Contra Costa County Agriculture and Weights & Measures Newsletter

Winter 2009

Inside this issue:

This is a part of a series of quarterly newsletters designed to inform growers in Contra Costa County about issues important to the Agricultural community. We welcome your questions and comments about any topics in this newsletter as well as suggestions for future newsletters. Contact us at:

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Plant Quarantine Detector Dogs

Every day, unmarked shipments of plant material are brought into California by package delivery services such as UPS, Fed-Ex, OnTrac, DHL, etc. These shipments can contain exotic plant pests, diseases, and weeds that threaten California's agriculture, which was estimated in 2005 to be worth $38 billion, generating $100 billion in related economic activity. If any of these exotic plant pests became established in California, they could spread into other states and cost the state and federal governments hundreds of millions of dollars to control. California and the rest of the nation could face enormous losses in export markets as a result of quarantines.

California's plant quarantine laws help prevent exotic pest infestations by requiring that any shipments of plant material coming into the state must be clearly marked. This allows Biologists

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Contra Costa County has two plant quarantine detector dog teams.

to determine whether they might contain serious plant pests. Unfortunately, when a package is not marked, the Biologist might not know that there is plant material inside it. Dogs working with a human partner can accurately inspect a large number of packages in a very short amount of time and can sniff out shipments containing plant material at about a 90 percent success rate.

Dogs' noses have over 200 million scent receptors compared to a mere 5 million possessed by humans. Not only can dogs detect scents, but they can be trained to distinguish and remember many different ones. Some dogs have been known to recognize nearly 50 odors.

Candidates for plant quarantine detector dog training are usually selected from animal shelters. Dogs are evaluated for temperament, suitability, and good health before they are accepted into the training program. The dogs must be between one to three years old, energetic, friendly, highly motivated for food, attentive, agile, and able to work around distractions. They generally work until they are seven or eight years old and are often adopted by their handlers when they retire.

Both of the Contra Costa County plant quarantine detector dogs were taken from animal shelters. Bella was a "dropout" from a Canine Companions for Independence breeding program because she was too active. Bart was turned in to the ASPCA for chasing chickens.

Our detector dogs are Bart (left) and Bella (right). Both originally came from shelters.

PSCIT teams inspect packages on conveyer belts, trucks, and in holding areas.

The dogs and their human partners go through training together at the USDA National Detector Dog Training Center in Florida for 8 - 12 weeks. Trainers begin by teaching the dogs to paw (or for baggage inspection, sit next to) any packages containing the odors of citrus, apple, mango, guava, or stone fruit. Each time the dogs find plant material, they get a food reward.

The first few months on the job are a transitional period for the teams as the dogs become familiar with their new living and working environments. They learn the scents of other target items such as nursery plants, flowers, bulbs, seeds, roots, and a large variety of fruits and vegetables. They also learn to ignore distractions in their workplace and to disregard non-target items such as candy or baked goods. Generally, the teams will be able to work at or near peak efficiency after about six months. They become USDA certified once they complete their on-the-job training and pass their final tests.

The Contra Costa County teams inspect shipments on trucks, conveyer belts, and holding areas at UPS, Fed-Ex, On-Trac, and DHL facilities all over the Bay Area. They work when the packages are sorted and loaded onto delivery trucks in the late night or early morning hours. Currently, both Contra Costa and San Bernardino counties have plant quarantine detector dogs.

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Some important finds (top to bottom): White-footed Ant, Magnolia White Scale, and Spiraling Whitefly.

New teams in Sacramento, Fresno, and San Diego have recently completed training and will begin working in December 2008.

The program has already proved to be highly sucessful. In 2007, the Contra Costa and San Bernardino teams found 673 unmarked shipments containing plant material. There were 95 pest interceptions in these shipments with 38% of them being serious exotic plant pests.

One of the more interesting finds in 2008 occurred when Bart detected an unmarked box containing about 15 pounds of cut branches, foliage, and grasses. It had been sent by a business in Florida that specialized in voodoo and other occult religious supplies. Department of Agriculture staff carefully inspected the shipment and collected a total of 66 insect and 26 plant samples for analysis. The lab results came back with 20 serious types of pests.

The worst pest in the shipment was the Little Fire Ant. It's sting is extremely painful and causes long-lasting itching. Little Fire Ants climb into trees and shrubs and, if disturbed, rain down in large numbers, stinging skin and eyes and getting under clothing. In heavily infested areas, agricultural workers can't prune or harvest crops because of this pest.

Crop Data: What is it used for?

At the beginning of each year, the County Departments of Agriculture begin to collect and compile information about crop and livestock production. The Contra Costa County Department of Agriculture typically collects this information when we issue grower pesticide permits for the new year.

The information collected from individual growers is kept completely confidential and is not subject to disclosure to the public. In fact, Section 6254 of the California Public Records Act specifically exempts "market or crop reports which are obtained in confidence from any person". When companies, government agencies, citizens, etc. request individual grower-specific crop production information from the County Departments of Agriculture, the request is denied. The collected data may only be used to develop a statistical value that does not allow the identification of any specific person or business.

The rules for compiling County Crop Reports are designed to protect the confidentiality of individual growers. The crop report information from each grower is combined with other growers' data into general categories. If there are less than three growers of a particular commodity

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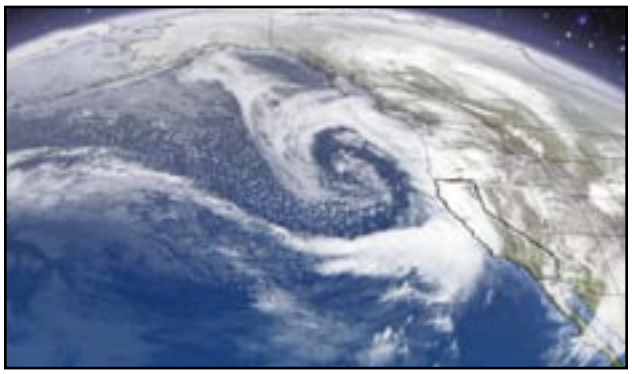
Crop production data from individual growers is kept strictly confidential.



Relief efforts for storm damage rely in part on accurate data provided by growers.

or if any one grower produces 60% or more, the product total must be combined with other products to avoid disclosing the growers' business affairs. As an example, if there were five tangerine growers but one had 65% of the total production, tangerines would have to be placed in the miscellaneous fruit category.

The County Departments of Agriculture are required by law to compile reports of the condition, acreage, production, and value of the agricultural products in their county. The information contained in crop reports represents the value of the agricultural industry to government, financial institutions, the news media, and the public. County Crop Reports are sometimes the only source of information for specialty crops unique to California.

County Crop Reports are used for a variety of specific purposes. One of the most important is to provide a base value to be used during disaster relief. USDA uses the average county crop values from the previous several years in order to estimate grower losses. Crop data can also be used by growers to plan future production and by businesses and agencies to better serve the needs of growers in their area.

Complete and accurate information is vital in order to produce a County Crop Report. We appreciate your help in providing us with your crop production data so we can represent the true value of agriculture in Contra Costa County.

Deadline for USDA Disaster Assistance

The USDA has granted a disaster declaration in Contra Costa County for the drought that has hit rangeland and dryland farming over the last two seasons. Disaster assistance is available from USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to help producers recover from drought related production and physical losses.

In order to qualify, producers must have their crops and rangeland covered by federal crop insurance or FSA's Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP). Some of the FSA programs for disaster-related crop/livestock loss assistance in Secretarial Disaster Designated Counties are as follows:

SURE (Supplemental Revenue Assistance) provides payment for revenue losses or for farms with a minimum 50% production loss.

EM (Emergency Loan Program) provides low interest loans for producers with a minimum 30% production loss.

LFP (Livestock Forage Disaster Program) provides payment for feed losses on grazed land.

LIP (Livestock Indemnity Payments) provides financial assistance for livestock deaths in excess of normal mortality.

NAP (Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program) provides payments for crop or grazing feed losses in excess of 50% from crops not covered by a federal crop insurance program.

TAP (Tree Assistance Program) provides up to 70% cost share assistance for tree, vines, and bush crop losses in excess of 15%.

The deadline to apply for FSA assistance for the recent Contra Costa County drought disaster declaration is March 30, 2009. Contact the Stockton FSA office at (209) 472-7127 for further information.

First Aid for Pesticide Exposure

Whenever people work with pesticides, there is always a risk of exposure and illness. Most commonly, pesticide exposure occurs through the skin. Pesticides contacting the skin can cause burns and rashes and also be absorbed into the bloodstream. Skin exposure is especially dangerous when skin is hot and sweaty and can easily absorb pesticides. Some pesticides can be fatal from skin exposure alone.

When skin exposure occurs, get the victim away from the pesticides. Next, get rid of any pesticide that may be on skin or clothing by showering and changing into clean clothes. Wash the entire body using lots of water and soap. Pay special attention to parts of the body such as the hands and forearms that may have had the majority of the exposure. People helping the victim should wear protective equipment to avoid contact with contaminated skin or clothing.

Pesticide exposure to the delicate tissues of the eyes can cause serious burns and even blindness. When decontaminating eyes, it is important to be as quick and gentle as possible. Rinse them with plenty of water and keep rinsing for at least 15 minutes using a gentle flow. Use eyewash if it is available but if it is not, eyes can be rinsed in a shower or with clean water from a hose or faucet. Blink while rinsing and do not force anyone's eyes open.

When pesticides exposure occurs, it is vital to decontaminate as soon as possible.

Emergency responders will need specific information about the pesticide.

When pesticide dusts, mists, or vapors have been inhaled, move victims to fresh air immediately. In open areas, go at least 100 feet away, preferably somewhere the wind is blowing the pesticide the other way. If victims are convulsing, watch their breathing and protect them from falls and blows to the head. If their breathing stops, give them CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation).

If someone has swallowed a pesticide, get help right away. Call 911 or the free phone number for the Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222). Have the pesticide name, active ingredient(s), and EPA registration number available. If the pesticide is still in the mouth, wash it out with plenty of water. Do not give the victim anything to eat or drink or try to make them throw up without specific instructions to do so from the Poison Control Center or 911. For some types of pesticides, vomiting makes the situation worse.

The time it takes for symptoms of pesticide exposure to appear can range from immediately or within 24 hours (acute effects) to delayed symptoms that may occur up to years later (chronic effects). Acute symptoms may include nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, headache, weakness, fainting, sweating, convulsions, confusion, eye damage, coughing, and skin rashes. Chronic effects may include cancer, paralysis, blood and lung disorders, infertility, birth

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The use of required PPE, especially during mixing, will help prevent pesticide exposure.

defects, nerve damage, and organ failure. The Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for each pesticide will list both the acute and chronic health effects.

Since symptoms may not occur immediately, it is important to get a medical evaluation if someone has been exposed to pesticides. When employees are involved, it is a legal requirement that they be taken to a medical care provider if they feel sick from pesticides. They also must be trained where to get medical care in emergencies.

When exposure occurs, be ready to tell medical care providers what happened. Look at the label and copy the name of the pesticide, the active ingredient(s), and the EPA registration number. If you can't do this, bring the pesticide label from the container. Try not to bring anything with you that could be contaminated with pesticides and cause illness to other people.

The proper use of required personal protective equipment (PPE) while handling pesticides will help prevent most pesticide exposure. The mix/load is generally the most dangerous part of a pesticide application since it involves the use of pesticide concentrates. Be sure to take special care in lifting, measuring and pouring concentrates and have enough light and ventilation. Prior to handling, it is important to understand the health risks for each pesticide and to have a detailed plan for what to do in case of emergency.

Packaging: Labeling and Tare

If you have ever taken a close look at packages in a grocery store, you will notice that they have a lot of the same basic information on them. This is because the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has guidelines for labeling that the state of California enforces as a part of the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act. These requirements also apply to closed containers of produce sold at Certified Farmers' Markets and grower fruit stands.

The main label on a package is called the principal display panel (PDP). The information on the PDP is important to the consumer and must be clear and complete. Even the PDP's size and lettering format are regulated so the label can be easily read. In California, all required information on the label must be in English, although other languages may be included.

All package labels must have statements of "Identity", "Responsibility", and "Quantity" (IRQ). "Identity" is the common or generic name of the product (cleaning powder, strawberries, etc). It must appear on the PDP, and is usually parallel to the base of the product.

"Responsibility" is the name and address of the manufacturer, packer or distributor. It must include the city, state and zip code for the business. If the business is not listed in a local phone book, the label must also include its street address. If

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A typical label showing identity, responsibility, and quantity.

the responsible party is not the manufacturer, the label must list their connection with the package (such as "Manufactured for and packed by").

"Quantity" is the amount of commodity in the package and can be listed by weight, volume, length, area, time, or count. The quantity statement must in the lower 30% of the PDP and be listed in metric and regular inch-pound units (unless by count or time). The format for the numbers and units is set by law. Metric units must be between 1 and 1000 (such as 500 mg instead of 0.5 g or 1.4 kg instead of 1400 g). Words or phrases that qualify the quantity declaration (like "approximately", "minimum", "when packed", "not less than", "at least", "giant", "full") cannot be used in the quantity statement.

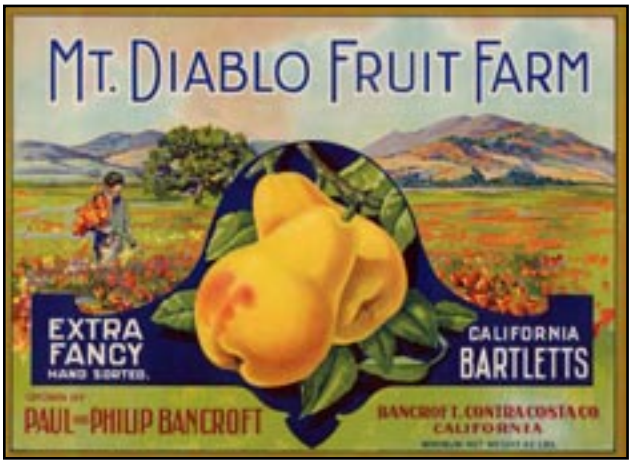
The weight of the container or wrapping is called tare and cannot be included in the quantity statement listed on the label. If the commodity is packed in a liquid that is a part of the product (such as canned peaches in syrup), the labeled weight includes the weight of the liquid. If the liquid is not a part of the product, the labeled weight will not include the weight of the liquid.

This article is a basic guide to labeling, and doesn't include every rule about labeling packages. For a complete set of laws, go to NIST's website (www.nist.gov/owm and click on "Handbook 130, Uniform Laws and Regulations" under the "Quick List (popular links)" section).

This label shows a commodity where the packing liquid is not part of the product. "DR WT" means drained weight.

Contra Costa County Yesterdays

During the period following the Great Depression, Philip Bancroft became known statewide as the "Fighting Farmer from Walnut Creek". The 1930's were a period of violent labor conflicts and Communist hysteria. Strikes by the longshoremen and teamsters prevented the delivery of food, gasoline, and other supplies. Pickets came to Contra Costa County and stopped growers from moving their produce. Businesses, fearing terrorists, shut their doors.



A fruit crate label used by Philip Bancroft.

Communists in the Bay Area were rumored to have organized gangs plotting a violent takeover. The public demanded that the government call out the militia to maintain order. Local communities deputized citizens to help keep the peace and even formed an armed home guard, the Diablo Nationals, to fight "radicalism" in central Contra Costa County.

Philip Bancroft was a leader in these movements, even arming his produce truckers with shotguns to deter picketers. After the Diablo Nationals faded away, their anti-radical work was taken up by the Contra Costa Associated Farmers, headed by Philip Bancroft. In 1938 and 1944, he went on to run as the Republican candidate for U.S. Senator. Today, he and his family are remembered in the names of many streets and other landmarks in Contra Costa County.