

ed in the field, and it looked as if the light brown apple moth was the culprit.

Bolda is the UC Cooperative Extension's strawberry and caneberry farm advisor for Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties, and as such his duties include monitoring a South Pacific export – the light brown apple moth or LBAM.

"Indeed, there were a lot of leafrollers there," said Bolda.

The LBAM is one of several types of leafrollers, so named because their caterpillars pupate within the protection of rolled up leaves. The inspectors took a sampling of 100 fruit from a limited section of hedgerow and identified between 10 and 20 of those fruit that had been damaged to the point of not being marketable.

"There was a lot of damage," said Bolda, "and a high percentage of larvae taken from the field were tested positive for LBAM."

When Bolda reported the incident in his agricultural blog, it quickly set off a firestorm of media attention, with news crews clamoring for photos and interviews.

"The grower community really got a shot across the bow with this," he said.

Moth Population Explosion Debated

Bolda himself takes a non-partisan position in the LBAM debate, but many others do not.

The California Alliance to Stop the Spray until now has flatly stated "The LBAM has done NO damage in California."

Their argument and a huge public outcry stopped aerial spraying over Northern California counties, including Santa Cruz.



Left: This berry is rendered unmarketable by a leafroller larva. Right: The life cycle of the Light Brown Apple Moth.

Another keystone argument against heroic eradication efforts has been that the moth is well established in the state and has been here for as long as 50 years, with the implication that distribution is already pretty well stabilized.

The news from the blackberry field coincided with a series of CDEFA surveys showing a roughly fourfold increase in the number of LBAM trappings in the state over the last year, and as high as tenfold in select areas.

Was the moth on the move, with another war over spraying about to begin?

No Surprises for Most in Ag Biz

If the media were shocked about such an incident, Commissioner Corbishley was not. He said such an infestation was bound to happen.

Blackberries, unlike raspberries and strawberries, are perennial plants, most of which stay in the ground for five years. As such, they have a prolonged buildup of insects – "There's everything in there; a zoological park," according to Bolda.

They also like the protection of enclosed spaces, and this field was "tunneled," i.e. covered with a heavy gauge plastic. Finally, it was an early

bearing variety of blackberry, so many rival food sources had yet to ripen.

However, the naysaying began almost immediately.

One blog response to Bolda's posting immediately chalked it all up to an ongoing CDEFA conspiracy, but many of the objections were more sober. A lot of those centered around the population statistics.

David Cavanaugh is owner of Cavanaugh Color nursery in Watsonville and holds the office of second vice president of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau. He said that, "Actually, the amount of leafrollers at my nursery has diminished rather than gone up. ... The fact we're seeing more than we have in the past means we are seeing cyclical variations in populations or they are just spreading to more areas."

Until now, nursery products have been considered to be the primary vector for distribution of the LBAM.

Dr. Daniel Harder, director of the UCSC Arboretum and a frequent critic of the state's Light Brown Apple Moth Program, agrees with Cavanaugh. Besides its own nursery, the Arboretum monitors apple moth populations through traps in San Francisco, the Peninsula and Watsonville.