

Meeting Summaries

Intro

CCM and Bayer Crop Science hosted six ACP/HLB strategy and prevention meetings throughout California in an effort to keep the citrus industry unified on possible steps moving forward in the prevention of ACP and HLB. All six meetings included a panel moderated by CCM's President Joel Nelsen. The panelists included Victoria Hornbaker, CDFA Program Manager for the Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Program; Nick Hill, Chairman for the Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Program or Kevin Severns, Secretary/Treasurer for the Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Program; Neil McRoberts or Matt Daughtery, UC Riverside Cooperative Extension. The three meetings in Southern California also included three Florida growers to give insight on their experiences, failures, and successes. Around 350 people attended these meetings.

Summary

Each meeting touched on the same major topics including the Quarantine Area Designation, Mitigation Steps for Moving Forward, Enforcement, Outreach/Training, Mandatory vs. Voluntary Approaches, and Response to an HLB Find in a Commercial Grove.

The first agreement from all six meetings is that the committee's proposed quarantine structure is not going to cut it. Everyone agreed that a restructured quarantine was necessary. CCM proposed separating SLO County north from Santa Barbara and Ventura. That seemed amenable to all. It was also recommended that LA County be treated as a separate entity because of the HLB finds and that too was acceptable. Coachella and Imperial Valley growers sought separation from the Riverside and San Diego production areas because of their mandated program. Complications ensued as to how and why to separate Ventura from Santa Barbara and creating separate zones or areas within the San Joaquin Valley. There were no natural barriers as in Coachella and Riverside nor are there existing mandatory programs that warrant separation. Neil McRoberts informed the groups that ACP does not do well above 2,300 feet, giving California many natural barriers. Because of this information, it is even more crucial to move fruit/equipment/people without ACP catching a ride to areas they would not be able to access on their own. A handful of producers thought the solution would be to stop all fruit movement across these natural barriers. This could create problems in areas without the packinghouse capacity to pack all of their fruit in the same area it is grown and could create shortages for the packinghouses that pack a lot of fruit grown in various areas.

When the topic of mitigation steps started, attendees had an array of ideas. Some of the ideas included coordinated area wide sprays, spray and move, field clean, clean bins/equipment, tarp, and wet wash. Most people liked the idea of having multiple options to choose from in order to move their fruit. Wet wash is very effective but it also causes more damage to the fruit. This caused some concern, but was not ruled out completely as a viable option to move fruit. Coordinated area wide sprays can be very effective, but the compliance rate would need to be extremely high. The Florida panel touched on this subject and said the lower the compliance rate, the faster ACP develops in your groves and the faster

you lose your trees to HLB. Imperial County is currently implementing coordinated area wide sprays and has seen very positive results. Tulare County growers expressed the attitude that they will do anything they need to do to prevent ACP and HLB from taking over. Their only concern was making sure their neighbor would be participating and doing just as much.

Another major agreement is the need for stronger enforcement. Local government, the Rural Ag Crimes Task Force and CHP should be utilized to enforce tarping on all fruit movement, clean bins distributed to groves and documentation for recommended spray programs. The failure to have proper documentation, clean bins and tarped loads could lead to the loss of compliance agreements and the prohibition of the designated load from reaching its intended destination.

Most attendees agreed that tougher enforcement was necessary; however this did not mean they were enamored to the idea of mandatory government enforcement. Unfortunately voluntary programs almost never reach 100% compliance. According to the Florida panel, low levels of ACP cannot be acceptable as that will still be detrimental. Mandatory programs in California may differ between regions depending on the amount of ACP pressure faced. Areas with high ACP populations may need to take more precautions than an area with low ACP populations.

Since California has significant movement of fruit, workers, and equipment, it is very important to have an outreach and training program. The map of ACP detections clearly shows that the insects are being moved along major highways. CCPDMC is putting together a train the trainer program for employers to start training their employees on the importance of having clean bags, equipment, and bins. The psyllids travel on both leafy material *and* fruit, but only feed on the leafy materials. It is critical not to move the leafy materials as you move from one grove to the next, especially if they are in different quarantine areas. Multiple people brought up the topic of organic v. conventional farming to the Florida panel to get an answer from actual experience. Their answer was simple; if you let ACP in your grove, it will take your business. Florida used to have organic farmers, and they were very good and tried extremely hard to fight HLB, but these groves were among the first to succumb to HLB and brought down the groves next to them. Whether you have an organic grove or a conventional grove, having ACP will eventually take away your business and will take the businesses around you.

The tough question asked at every meeting was what will your response be when HLB is found in a commercial grove? California is still ahead of the disease so we can learn from the mistakes of Florida and Texas but need to create a new plan to stay ahead. The Florida panel believed that tree removals for HLB positive trees are still the most effective way for California to stop the spread of HLB. Attendees agreed that the removal of the HLB positive trees was necessary, but the amount of surrounding trees that may need to get pulled without confirming they are HLB positive is still undecided.