



Legislation to curb spread of citrus pest proposed

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In an effort to protect jobs and productivity in one of the state's largest economic engines, Assembly Republican Leader Connie Conway of Tulare sent a letter Thursday to Governor Jerry Brown urging him to sign legislation to help the citrus industry stop the spread of a disease that has destroyed crops around the globe.

Assembly Bill 571 by 43th Assembly District representative Mike Gatto, would provide \$5 million in funding to produce insects to help eradicate Asian Citrus Psyllid, which carries Huanglongbing disease. The legislation would also help secure additional federal funding to fight HBL, funding Conway said is uncertain and dwindling.

Gatto introduced the legislation in February when parts of Tulare County were in quarantine because at that time three psyllids had been found in three traps near Strathmore and Terra Bella. Since then, six psyllids were found in three traps southeast of Porterville and earlier this month the first discovery of live psyllids was made in the backyard of a home in Dinuba.

A good portion of eastern Porterville stretching to Terra Bella has been placed under a citrus quarantine to stem the spread of the pest which carries a disease fatal to all types of citrus. With the find in Dinuba, a quarantine is pending there as well.

"The Golden State is known around the world for its citrus fruits. If California growers are crippled by this disease, it will hurt the state's economy as a whole. I represent Tulare County, where almost half of the state's oranges are grown and where there are two quarantines due to this disease."

Citrus is the No. 3 crop in terms of value in Tulare County with a value of more than \$750 million in 2012. Most of that value is in navel and Valencia oranges.

In her letter, Conway noted the importance of the citrus industry.

"The citrus industry accounts for 12,000 jobs in California, has \$2 billion in gross revenue, and creates another \$1.5 billion in economic activity for our state. Without your signature on AB 571, all of this is at risk of being destroyed by one small bug."

She also noted the disease has decimated the citrus industry in Florida, forcing the removal of 250,000 acres of citrus trees there.

The majority of the \$5 million is intended to be used to produce a beneficial insect, the tamarixia radiata, which will reduce the ACP population in Southern California.

"Using a beneficial insect protects backyard citrus trees, of which there are more than there are of commercial citrus trees, and reduces reliance on chemical treatments," noted Conway in her letter.

She also noted the California citrus industry is proud to have funded the University of California research to find the tamarixia and is hopeful that the production and release of it will make this citrus program as successful as the sterile medfly program.

Gov. Brown has until October 13 to act upon AB 571.

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