

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 23, 2007

BULLETIN



***AT THE END OF AN EVENTFUL AND PRODUCTIVE WEEK,
THERE ARE SEVERAL DEVELOPMENTS TO REPORT . . .***

CAC LAUNCHES PLAN TO OBTAIN MORE ACCURATE SCALE IDENTIFICATION

Federal, State, and University Entomologists continue to confer on the morphological variations in the armored scale insects found in shipments from Mexico and subsequently submitted for identification. Although the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) declared most of interceptions to be San Jose Scale, not *Hemiberlesia neodiffinis* as originally believed, some scientists question whether such determinations can be made with a high degree of confidence. Consequently, the California Avocado Commission has asked Dr. Richard Stouthamer, an entomologist specializing in population genetics at University of California-Riverside, to develop a proposal for the genetic analysis of armored scale specimens collected from Mexican avocados. Molecular characterization of these insects promises to resolve questions that standard taxonomy cannot, thereby allowing distinctions to be made between closely-related species. Thus far CDFA appears willing to collaborate with Dr. Stouthamer. The proposal is expected sometime next week and, despite funding cuts (post freeze) presently underway at the Commission, Chairman Scott McIntyre and the Executive Committee have assured staff that it will be given top priority consideration by the Board.

EMERGENCY PROGRAM REVIEW COMPLETED

In response to pressure from CAC last week, USDA-APHIS committed to an emergency review of the Mexican avocado import program THIS WEEK to assess steps that can be taken in Mexico to mitigate the risk of introducing scale insects into California. The Emergency Program Review was conducted as scheduled in Mexico with participation by top-level USDA, CDFA and Mexican Plant Health officials. Although CAC has not yet received a formal account of the team's findings from USDA, CDFA Plant Health Director John Connell reports that orchard and packinghouse inspections resulted in very few detections of armored scale insects. In addition, various risk mitigation steps were discussed during the review, including increased field inspections of orchards, processing steps (washing, brushing, possibly waxing) to remove or kill scale, and trace-back of infested loads, for possible inclusion in a revised import protocol. Finally, CDFA was told that the Mexican industry had initiated voluntary steps to reduce the incidence of scale insects on loads destined to California.

CAC SECURES CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR UNIFORM INSPECTION

CAC's aggressive push to have CDFA and USDA modify its Cooperative Agreement--which would allow federal inspectors at Otay Mesa to act in accordance with California pest prevention policy--remains in play even though there has not been formal disposition. USDA's Office of General Counsel requested and received more information from CDFA this week, but no decision has been reached. To keep pressure on USDA, the Commission is circulating a letter among California Members of Congress calling for resolution of this issue. Congressmen Duncan Hunter and Darrell Issa are taking the lead on behalf of California avocado growers. We'll keep you posted, of course.



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