
Pests and Diseases

Reducing the Threat of Laurel Wilt Disease to the California Avocado Industry

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Project Objective

The objective of this project is to educate and inform California avocado growers on laurel wilt disease (LWD) symptoms and the risks of introduction to California. Accomplishment of this objective consists of a two-pronged approach through: 1) developing a collaborative relationship with researchers working on LWD in the southeastern U.S. in order to stay up-to-date on the disease status, and 2) constructing and delivering informational and educational tools and programs through the extension service to stakeholders in the California avocado industry.

1) Developing collaborative relationships

In February 2011, the primary investigator, Akif Eskalen, traveled to the University of Florida to meet with LWD researchers and discuss the disease status and current management strategies. The information collected on this trip was then related to the California avocado growers via various outreach channels noted below.

In addition, three University of Florida researchers, Drs. Jorge Peña, Jonathan Crane and Randy Ploetz, were invited to California in October 2011 to give a series of grower seminars entitled “Current Status of Laurel Wilt and the Redbay Ambrosia Beetle”. The seminars were held in three different locations in order to accommodate as many growers as possible and included San Luis Obispo, Ventura and Temecula on 10/18/11, 10/19/11 and 10/20/11, respectively.

2) Constructing and delivering informational and educational tools and programs

A web site was designed that includes information on the LWD fungal pathogen, the insect vector which carries it, the symptoms of the disease and the threat to the California avocado industry. The site can be found at <http://laurelwilt.ucr.edu>.

A LWD color handout was developed and is available as a PDF file for downloading and printing at http://laurelwilt.ucr.edu/minutes/new_laurel_wilt_handout.pdf. This handout details all the above information and includes color pictures of disease symptoms. The handout is a useful reference guide for growers and farm advisors.

Researchers in Florida formed a LWD working group to assemble research, regulatory, outreach/extension and industry expertise to review the current status and chart effective management strategies to mitigate the potential impact of the beetle vector and LWD disease on the Florida avocado industry. The Eskalen lab has made the minutes of the working group meetings available at <http://laurelwilt.ucr.edu/workgroup.html>. The latest working group meeting took place on 11/15/11 and minutes are expected to be posted to this site at the end of November 2011.

In 2012, an in-service workshop is planned for county and state extension workers the purpose of which is to teach farm advisors and others in the field how to recognize LWD symptoms, sample from suspected trees as well as pack and ship samples back to the Eskalen lab.

The California avocado industry has an advantage in being able to watch and learn from how the Florida avocado industry is dealing with LWD. Keeping close collaborative ties with Florida researchers and passing new information on to the California avocado industry stakeholders is an important factor in monitoring for LWD in California.