

State sprays county for apple moth

Light Brown Apple Moth

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After four straight nights of no-show due to fog, planes took to the skies over Santa Cruz County and sprayed a pesticide in residential areas in an attempt to wipe out the light brown apple moth, a crop-eating bug that's capable of causing millions of dollars in damage to California's agricultural industry.

SCOTTS VALLEY

The state Department of Food and Agriculture on Thursday night began spraying over north Salinas, North Monterey County and parts of Santa Cruz County. "We're glad we can finally begin to treat. We need to knock down the moth population here, and we've got to do it before the rains come," said Nancy Lun-

gren, a spokeswoman for the Department of food and agriculture.

Three planes, taking off from Salinas Airport, flew over a section of the county from Aptos to Scotts Valley and sprayed what the state says is an odorless and virtually "nontoxic substance" that replicates the scent of a female moth.

The state believes the aerial applications of the synthetic pheromone will disrupt the mating cycle of the moths by confusing the males to the point where there's a crash in the population. But many residents have opposed the state's tactics on the basis that the long-term health effects of the pesticide, CheckMate LBAM-F, manufactured by the Bend, Ore.-based Suterra LLC, is not known and has never been tested.

The state's eradication efforts have been the subjects of lawsuits, three court

hearings, numerous town hall meetings and rallies that are fast becoming a common sight on the weekends in Santa Cruz, a town that takes pride in its environmental awareness and its organic lifestyle.

Some residents told the Sentinel they planned to leave town while the state sprayed while others have unsuccessfully tried to stop it by filing lawsuits.

Even local nursery operators like Josh Fodor, who potentially stand to benefit from the spraying, are struggling with the logic behind the state's efforts to spray.

"I just wish people would come out and say it, that this moth isn't really causing any problems but it's all a matter of protecting California and international trade," said Fodor, the owner of Central Coast Wilds Nursery in Santa Cruz. "Because so far this moth hasn't caused

the slightest bit of damage anywhere." Fodor thinks the population of the moths is declining.

As of Nov. 1 in Santa Cruz County, there nearly 8,700 moths, the highest in the state by far. San Francisco County ranks second with 2,140; Monterey County third with 746.

"The moth doesn't go dormant. Rather, adults just don't fly if the temperature is too cold," said Kevin Hoffman, a state entomologist. "We expect some catches in heavily infested areas like Santa Cruz to continue all winter, but at a much reduced number because of cooler temperatures."

Weather permitting the state will spray over the weekend but not Veterans Day.

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