

UC Extension marks 100 years of helping farmers



Members of a tour celebrating the 100th birthday of the UC Cooperative Extension, including Nita Gizdich, right, are treated to a water quality demonstration at Suncrest Nursery on Thursday.

SHMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Farms

By Donna Jones

djones@santacruzsentinel.com
@DonnaJonesSCS on Twitter

WATSONVILLE » When the light brown apple moth appeared in 2007 to threaten nurseries and orchards with quarantines of vast swaths of agricultural land in Santa Cruz County and across the state, farmers turned to advisers and researchers at the UC Cooperative Extension office in Watsonville for help.

Through its research projects, the extension has helped farmers learn to manage the invasive pest and keep their operations viable.

At Prevedelli Farms, Sam Lathrop credited Mark Bolda, a farm adviser who heads up the Santa Cruz County office, with cutting through political hysteria by bringing science to the forefront of the discussion.

"Without his [light brown apple moth] program, we would be here under quarantine at all times," Lathrop said.

The UC Cooperative Ex-

tension, which operates in all but one California county, celebrated its centennial Thursday with special events across the state. In the Pajaro Valley, Bolda led a bus tour showcasing some of the local office's projects.

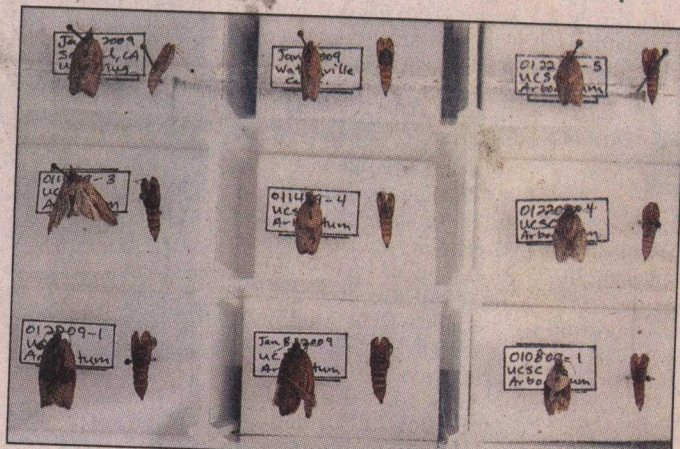
At Suncrest Nursery, researcher Neal Murray talked about monitoring efforts that have enabled him to identify plants that harbor light brown apple moth larvae off farms, in neighboring roadside ditches, for example.

Murray said since the moth can travel up to 300 feet, his work has shown that growers need to pay attention to what's happening beyond borders.

Pest control is just one area of extension staff focus. Another researcher is exploring a system to trap sediments leaving potted plants at nurseries to improve water quality. Others are working on alternatives to field fumigation.

Farm adviser Laura Tourte

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Examples of light brown apple moths collected by UC Cooperative Extension staff are displayed during Thursday's tour celebrating the institution's 100th birthday.

"Without his [light brown apple moth] program, we would be here under quarantine at all times."

— Sam Lathrop of farm adviser Mark Bolda

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is working with the Palo Alto Medical Foundation to develop a brochure promoting the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, a project designed to help local farmers market their produce while encouraging healthier diets in the community.

Advisers routinely answer questions about crop varieties, pollinators and disease.

The extension isn't just for farmers either. Its advisers work with 4-H, an agricultural program for youth, and operates a master gardener program that helps home gardeners with issues such as erosion control and water conservation.

When President Woodrow Wilson signed the law creating the national Cooperative Extension program in 1914, the idea was to put university research into the hands of the people.

The UC system, already working with state farmers, was quick to adopt the

UC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

What: Celebrating 100 years of assisting farmers and home gardeners.

Where: In nearly every California county. Santa Cruz County office is at 1432 Freedom Blvd.

Details: 831-763-8040 or cesantacruz.ucanr.edu.

model. Santa Cruz County's office dates to 1917.

The program is funded by the UC system, counties and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Bolda stressed the word "cooperative" in the agency's name. Projects often are done in collaboration with other private and public agencies, he said.

When he's stumped by a question, he goes to experts at extension offices throughout the state and at UC Davis for help. Farmers allow their fields to be used for study. Researchers return the favor by providing insights.

"It's a neat model," Bolda said. "Universities can work hand in hand with local people."