

LBAM no worse than leaf roller

By ROY UPTON



THERE has been a recent onslaught of articles and editorials on raspberry damage in Watsonville, damage purportedly caused by the Light Brown Apple Moth, or LBAM.

The million-dollar question is how anyone can discern what organism was responsible for the damage, because all leaf-roller moths inflict the same damage.

Was the damage caused by LBAM or by any of the more than 80 leaf rollers that are native to California?

Or was it one of the five other leaf rollers that are common in Santa Cruz County?

Leaf rollers outnumber LBAM

Native leaf rollers other than LBAM far outnumber LBAM in Santa Cruz and San Francisco counties, where LBAM appears to have the greatest population density in California.

Trapping data from points in these two counties found varying data: from one LBAM for as few as 50 leaf rollers, up to one leaf roller for 200 leaf rollers.

The scarcity of LBAM raises the question of whether LBAM is to blame for berry damage in Watsonville.

GUEST EDITORIAL

LBAM damage in berry fields is said to be confirmed by DNA.

Here, a [second million-dollar question: How can LBAM be associated with berry damage when the California Department of Food and Agriculture's DNA testing is not conclusive?](#)

According to CDFA's own 2008 report to the legislature, there is a need to "develop an effective DNA fingerprint and identification technology for LBAM."

What can you say about an agency [which is confirming the presence of an insect by the most sophisticated science, and yet has inconclusive testing technology?](#)

Maybe leaf-roller overgrowth in Watsonville is in the orange tortrix population; maybe it's in the garden tortrix population; maybe it is, in part, in the LBAM population.

The CDFA operating principle appears to be that "There is LBAM funding, so let's say it is LBAM."

Farmer victims

Who gets the short end of the stick?

When CDFA was aerielly spraying communities, everyone was a victim.

Now the primary victims are the

farmers who are made to jump through CDFA quarantine hoops because CDFA wants to keep programs afloat during severe budget cuts.

Do farmers know that trading partners are not asking for LBAM to be eradicated — trading partners only require that LBAM not be present in exports?

Do farmers know that in Australia and New Zealand, LBAM is lumped with other leaf rollers in terms of how it is managed and controlled?

Farmers should know that LBAM is easily and cost-effectively controlled in agriculture systems just like other native leaf rollers?

It is incredible how much fervor can be stirred up when a government agency has a specific agenda and can generate press release after press release.

It doesn't seem to matter that the agency's message lacks any factual basis, or that the science is distorted or non-existent.

What others say

The situation with LBAM is just as [John Eiskamp, Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau president and a Watsonville cane berry grower](#), remarked in the June 18, 2009 issue of the *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*: "[I think the potential damage is humongous — not the pest, but the political damage.](#)"

Or, as [Dave Cavanaugh](#), another Santa

Cruz-area grower and former [Santa Cruz Farm Bureau president](#), put it, "[The perception of the problem is much worse than the problem. The moth is no worse than native leaf rollers.](#)"

New priorities needed

The issue of LBAM will always come back to how it is classified domestically and internationally.

The United States Department of Agriculture, along with CDFA, should put as much effort into changing the classification of this very minor insect as it has put into its futile attempts to develop techniques to eradicate an in-eradicatable species.

Until these agencies change their priorities, the public and farmers will continue to suffer at the hands of bureaucrats whose primary need is to maintain their funding.

For the science and opinion of true LBAM experts should tells us that LBAM is a myth of mass destruction, not a moth of mass destruction.

Upton is a Soquel medical writer and LBAM liaison for Citizens for Health, a consumer and environmental health advocacy organization with 90,000 members nationwide. He is co-author of a petition calling for the reclassification of LBAM. See a petition summary at [www.lbamspray.com/Reports/ReclassificationPetitionSummaryRU.pdf](#).

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