VENTURA COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

Ventura County AGRICULTURAL Commissioner
Serving Ventura County Since 1895

In this issue:

- What's New
- Who is new
- IPM Corner
- News from the Various Divisions

First Quarter Newsletter-2019

What's New

There is exciting news from the Agricultural Commissioners Office as several new programs are proposed for the current and the coming fiscal year. The Commissioner's request for an increase in appropriations and several new positions was approved by the Board of Supervisors and there will be seven brand new positions between the two offices in Santa Paula and Camarillo, to administer several new programs.

In recent years there have been increased concerns over losses of honeybees throughout the United States due to mortality from certain pesticides, bee diseases, pests (primarily mites), that attack honeybees and probably other unknown causes. Losses in honeybee vitality have been increasing over the past fifteen years. A new funding source at the state level will authorize $1.5 million to be distributed to Agricultural Commissioners to be spent protecting pollinators and the beekeeping industry from theft, pests, diseases, lack of adequate forage and avoidable exposures to pesticides. Ventura County will be receiving $66,400 for the next fiscal year to carry out what is being called the **BEE SAFE PROGRAM.**

Newly introduced invasive species such as the Asian Citrus Psyllid (ACP), Light Brown Apple Moth (LBAM), Invasive Shot-Hole Borers (ISHB), Peach Fruit Flies, and Guava Fruit Flies that were first detected in neighboring counties have recently been detected in Ventura County. These pests can be transported by inadvertent movement of plant materials from infested areas.

Strawberries are once again the highest value crop in Ventura County

"The value of Ventura County Agriculture was worth over $2 billion dollars in 2018 according to the latest annual crop report submitted in July of 2019. Ventura ranks number 9 in value among counties statewide.

Chief Deputy

Korinne Bell

Recently Promoted

Deputy Commissioner

The Commissioner's Office has been without a permanent Deputy Agricultural Commissioner to manage the Pesticide Enforcement Division for over 18 months.. Andy Calderwood was chosen from a field of talented candidates in February. Andy was promoted from his previous position of Senior Agricultural Inspector.

Andy grew up in Carpintería, in Santa Barbara County. He attended Santa Barbara City

VENTURA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

College , where he developed his life-long love of insect diversity. He transferred to UC Santa Barbara to study biochemistry, but ended up with a degree in Entomology from UC Riverside. While at UC, he supported himself by umpiring softball and baseball games,

During the 90's, he worked for the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, first as part of a team that developed the Cartwright exhibit hall, *Interactions-Plants and Invertebrates of the Santa Barbara Area,* and then doing shows where he says "I handled scorpions, black widows, and tarantulas. He has a small collection of mammal skeletons and a very large collection of more than 23,000 Bee Flies (DIPTERA: BOMBYLIIDAE) taken mostly in the West.

Picture of Andy at his desk

Andy joined the County Agricultural Commissioner's office as an insect trapper in late 1999, becoming an inspector / biologist

The grower-initiated ACP area-wide management program has resulted in a strong preventative program to control this serious vector of the industry-destroying HLB. It has also resulted in complaints from concerned growers and informed residents. Orchards that are abandoned without managing pests can allow a pest reservoir to build up. These neighboring growers, residents, the Ventura County Farm Bureau, California Citrus Mutual, and the State's Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Program staff have expressed concerns and their desire for the Commissioner to initiate an **ABANDONED ORCHARDS ABATEMENT PROGRAM.**

More than 4.5 million tons of green waste is generated in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties annually. Much of this is hauled into Ventura County for use on farms. Improperly composted green waste may carry some of the invasive pests found recently in Southern California, along with other quarantine diseases such as *Phytopthora ramorum*, a.k.a. Sudden Oak Death and insects such as Invasive Shot-hole Borers. The **GREEN WASTE MONITORING PROGRAM** will start with outreach and education to achieve compliance for cleanliness of the green waste hauled into Ventura County.

Greenwaste Management and Apiary Inspection are to be added to the duties of the Agricultural Commissioner

VENTURA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

Alternatives to Anti-Coagulant Baits

The Ventura County Watershed Protection District (WPD) developed and completed a Raptor Pilot Study to determine if owls and hawks can be attracted to flood-control facilities and reduce the ground squirrel populations on levees and dams. WPD maintains 56 dams and over 40 miles of levees which are highly susceptible to rodent burrow damage from ground squirrels and gophers. The Pilot Study was initiated in compliance with the Ventura County Board of Supervisors directive to reduce or eliminate the use of anticoagulant rodenticides. The primary study goal was to compare the extent of ground squirrel damage along a levee reach where raptor perches were installed with a similar reach where traditional anticoagulant bait stations were used. Gopher burrow damage was observed but not included in the study data because anticoagulant bait is not applied to treat gophers. WPD completed the Raptor Pilot Study in two phases. During Phase I, raptor perches and nesting facilities were installed along a 6,000 foot reach of Revolon Slough levee in Oxnard, California (Raptor Test Site). The enhancements were designed to attract owls and hawks from the vicinity to the levee. This reach was compared to a similar downstream 6,000 foot reach of Revolon Slough (Control Site) where diphacinone bait was applied through bait stations. During Phase II, the Control Site was modified by adding raptor perches and removing the bait stations. Weekly monitoring of the perches, tracking of new rodent burrows, raptor sightings, adjacent agricultural use, scat, and collection of raptor pellets occurred at these reaches in 2016 and 2017. Observations and raptor pellet collection found that Red-tailed Hawks, Great Horned Owls, and Barn Owls were actively using the perches. Bones from 8 ground squirrels, 44 gophers, and 1 muskrat were found in the 107 raptor pellets collected from the study area. This demonstrated active hunting by both hawks and owls. Monitoring during Phase I of the Pilot Study in 2016 found that the Raptor Test Site had 145 new ground squirrel burrows and the Control Site had 430 new burrows. During corresponding monitoring periods between Phase I and Phase II, 206 burrows were observed at the Control Site and 110 new burrows were observed at the "Modified" Control Site (a 47% reduction). Adjacent agricultural use was monitored but did not change significantly during the study. Ground squirrels preference for certain types of crops (such as berries and dark green vegetable) over diphacinone-treated oats appeared to have significantly limited the effectiveness of the rodenticide. The study estimated an annual saving of $7,500 per levee mile by converting from the current rodenticide program to a raptor program. The net savings are primarily due to the reduction in damage repairs predicted from the study results also considered inspection, baiting, and perch installation costs. It was recommended that WPD develop a system-wide raptor program by identifying flood-control facilities with adjacent raptor habitat areas and replacing their bait stations with raptor perches.

As a result of the study the Watershed Protection District has installed owl boxes along miles of levee. Kids from Boy Scout Troop 820 in Camarillo worked on one

CEQA EQUIVALENCY

In evaluating the proposed use of a restricted material, the CAC must **"determine if a substantial adverse environmental impact may result from the use of such pesticide,"** and if so,

1. Must consider whether feasible alternative pesticides or mitigation measures would substantially reduce the adverse impact.

2 Where feasible alternatives or mitigation measures are available, the CAC must

A) deny the application or B) condition approval on use of the mitigation measure.

Each commissioner is responsible for knowing local conditions and utilizing such knowledge in making these determinations.

VENTURA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Happenings in our Various Divisions

Standardization

Inspectors received training in the produce standards for potatoes, watermelons and cherries, the week of June 3rd. Hollow heart is a defect in potatoes that can only be detected by cutting a certain number of potatoes from a given lot. The standards for cherries and watermelons are based on the color of the fruit. Most of the potatoes, cherries and watermelons come from the Central Valley. They are inspected at farmers markets and roadside stands.

Asian Citrus Psyllid

This year we collected data for CDFA which was used to approve a new cleaning method for the movement of bulk citrus to other areas in the state. Our staff has issued violations for improper tarping and excess leaves in bulk citrus loads, which can spread the Asian Citrus Psyllid. ACP is the vector of Huanglongbing (HLB), also known as citrus greening disease, a uncurable and deadly disease of citrus trees. We are also working on several abatements of abandoned and uncared for citrus orchards that are harbors for disease and other pests.

Leaving crop residue in a field after harvest of many field crops can serve to increase the population of Lygus Bug, resulting in complaints from neighboring property owners in residential areas as well as owners of adjacent crops. Proper cleanup as well as proper orchard maintenance is part of being a "good neighbor"

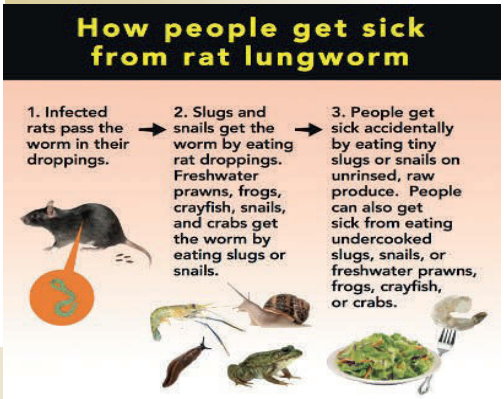
Pesticide Use Enforcement

About 3/4 of the investigations done by the PUE staff when someone is exposed to a pesticide involve antimicrobials. Antimicrobials are classified as pesticides by the USEPA and include many products used to disinfect surfaces in restaurants, medical and dental offices and packing houses. Most commonly exposure to these materials causes minor to moderate skin or eye damage. Recently the PUE staff investigated an incident where equipment malfunction involving pool equipment caused symptoms in 13 children at a swim school. The staff also investigated an exposure at a local restaurant where a disinfectant containing bleach was accidently left in a water pitcher resulting in exposure to a customer.

Quarantine and Pest Prevention

Over the past year, our Pest Exclusion group has intercepted numerous shipments found to be harboring invasive weed seeds and pests. Invasive weeds and pests are not only a threat to our agricultural industry and the environment but can also pose a threat to human health. One shipment we inspected was found to have a type of flatworm that can carry the nematode commonly known as "Rat Lung". This can cause an extremely serious, and sometimes fatal disease in humans.

Angiostrongylus cantonensis is a parasitic nematode that commonly resides in the pulmonary arteries of rats, giving it the common name rat lungworm. Fortunately, the flatworm found was not infected with this nematode.



VENTURA COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

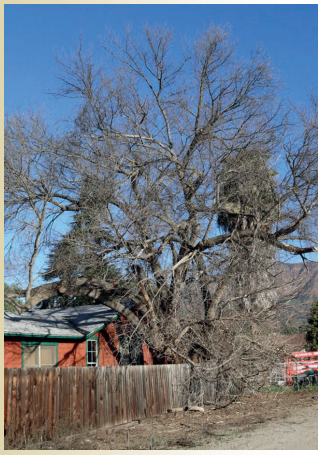
Administration

The Commissioner's office in Camarillo will be increasng in size next month. The office space to the north of the existing facility has been vacant for several years. Commissioner Williams has secured this space and renovated it to accommodate additional staff and in addition to allow the existing staff some much needed additional cubicles. It will also provide two new large conference rooms to host groups who have their regular meetings at the Commissioner's Office. One of these is the Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee. (APAC) This is a five member committee appointed by the Baard of Supervisors to advise them on issues effecting agriculture in Ventura County. APAC meets on the second Wednesday of the month. Meetings are open to the public and agendas are sent to interested parties who have notified our office of their wish to receive the agendas.

Pest Management Division

One of the programs under this division deals with stopping the spread and mitigating the impact of Invasive Shot Hole Borers (ISHB).

Shot Hole Borers are beetles that tunnel into hardwood trees in order to lay their eggs When the larvae hatch out they feed on the tree, weakening and eventually killing it. In addition a number of diseases are spread by different species of the beetle. The beetles along with several other invasive pests are often spread by the movement of greenwaste. Recent state legislation has made funds available to cure or suppress the spread of diseases associated with ISHB. Commissioner Williams co-chairs a statewide subcommittee to identify new infestations and recommend appropriate responses for suppression. Some things being considered are audits of companies who haul greenwaste, compost or mulch into the county; surveillance and inspection of shipments; trapping at processing facilities, places where greenwaste is spread, high risk plant nurseries and riparian areas; and visual surveys by staff and volunteers in urban areas and parks. Heavily infested trees may need to be removed. The subcommittee will have to develop a decision matrix for the removal of infested trees, establish procedures for securing the necessary permits, and identify possible options for saving high value trees. A major component of this program will have to involve public outreach, and collaboration with other stakeholders such as fire departments, conservancy groups, farmers and ranchers, foresters, Public Works and the UC Cooperative Extension.



This photo-graph of a large tree damaged by ISHB was taken by John Kabashima of the UC Cooperative Extension. The tree will have to be removed as it is threaten-ing the adjacent house

VENTURA COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

Andy continued... the following summer and a senior ag inspector in 2001. He spent the better part of the first year sitting on an upturned nursery pot and looking at the underside of leaf after leaf after leaf, searching for egg masses of the Glassy Winged Sharpshooter. He took an interest in pesticide use enforcement early, although he worked in all programs In 2009 he became the supervisor of the pesticide use enforcement team.

In 2013, Andy left the department and spent the next five years working at a variety of jobs including construction, school janitor and Uber Driver. He spent time in his favorite destinations in Mexico. He says "Tabasco, Colima and Michoacán are the only states I have not visited."

Andy returned to the Agricultural Commissioner's Office in 2018. He worked in Pesticide Use Enforcement initially and was then put on special assignment dealing with bees, orchard abatement, green waste, and industrial hemp –a list of new programs that would be added to the existing duties of the Agricultural Commissioner in 2019. In February he was appointed Deputy Ag Commissioner in charge of PUE, Currently he is still keeping track of the hemp and bees. The Commissioner's office has an open recruitment for an additional deputy and supervisor for the recently added programs.

alternatives and mitigations continued..project in the Conejo Mountain Basin in Newbury Park. The basin is also known as a dam, which holds water during storms to prevent flooding. The boys assisted the Ventura County Public Works Agency to install the rectangular -shaped wooden boxes with a large round hole in them. The Boy Scouts built the owl boxes to attract owls to levees and dams so that these raptors can control the rodent population that could otherwise destroy the flood control system.

Anticoagulant rodenticides, which cause rodents who consume them to bleed to death internally, had been used for control until the County discovered that hawks and owls do a better job. Using raptors instead of poisons may also help other wildlife. Optimally secondary poisoning of high level predators is reduced. Toxicant contained in the bait may travel up the food chain and contribute to the incidence of diseases in predators like bobcats and mountain lions. If the rodent dies above ground and is eaten by one of these animals, the toxicant is then in the system of the predator. Levels of anticoagulant have been discovered when the predators are autopsied.

FARMWORKER RESOURCE PRGRAM
OFFICE LOCATIONS AND HOURS OF OPERATION

OXNARD	SANTA PAULA	FILLMORE
1400 Vanguard Dr.	725 E. Main St.	828 Ventura St. #200
MWF 11am-7pm	T&TH 11am-7pm	T&TH 11am-7pm
1st Saturday 11am-7pm	3rd Saturday 11am-7pm	

www.vchsa.org/farmworker-resources
Phone (805) 385-1899
Email HAS-AGFRP@ventura.org

FARMWORKER RESOURCE PROGRAM

- ◊ Serve as liaisons for farmworkers, employers and other representatives within the agricultural community
- ◊ Provide valuable resource information available through state, county and local programs
- ◊ Help facilitate resolutions when needed; by reviewing federal, state, and county laws, regulations and policies to assist farmworkers and employers to reach collaborative solutions related to workplace conditions
- ◊ Develop, administer and evaluate educational and marketing tools regarding programs and laws that serve as resources for the agricultural community
- ◊ Available to assist in English, Spanish, Mixteco