



## HLB find triggers quarantine in Texas

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By Vicky Boyd

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has established a permanent, 5-mile quarantine around a San Juan, Texas, citrus grove that tested positive for citrus greening in January.

The rule, effective Sept. 1, regulates the movement of host plants within or out of the quarantine area, according to an Aug. 9 *Federal Register* notice.

It affects a total of 900 acres, according to APHIS.

The new rule replaces a temporary quarantine enacted by the Texas Department of Agriculture after citrus greening, also known as huanglongbing or HLB, was detected Jan. 13 in a commercial citrus grove in Hidalgo County, Texas.

Subsequent surveys and testing confirmed the disease in a neighboring grove as well.

Ray Prewett, president of Texas Citrus Mutual, Mission, said the industry believes the new rule is more feasible while at the same time reducing the risk of spreading HLB and the Asian citrus psyllid that transmits it.

"It's very practical and yet more acceptable to growers," he said.

The old rule required that leaves and stems be removed from all fruit originating from within the quarantine zone before it could be moved to outside packinghouses or processors.

But Prewett said the requirement was more difficult than it sounds, increasing harvest costs by 50% to 100%.

The new leaf-removal requirement only applies to infected groves.

Otherwise, the new rule requires packinghouses that receive fruit from the quarantine zone to dispose of leaves and stems in prescribed ways.

The biggest change, Prewett said, is that all groves within the quarantine zone must now be treated with an insecticide a few days before harvest.

"The biggest thing we think in reducing the risk is to be sure there aren't psyllids in the groves," he said.

HLB is spread when psyllids feed on infected leaves and then feed on healthy plants. The pre-harvest spray would significantly reduce the risk of an infected psyllid hitchhiking on fruit destined for an outside packinghouse or processor, Prewett said.

The pre-harvest spray also is on top of an area-wide psyllid control program, which involves about 85% of Rio Grande Valley citrus growers.

Under that coordinated effort, growers time their insecticidal sprays so large areas are treated at once. The theory is psyllids that flee one treated grove won't be able to seek safety in a nearby untreated grove.

Prewett said he anticipates the Texas Department of Agriculture will update its quarantine to mirror



File Photo

The Asian citrus psyllid spreads citrus greening by feeding on infected plants, then feeding on healthy ones.

APHIS'.

Citrus Mutual plans to explain the new requirements at a grower meeting, Sept. 7, Prewett said.

That will provide growers enough time to implement them before harvest, which is expected to start in early October, he said.

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