

# Moth trackers follow surging pest population

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Light Brown apple moth

## Fairgrounds is headquarters of eradication effort in region

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Every weekday, agriculture inspectors and insect trappers emerge from a nondescript set of trailers at the back of the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. They climb into their pickup trucks and head out to nurseries and farms in the area.

Their target: the light brown apple moth, enemy number one for a variety of agriculture in Central California.

State and federal agriculture regulators hope a Sept. 5 aerial application of pheromone in Monterey County, intended to disrupt the moth's mating cycle, will help knock down this small but unwelcome transient pest. The exotic intruder, hailing from Australia, poses a threat to a variety of crops, and the workers in the fairgrounds trailers — staff of the California and U.S. departments of agriculture — are working to prevent its spread.



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

**Work continues Tuesday at the Light Brown Apple Moth project at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds.**

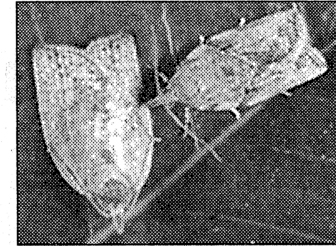
“Our headquarters for the entire light brown apple moth eradication program is actually set up on the fairground location,” said Larry Hawkins, U.S. Department of Agriculture spokesman. “From those offices, some of the trapping staff, some of the inspectors with our

regulatory program, some of the administrative people (work to contain the moth). The reason we picked that site is because it's centrally located because of the work that has to be done in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties.”

Ken Corbishley, Santa Cruz

County agriculture commissioner, said the “LBAM project” at Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds is critical to success in stopping the moth, which could inflict an estimated \$133 million in crop damage statewide.

“These people are trapping the light brown apple moth,



U.S. Department of Agriculture photo

**Light brown apple moths threaten a variety of crops.**

they're conducting inspections of row crops, they do inspections of fruits and vegetables, they're walking some row crop lands depending on what the commodity is. They're also monitoring treatments. So these people are the backbone behind the project,” he said.

Hawkins said the cooperation of nursery owners is critical as well. Traps at nurseries help ensure that moth-infested plants don't spread.

“All of the nurseries are under a compliance agreement, that agreement just specifies that there are certain safeguarding measures they will take,” Hawkins said. “Those measures differ slightly depending on where the nurseries are located.”

In quarantine areas, nursery owners must maintain a fixed number of traps and conduct

regular inspections to make sure plants are free of light brown apple moths prior to sales.

“Most of the work is really sort of an honor system left to the nursery owners themselves,” Hawkins said.

Corbishley said the LBAM project could become a fixture in Watsonville, based on early indications.

“It's the people on the ground who are doing the trapping, doing the inspections. They'll probably be out there for four to five years,” he said.

Hawkins hesitated to lay out a time frame for the eradication program. Success of trapping, inspecting crops and applying pheromone to curb reproduction will determine the duration of the project.

The good news, Hawkins said, is “the infestation does not appear to be spreading beyond the 10 Bay area counties where we found it.”

Now, it's a matter of seeing whether the eradication program works.

“It's going to depend on how successful our eradication strategy is as we implement it,” Hawkins said. “We're just now starting to get into the swing of things as far as implementing the eradication strategy.”