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USDA needs to do more research on the potential environmental effects before it would approve the release, Hawkins said. The wasps will not bother monarch butterflies and would not be released near threatened or endangered plants or insects, he said.

Aerial spraying opponents encouraged the government to continue to examine such alternatives.

"We applaud the CDEA for its willingness to test safer eradication measures, but we are utterly dismayed that the state of California, under Governor Schwarzenegger's leadership, continues to carry out a potentially grave experiment by spraying human beings with untested pesticides," said Lori Cioffi of LBAMspray.com in a recent release.

Organic solutions like the wasp and bacteria also address a shortcoming of aerial applications by reaching the insect before they do damage.

"Well-developed larvae within leaf rolls, between fruit in clusters and in grape bunches, are protected from contact with chemicals. High levels of control are often possible only with repeated applications of insecticide," according to BioResources in Australia, the moth's native country.

The light brown apple moth can live on an estimated 2,000 kinds of plants and its larvae cause damage to fruit, berries and some ornamental plants.

Fearing extensive quarantines against California plants and produce, the state declared a state of emergency and began aerial spraying of the pheromone compound in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties last fall. Hundreds of residents protested the action, and more than 600 reported symptoms of illness following the spraying.

The county and city of Santa Cruz have sued the state after the state refused to prepare an environmental impact report prior to spraying. That lawsuit has yet to be heard. ■