three weeks earlier.

- Once separated from the mother plants, the misted-tip transplants take about 6 weeks to prepare for planting, while several months of field production and refrigeration are required for bare-root transplants.

- Local production of misted-tip transplants is more likely to adjust to grower

needs and probably gives better control for producing uniform and good-quality transplants that can be easily supplied without long-distance transportation.

- Misted-tip transplants are less likely to have soilborne diseases, compared to the bare-root transplants from a traditional in-field nursery.

Development of the strawberry transplanter is a major improvement in strawberry production technology and makes a significant contribution to addressing the labor shortage issue.

— Surendra K. Dara is strawberry and vegetable crops advisor and affiliated IPM advisor with UC Cooperative Extension in San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties.

Notes from the CEO *Continued from front page*

have mounted a notably lackluster effort to control ACP and remove infected trees to slow the epidemic's spread, and the consequences are clear.

The Ventura County citrus industry's battle to control ACP and delay the introduction and spread of HLB began nearly six years ago, with initial trap detections in December 2010. Detection of the hot spot clusters, however, signals a dramatic change in the nature of that battle.

Over the past two years, we have been working out the kinks in a coordinated countywide suppression strategy, organizing hundreds of growers, pest-control advisors, applicators and packinghouse workers to execute a complex treatment campaign. But the window for practicing without serious consequence from mistakes is over. It's game time now, and stumbles from this point on will give the disease an advantage it will never relinquish.

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As the industry transitions from a pest-management strategy to an epidemic-management strategy, growers need to prepare themselves for the long, difficult road ahead. Never before has industry collaboration been as critical as it will be in the coming months and years. Some citrus operations will succumb to the HLB epidemic sooner than others. But by working together, we can buy everybody as much time as possible, maximizing the number who can hold on long enough for researchers to provide the tools to beat the bacteria.

New faces

Farm Bureau of Ventura County seated new directors and elected officers at its Sept. 15 meeting.

Two of the “new” faces on the board really aren’t. Jason Cole served as an advisory member of the board from 2012 to 2014 as Chairman of our Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee. And Will Pidduck was first elected to the board in 2003, serving as treasurer and secretary before leaving in 2009. They were elected earlier this year along with George Boskovich III.

Our current slate of officers were all re-elected to second one-year terms: Scott Klittich, president; Danny Peirera, first vice president; Will Terry, second vice president; Katie Brokaw, secretary; Ted Grether treasurer.

The board also said farewell to Phil McGrath, who chose not to seek re-election this year. Phil has been a valued member of the board since 2009, and we are sorry to see him go.

FBVC director selected for leadership program

Ted Grether, a member of Farm Bureau of Ventura County’s Board of Directors, has been selected for Class 47 of the California Agricultural Leadership Program, an advanced leadership development experience for emerging agricultural leaders.

Ted is a fourth-generation member of a family that has been farming in the Las Posas Valley for more than 100 years. He currently works for the family farming business, Grether Farming Company, growing lemons, avocados and mandarins as an operations manager and administrator.

He is among 24 individuals selected for

this year’s Ag Leadership class. The new fellows were inaugurated into the program on Oct. 6 at the Clovis Veterans Memorial District.

Through dynamic seminars during an intensive 17-month program, fellows will study leadership theory, effective communication, motivation, critical and strategic thinking, change management, emotional intelligence and complex social and cultural issues.

Seminars are delivered by four partner universities: Cal Poly Pomona, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Fresno State and UC Davis. Fellows will participate in 55 seminar days, including an eight-day national travel seminar and a 15-day international travel seminar.

“We are extremely fortunate and grateful to have such knowledgeable Ag Leadership alumni participate in this selection process,” said Barry Bedwell, president of the California Agricultural Leadership Foundation (CALF). “By all indications and thanks to those efforts, Class 47 represents another outstanding example of individuals eager to further their leadership development so they can make a positive difference for California agriculture.”

CALF invests approximately \$55,000 per fellow to participate in the program, which is underwritten by individual and industry donations. Ag Leadership is considered to be one of the premier leadership programs in the United States. Since it was first delivered in 1970, more than 1,200 men and women have participated in the program and have become influential leaders and active volunteers in the agriculture industry and other areas.

— John Krist is chief executive officer of the Farm Bureau of Ventura County. Contact him at john@farmbureauvc.com.

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Member Benefits

TICKETS & DISCOUNTS

Farm Bureau members qualify for discounts on admission to many of Southern California’s most popular theme parks and other attractions. To take advantage of any of these special offers, drop by the Farm Bureau office at 5156 McGrath St. in Ventura. You can also place an order and pay by phone, and have the tickets mailed to you. For more information, contact Cissy Perez-Haas at (805) 289-0155. Have your membership number handy. We accept Visa and MasterCard.

Aquarium of the Pacific — Adult (12+ yrs): \$19.95 (save \$9); Child (3-11 yrs): \$12.95 (save \$4). Valid thru 12/31/16.

Cinemark & Century Theatres — Platinum ticket, valid all show times at all Cinemark & Century locations: \$8.75 (savings \$2.75). Additional premiums may be applied for specially priced films and/or events priced higher than normal box office. No expiration.

Knott’s Berry Farm — Buena Park. Adult (12+ yrs) \$37.95 (save \$34.05); Junior (3-11 yrs) Senior (62+ yrs) \$34.95 (save \$7.05). Valid thru 12/31/2016.

Legoland — “E” tickets only. Adult (13+ yrs) \$78.95 (save \$14.05); Child (3-12 yrs) \$72.95 (save \$14.05). Includes 2nd day free ticket within 90 days of 1st visit.

Resort Hopper Ticket — “E” Ticket only. Adult (13+ yrs) \$87.95 (save \$29.05); Child (3-12 yrs) \$80.95 (save \$30.05). Includes 2 visits to Legoland, including new Waterpark (seasonal) and 2 visits to Sea Life Aquarium. Valid thru 12/31/2016.

Regal Cinemas — Unrestricted tickets \$8.75 (regularly \$12.50 Sun-Thu, \$10 Fri.-Sat). Good at Edwards, Regal, Signature & United Artists. No expiration.

San Diego Safari Park — (Formerly Wild Animal Park) Adult-African Tram Safari: \$42.95 (save \$7.05) (12+ yrs); Child-African Tram Safari: \$33.95 (save \$6.05) (3-11 yrs). Valid thru 12/31/16. Africa Tram Safari includes admission, unlimited use of the Journey into Africa Tour, Conservation Carousel and other shows/exhibits.

San Diego Sea World – 2nd Day Free Adult (10 yrs+) \$65 (save \$24); Child (3-9 yrs) \$65 (save \$18). Both visits valid thru 12/31/16.

San Diego Zoo — Adult (12+ yrs): \$42.95 (save \$7.05). Child (3-11 yrs): \$33.95 (save \$6.05). Valid thru 12/31/16.

See’s Candy gift certificate — One-pound box \$15.95 (Save \$2.05). No expiration.

Six Flags Magic Mountain Fright Fest — General Use Ticket (3 yrs+) \$49.95 (savings \$30) Valid on day/night during Fright Fest Sept. 17, 18, 24, 25, 30; Oct. 1, 2, 7-9, 14-16, 21-23, 28, 30 OR valid any operating day thru 9/30/2017.

“E Tickets” — **San Diego Sea World:** Unlimited visits: Adult (10+ yrs) 2016 Fun Card \$75 (save \$14) Child (3-9 yrs) \$75 (save \$8). Valid thru 12/30/16. Blackout dates apply. **Universal Studios:** 12 Month Annual Pass (3+ yrs) \$109 (save \$40) Exp. 12/31/16. Valid 12 months from first visit. First visit must be by January 31, 2017. Blackout dates apply after 1st visit. To view blackout dates see www.universalpassmember.com/2016N.

FARM BUREAU OF VENTURA COUNTY

5156 McGrath St., Suite #102
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FARM BUREAU
OF VENTURA COUNTY

5156 McGrath St., Suite 102 • P.O. Box 3160 • Ventura, CA 93006
Telephone 805-289-0155 • Fax 805-658-0295 • www.farmbureauvc.com