



Psyllids but no HLB detected in Texas

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The Asian citrus psyllid continues to pose a threat to the Texas citrus industry, but the good news is that the pest has not yet imported the dreaded citrus greening disease — also known as huanglongbing.

HLB has devastated trees in Florida, and lurks just south of the border, said Ray Prewett, president of Mission-based Texas Citrus Mutual.

Growers were on edge in mid-October, after a “hot” psyllid was detected in Mexico, not far from the Rio Grande Valley, where much of the state’s citrus crop grows.

The finding was the closest yet to the Texas growing area.

Prewett said he would not disclose the exact location unless it’s proven the psyllid actually was carrying the disease.

Preliminary testing indicated the presence of HLB, but a second test failed to confirm it. Further tissue analysis was being conducted.

Meanwhile, members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service continue to test psyllids and citrus tissue in Texas and take samples.

Texas Citrus Mutual has been cooperating with APHIS in managing an area-wide psyllid control program in commercial citrus.

“We have been monitoring population levels of psyllids, and the numbers have gone down significantly during that period,” Prewett said.

The thrust of the effort is two dormant spray events — one when the trees are going into dormancy in the fall and another just before they come out of dormancy in the spring.

The next treatment is scheduled for November, when all growers will be encouraged to spray within a window of about three weeks.

It’s important that growers spray within the same timeframe.

“If you treat and your neighbor doesn’t, after the pesticide residue is gone from your trees, the psyllid could come back in from your neighbor,” Prewett said.

During the fall of 2010 and spring of 2011, 85% of commercial citrus acreage was treated on a voluntary basis, Prewett said.

While the government provides funding for some trapping, laboratory analysis of samples and grower outreach, it does not subsidize the spraying program.

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