

# Apple moth population exceeds 6,000 in Santa Cruz County

## Good news is exotic pest does not appear to be spreading in outlying areas, CDFA reports

By <sup>Light brown apple moth</sup> DAVID CARKHUFF  
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Trapping of the light brown apple moth presents a good news-bad news scenario, according to the latest survey of the crop-destroying pest.

First, the bad news: The moth has turned up in increasing numbers in traps set up around Santa Cruz County. This county is the hotbed for this exotic pest, a threat to a variety of crops, the survey reveals.

"We're still, every day, finding a lot more moths in Santa Cruz County," said Larry Hawkins, U.S. Department of Agriculture spokesman. "That's where the heaviest infestation is, and has been from day one."

A daily situation report by California Department of Food and Agriculture from Aug. 14 reveals that the population of light brown apple moth has hit 7,001 — that's 7,001 moths captured in the state since the beginning of the eradication program in March.

"All but one of those is in the Bay area," Hawkins said. "However, of those 7,000, 6,031 are in Santa Cruz County."

The report further reveals that 92 percent of all moths caught in the state's 40,389 pheromone-baited traps were found in southern Santa Cruz and northern Monterey counties.

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— **Larry Hawkins**, U.S. Department of Agriculture spokesman

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"It keeps going up all the time," Hawkins said, noting that the intruders are multiplying.

The government's strategy, he said, is to establish a perimeter free of moths before hitting the center with pheromones, a natural secretion that confuses the moth and disrupts its reproduction.

"We're squeezing in from the outside, we're moving toward the more heavily infested areas," Hawkins said.

That's why Monterey County, where 419 moths had been captured as of Aug. 14, will be the site of a pheromone aerial spraying, something unprecedented in California agriculture history.

California Department of Food and Agriculture plans to spray a pheromone, a chemical secretion from insects, over 60 square miles of Monterey County for three days beginning on the evening of Sept. 5. A team of three airplanes will begin releasing the pheromone, which is designed to confuse male light brown apple moths and

prevent them from locating a mate, CDFA announced. Sites of the aerial spraying will include the communities of Marina, Seaside, Sand City, Del Rey Oaks, Monterey and Pacific Grove, CDFA reported.

Hawkins said the Monterey County aerial application aims to tighten the noose around the moth.

"Now, we can get those out-lyers taken care of and then pull back in to where the heaviest infestation is," he said.

That means regulators may roll out plans for more aerial applications.

"The whole pheromone treatment regime is what we plan to use for the eradication throughout the Bay area, some of it by ground, some of it by air, at this point certainly we're planning to do that Monterey-Seaside area over there by air," Hawkins said.

Timing of future applications, if found necessary, partly depends on manufacture of the pheromone itself.

"This is a fairly novel ap-

proach," Hawkins said. "The actual pheromone that we're going to be using in Monterey is not just readily available, they actually have to manufacture it, we might have done the treatments there even earlier this year but we were waiting on the manufacturer" to produce enough of the pheromone.

Trends are reassuring.

"The trends indicate we're in pretty good shape, we found a single moth up in Napa, we conducted treatment up in Napa, and we haven't found anything else," Hawkins said. "The same

thing is true over in Oakley."

Ground applications appear to have halted the moths' spread in outlying areas.

"We just recently did twist-tie pheromone treatments in Danville, Dublin and San Jose, and all of those were isolated finds," Hawkins said.

Agriculture officials will keep their fingers crossed while checking traps. An apple moth eruption is the worst nightmare of growers.

CDFA reported that the moth causes Australia \$21.1 million annually in lost produc-

tion and control costs, or about 1.3 percent of gross fruit value, for apples, pears, oranges and grapes; applying this percentage to the 2005 gross value of these same crops in California of \$5.4 billion, the estimated annual production costs would be \$70.2 million, the agency reported. This estimate does not include economic costs to the nursery industry and other significant host crops in California such as apricots, avocados, kiwifruit, peaches and strawberries, CDFA reported.

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