

MEXICAN FRUIT FLY INFESTATION DETECTED IN ESCONDIDO AREA OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY

A quarantine will be imposed, but regulatory requirements for Hass Avocados will be less stringent than those of previous quarantines

On November 6, five Mexican fruit flies were discovered in traps on two residential properties in the vicinity of Bear Valley Parkway and Oak Hill Drive in Escondido. The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), immediately contacted the California Avocado Commission, and we reminded officials that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) had previously agreed to modify harvest and handling requirements for Hass avocados based on scientific research that showed the variety was less susceptible to Mexfly attack than previously believed.

USDA and CDFA have expanded insect trapping in the area to detect any additional flies. Once the boundaries of the infested area have been determined, a quarantine will be imposed to prevent the spread of the infestation (look for quarantine boundaries to be posted at www.avocado.org/growers as soon as they are available).

Agricultural shipments from the quarantine zone will be regulated to minimize movement of potentially infested commodities. Locally grown crops such as citrus and minor avocado varieties (NOT Hass) will be regulated. Hass is thick skinned and not a good host for this pest. Crews will work with local growers, pack houses, transporters, farmers' markets and other related facilities over the next several weeks to ensure compliance with the quarantine regulations. While Hass on the tree is not considered a preferred host to Mexfly, once removed from the tree, certain protocols MUST be followed from the field to the packing facility.

Conditions for movement of Hass avocados from quarantined areas:

(a) Orchard sanitation and safeguarding requirements:

- (1) Hass avocado fruit that has fallen from the trees and may not be included in field boxes of fruit to be packed for shipping.
- (2) Harvested Hass avocados must be placed in field boxes or containers of field boxes that are marked to show the location of the orchard. The avocados must be moved from the orchard to the packinghouse within 3 hours of harvest or they must be protected from fruit fly infestation until moved.
- (3) Hass avocados must be protected from fruit fly infestations during their movement from the orchard to the packinghouse and must be accompanied by a field record indicating the location of the orchard where the avocados originated.

(b) Packinghouse requirements. If Hass avocados are packed at a packinghouse inside the quarantined area, the following conditions must also be met:

- (1) All openings to the outside must be covered by screening with openings of not more than 1.6 mm or by some other barrier that prevents insects from entering the packinghouse.
- (2) The packinghouse must have double doors at the entrance to the facility and at the interior entrance to the area where the avocados are packed.

- (3) The identity of the avocados must be maintained from field boxes or containers to the shipping boxes so the avocados can be traced back to the orchard in which they were grown.
- (4) The Hass avocados must be packed in boxes or crates. The boxes or crates must be clearly marked with the identity of the grower and the packinghouse.
- (5) The boxes must be placed in a refrigerated truck or refrigerated container and remain in that truck or container while in transit through the quarantined area. Prior to leaving the packinghouse, the truck or container must be secured with a seal that will be broken when the truck or container is opened. Once sealed, the refrigerated truck or refrigerated container must remain unopened until it is outside the quarantined area.
- (6) Any avocados that have not been packed or loaded into a refrigerated truck or refrigerated container by the end of the workday must be kept in the screened packing area.

Over the next few days, inspectors will also begin the labor-intensive task of picking and cutting into citrus and other fruits in the neighborhood to inspect for Mexican fruit fly larvae.

Within a few weeks, CDFA plans to begin releasing approximately 4.5 million sterile Mexican fruit flies each week by plane over approximately nine square miles around the infested sites. This method has been used successfully to eradicate many fruit fly infestations in California since the technique was developed in the 1980s. A similar project is currently underway in the Dixon area of Northern California to eradicate a recently discovered Mediterranean fruit fly infestation. Sterile Medfly releases also occur throughout the year in the Los Angeles basin in order to combat the repeated infestations that occur there.

While the State awaits the supply of sterile flies, short-term treatments have been applied in the immediate infested area starting, November 8, to prevent any additional flies from spreading. CDFA will first treat the properties where the flies were found, then the adjacent yards. Once these properties are treated, the crews will treat all other properties in a 200-meter radius from the original find sites.

The Commission will continue to work closely with CDFA and USDA to assist growers in the quarantine area. Once quarantine boundaries have been delineated, workshops will be scheduled to provide growers with the latest information on proper regulatory procedures to ensure the unimpeded flow of fruit to market.