

WINDOW ON AGRICULTURE

Office of the Sonoma County Agricultural Commissioner

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2,4-D APPLICATIONS

The mild winter this year resulted in an early end to dormancy for the vineyards. Grapevines are especially susceptible to damage from 2,4-D sprayed in nearby areas. 2,4-D is a broadleaf weed herbicide, which is applied to oat hay, pastureland and rangeland. We inspect vineyards that are in close proximity to where growers want to apply 2,4-D. If nearby vineyards have already broken dormancy we deny the application.

March 1 is the normal cutoff date for most 2,4-D and other phenoxy herbicide applications. This year we denied a few Notices of Intent to apply 2,4-D before the March 1 cutoff date. Notices of Intent are submitted by growers at least 24-hours ahead of a restricted pesticide application, so we can do a pre-site inspection to make sure there will be no problems with the application being made. The Notice of Intent informs us where an application will take place, in case we want to monitor that application.

It may still be possible to use non-ester phenoxy herbicides in the western part of the county. Notices of Intent need to be submitted 48-hours prior to an application. The Agricultural Commissioner's Office will look at proposed applications on a case-by-case basis. Each application will need to be pre-approved by the District Deputy in that area of the county.

ACREAGE SURVEY

We have been updating our permanent crop acreage information for our annual crop report. Senior Agricultural Program Assistant Nancy Fiddler had been busy meeting with growers and vineyard managers to update their information. Ms. Fiddler and biologists with our department reviewed the acreage information with growers, when they came in our office to renew their pesticide spray permits.

Due to budget shortfalls, Mrs. Fiddler was laid-off in

February. Our Clerk Typist III Charity Lyon has taken over the project, and has been entering acreage changes into our crop database. We have a contract with the United States Department of Agriculture Statistics Branch to update our permanent crop records. The acreage information is published in the California Department of Food and Agriculture's Grape Acreage, as well as our annual crop report. Individual grower records are kept confidential.

As of March 6, 1,304 grape parcels, 26 apple parcels, and 2 walnut parcels had been updated. In 2002, Biologist Cree Morgan developed an acreage program for our Sonoma County information. With our new program the database can be queried for appellation acreage, varietal information, year planted, which allows our office to answer public or grower requests. Our annual crop report will be released in April.



VINE MEALYBUG TRAINING

On February 27, 2003, staff from our office assisted with a Vine Mealybug (VMB) training for local grape growers, which was sponsored by the University of California Cooperative Extension. The training was held at Clos du Bois Winery in Geyserville.

Vine Mealybug continued

Viticulture Farm Advisor Rhonda Smith and Extension Entomologist Lucia Varela were in charge of the meeting. Ms. Smith explained how the grape growers present could help assist in detecting how widespread the Vine Mealybug is in Sonoma County.

Growers were asked to place and monitor VMB traps in their vineyards that had been planted in the last five years.

Ms. Varela gave a presentation on the characteristics of the VMB, and had specimens available to look at under microscopes. Ms. Varela described other insect species that might be found in the traps and might look similar to the VMB.

Biologist Jim Raisner was in charge of our office's participation in the meeting. Our staff was responsible for numbering traps, and putting together the trap packets that were given to the growers. Growers from different areas of the county were given traps to place and monitor. We obtained site locations from the growers of each trap. Growers are to service the traps twice, once in mid-March, and again at the beginning of April. Two hundred traps were given out, and 90 locations will be trapped.

In April, the traps will be taken down, and brought into the office. Our staff will then check the traps for the presence of VMB.

EXOTIC NEWCASTLE DISEASE

Agricultural Commissioner John Westoby and Assistant Commissioner Mike Smith have been busy with conference calls and negotiations for work plans with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), and other County Agricultural Commissioners regarding Exotic Newcastle Disease (END).

Exotic Newcastle Disease is a very serious and often fatal virus disease that affects most species of birds. Birds with END may have respiratory, nervous, or gastrointestinal symptoms. END is one of the most infectious diseases of poultry in the world; it is so virulent that a death of nearly 100 percent can occur.

Sonoma County may be entering into the eradication effort in the next few weeks. It is hoped that a work plan for a survey for the disease will be finalized and

approved by our Board of Supervisors. Once the work plan is approved extra-help personnel will be hired to carry out countywide surveys for the presence of END in our local bird populations.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) will fund the project. Some of our extra-help personnel that worked in our Glassy-winged Sharpshooter program will be hired to man the program. They will be doing a door-to-door survey for the presence of poultry and game birds.

Since the discovery of END in October 2002, 17 commercial flocks have been destroyed. Eighteen hundred separate sites have been found infested, and three million birds have been destroyed. The diseased birds have been buried in landfills near the site of infestation. The END Command Center is located in Modesto.

Our office is creating a list of addresses of poultry and game bird locations. If bird owners have birds that are showing symptoms of the disease, please call our office at (707) 565-2371.

