

LIGHT BROWN APPLE MOTH

# USDA closes Moss Landing station, moves office to fairgrounds

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Monterey County facility served as headquarters for light brown apple moth research

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By **DONNA JONES**

[djones@santacruzsentinel.com](mailto:djones@santacruzsentinel.com)

WATSONVILLE — The U.S. Department of Agriculture is shutting its office in Moss Landing and moving inspectors to a trailer at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds.

Two years ago, the Moss Landing station was the headquarters of a now-defunct effort to breed sterile light brown apple moths to frustrate reproduction and halt the spread of

the invasive agricultural pest.

Its closing is part of a nationwide streamlining of the federal agency, announced by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on Monday.

"The USDA, like families and businesses across the country, cannot continue to operate like we did 50 years ago," Vilsack said. "We must innovate, modernize and be better stewards of the taxpayers' dollars."

As part of what's dubbed the "Blueprint for Better Service," the

USDA will close 259 offices at home and seven abroad, which, along with other efficiencies such as consolidating cell phone plans, are designed to save \$150 million annually.

The offices slated for closing are typically small, and many are within 20 miles of another facility, USDA said.

In 2009, when the USDA launched its effort to breed sterile light brown apple moth males at the Moss Landing site, nearly 100 people were stationed there, including 70 inspectors,

20 researchers and nine support staff. The office had a budget of \$1 million. But after a field test in Long Beach, the program was quietly dropped several months ago.

USDA spokesman Larry Hawkins said the plan to use the sterile moths to counter reproduction worked, but was too costly for the agency to pursue at a time of budget reductions.

Hawkins said the two remaining researchers were being transferred to Salinas, and inspectors, who are

responsible for checking produce and plants for the moth before they're allowed to be shipped out of the area, will be based at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds.

Hawkins couldn't say how much would be saved by giving up the lease on the Moss Landing building, but a fairgrounds official said the agency is paying \$1,800 a month to park a trailer on its property.

The USDA anticipated spending \$146 billion in 2011.