

MOTH

Continued from A1

in Santa Cruz (County), the grower is not being able to market a substantial amount of the fruit. That's economic damage."

Officials have released little information about the incident. Though USDA inspectors discovered the problem in May during cooler inspections, it came to light after an agricultural official posted it on his blog earlier this month.

"This information is being provided in the interest of emphasizing to the grower community that this pest is not only a regulatory problem now, but is capable of becoming an economic problem as well," wrote Mark Bolada, a farm adviser with the University of California Cooperative Extension in Santa Cruz County.

Bolada, who could not be reached to comment Monday, advised growers that the infested field had been addressed by the grower and regulatory agencies, but that they need to take appropriate control measures to minimize infestations.

John Eiskamp, president of the San-

ta Cruz County Farm Bureau and a raspberry grower, called the incident discouraging.

"Many of us have had a very vigorous spray program in place," Eiskamp said. "But there's a lot more LBAM out there. ... It's very concerning. We can treat our fields, but we can't treat native vegetation. We can't treat other people's backyards."

Caneberries — raspberries, blackberries and olallieberries — accounted for \$85 million of the county's \$492 million agriculture industry in 2007.

The larval caterpillar of the moth produces a webbing to cocoon itself inside leaves for feasting. Blackberries can get caught inside the cocoon and nibbled on as well, which is what happened in the organic blackberry field.

It's unclear whether moth damage to raspberries would be to the fruit, the plant or both, Hawkins said. Apples also are at risk, he added.

When the moth first appeared in Santa Cruz County in 2007, the state agriculture department launched an offensive that included aerial spraying. But residents protested. Some blamed the spraying for illnesses. A Santa Cruz County judge halted the spraying last year until an environmental study

could be conducted. The draft review is due out at the end of June.

The latest strategy for attacking the pest is to breed sterile male moths to interfere with reproduction. Hawkins said sterile moths, which are being bred in Moss Landing, could be released in a limited area, possibly in Napa or Sonoma counties, in July, but widespread deployment is likely at least two years away.

Santa Cruz is second only to San Francisco County for infestation numbers, according to a trapping report released June 3 by the state Department of Food and Agriculture. Traps captured 13,498 moths in the first five months of 2009 in the county, as opposed to 15,439 for all 12 months of 2008. More than 100,000 moths have been trapped in 17 counties since 2007.

Close to 2,800 square miles, including all of Santa Cruz County, are under quarantine, and agricultural products must be cleared by inspectors before shipment out of the areas.

Michael Jarvis, a spokesman for the state agriculture department, said the hope is always to eradicate invasive pests before damage is done.

"It's no longer a what if," Jarvis said. "It's an unfortunate thing."