

Bay Window

GYPSY MOTH 3-7-85 EXP

# The Moth That United Felton

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**I**t isn't the purge of the gypsy moth that angers Felton resident Frances Adamson — she has no desire to see the San Lorenzo Valley defoliated by the leaf-munching pest. What she and other Valley residents object to is the California Department of Food and Agriculture (DFA) decision to use carbaryl sevin in the eradication of the moth. Two hundred-fifty acres are slated to be sprayed with *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), a microbial insecticide that infects the gut of the caterpillar without adverse effect to humans or other forms of life. Why spray carbaryl, an insecticide 15 times more toxic than malathion, on 175 of those same acres?

A registered nurse and environmentalist, Adamson is often described as "shy." Her involvement in Felton's anti-carbaryl movement began quietly enough with letters of protest in the *Valley Press*. "There didn't seem to be any local furor," Frances remembers. "I realized that something had to be done. I called Joe Cucchiara's office and asked, 'Who is the chief decision maker at the DFA? I want to write to him.' Then I started Xeroxing information and posting it in visible places around town."

She found an ally in County Supervisor Cucchiara. As retired research psychobiologist Shirley Adams recalls, "Frances told everyone, 'If you are against carbaryl, call Cucchiara and tell him to put your name on his list of people opposed.' So I did."

Adamson continued to paper Felton with her handmade posters, bracing herself for the DFA's meeting of January 29. To her surprise, another handmade flyer was soon posted beside her own, its well-documented text citing the horrors of carbaryl: water contamination, illness, cancer and birth defects. But it wasn't until the 29th, at what came to be known as "the State's meeting," that Adamson, Adams and the DFA realized the size of the opposition.

The Felton Community Hall was packed with an estimated 300 people. "People brought children and babies," says Adams. "It's unusual to have children at that kind of meeting. People were thinking in terms of the family unit."

Karen Van Schaack, nurse and mother of two, was not content to bring just her children. She invited TV Channel 46, Channel 11 and KUSP FM to attend. "I moved here to avoid smog and to provide a more natural environment for my kids," Van Schaack explains. "I made a pact with myself after the malathion spraying that I'm raising these kids and I'm not going to have them sprayed again."

The state was represented by toxicologist Dr. Peter Kurtz, State Deputy Attorney General Charles Getz and Area Spray Manager John Connells. Aerial spraying of Bt would begin March 15, they stated, with ground spraying of carbaryl beginning on March 18. They then assured the people of Felton that the insecticides were harmless.

But few of the people who attended the meeting came for information. Joe Cucchiara opened the meeting to the townspeople by berating the state officials for making a decision without consulting area residents. While a handful backed the state's decision, the majority rose to voice disapproval and alarm. People came equipped with their own data: that carbaryl can not only be inhaled but absorbed through the skin; that it can cause sterility in men; that the EPA has recommended pregnant women and women of childbearing age avoid contact with the insecticide; that it combines with nitrates to form carcinogens; that, depending on weather conditions, carbaryl has a half-life of 23 to 28 days.

As Adams sees it, it was Deputy Attorney General Getz who inadvertently gave the people of Felton hope. Since the gypsy moth had been declared a public nuisance, he explained, any physical resistance would be illegal. "A fire fighter or a

police officer," Getz said, "doesn't need your permission to come on your property to put out a fire or to involve themselves in police powers of the state."

His message was not lost on Felton. "The opposition has to be legal," Adams stresses, "which is what everyone has to know. Otherwise, under the powers of the police state, they can bring in the National Guard."

**T**he people of Felton decided to have their own meeting.

Two days before the February 19 meeting, Adamson received a call from Assemblymember Sam Farr's office, asking if the DFA could attend. "They wanted to know if I could guarantee them a forum," Frances says. "They stopped short of asking if I could guarantee their safety. It was an anti-carbaryl meeting — there was no point in having them."

On the 19th, Cucchiara confirmed that the County Board of Supervisors was suing the state. At the meeting, the townspeople hired environmental lawyer Victor Sher of Lobdel, Miller and Sher, and joined the county with a law suit of their own as People for a Safe Felton (PSF). "We just decided," Adams says, "and money started showing up in a box."

For the next six days, Felton was awash in legal declarations. The declarations, filled out by residents, employees, customers, businesspeople, doctors and experts protested the use of carbaryl.

The Felton book cafe, the White Raven, became what Adams jokingly called "Frances' office." It was just one place where people could pick up or drop off declarations and learn what was being done. Many told horror stories about the malathion spraying of '81, telling of children sprayed on their way to school or having seizures, each concluding with, "And carbaryl is 15 times worse."

The declarations were filed on February 25. That afternoon, the steering committee of PSF had a meeting to discuss fund raising, information flyers and a new devel-

opment: the support of the Valley Women's Club.

A non-profit organization dedicated to the improvement of the quality of life in the San Lorenzo Valley, the club's 250 members, one third of whom are male, had condemned the use of aerial spraying and carbaryl at its February 13 meeting. Members had already sent a letter to the governor when Cucchiara called and asked them to join the suit. "We were all strong in supporting it," says Nancy Macy, newsletter editor and founding president.

That night at a press conference organized by Van Schaack and Jean McCotter, the extent of Felton's support was made known. Cucchiara announced that not only were the county and PSF filing suits, but also the businesspeople of Felton, the San Lorenzo Valley Water District and the Sierra Club. With a hearing date set for March 13, the State must respond by March 8.

The big scramble now is to inform the public and raise money for the legal fees. On March 8, PSF hopes to be serving spaghetti non-stop from 5-9 pm at the Felton

Community Hall. Businesspeople and members of the community have not only donated the ingredients for the dinner but also merchandise and services, ranging from dental work to car washes, for a raffle (unscheduled as this went to press.)

"They think we're a small community and won't fight it," says Felton resident Pick Rogers. "They're wrong."

"What the State is doing is abating a public nuisance," Van Schaack explains. "They're supposed to use their mellowest means. Why aren't they? I feel we definitely have a chance. We are using the legal system that's been provided for us."

"It's not that we don't want to do something," adds Adams. "We don't want to stop the spraying. We want to stop the use of carbaryl."

Those interested in contacting People for a Safe Felton can do so by writing to: PO Box 740, Felton, California 95018 or calling 335-7128 or 426-5426.

The spaghetti dinner, held at the Felton Community Hall Friday (5-9 pm), costs \$5 for adults, \$2 for kids.

