

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

TODD STAPLES
COMMISSIONER



June 18, 2008

The Honorable Ed Schafer
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Schafer:

I am writing to express grave concern about the detection of citrus greening disease (Huanglongbing) and its vector Asian citrus psyllid not only in the first state outside of Florida, but more concerning, in a state bordering Texas – the U.S.'s third largest citrus producer. Many have seen the devastation the disease has caused to citrus crops in Florida. While the psyllid is present in Texas, all citrus greening surveys have shown the disease to be not present. However, introduction of the disease into Texas could be very perilous to Texas citrus. The U.S. citrus industry needs their government now more than ever to implement stringent safeguard measures that will prevent the further spread of this devastating disease beyond Florida and Louisiana.

I urge the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to immediately quarantine those Louisiana parishes where the psyllid or the disease is present. Such interim or emergency quarantine could be amended if the vector or the disease is found in additional parishes. It is of utmost importance to place immediate restrictions on movement of the vector and the psyllid hosts from infested parishes. Outreach efforts must be undertaken immediately to educate homeowners and tourists in the infested area that it is illegal to move the host plants (primarily citrus and Murraya species) outside the quarantined area. Checkpoints should be established at strategic locations on the border of infested parishes to ensure compliance with the quarantine regulations, both for commercial shippers as well as for homeowners.

While Texas regulations prohibit entry of citrus, Murraya and related host plants into Texas, on a few occasions, Louisiana-grown citrus nursery plants have been intercepted at our temporary checkpoints (roadstations). Furthermore, some of the citrus nursery businesses maintain citrus nurseries both in Louisiana and Texas, enhancing the possibility of disease introduction into Texas, particularly into citrus nurseries in the Houston area. Furthermore, the state of Louisiana does not have a citrus budwood certification program, obviously due to its small citrus acreage. However, this increases the risk of introduction of the diseased citrus plants into Texas. Consequently, intensive surveys are needed in the Houston area for citrus greening. The sooner the disease is detected; the better will be the chance for a successful eradication of this disease.



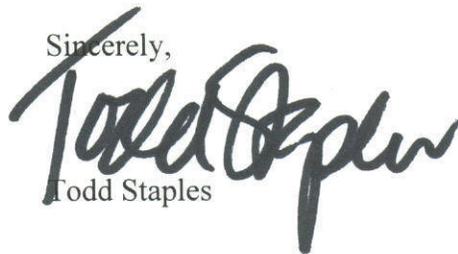
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The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) appreciates the funding USDA has provided for detecting citrus greening in the Lower Rio Grande Valley dooryards, for the psyllid management strategy using insecticides and for biological control of the psyllid. However, finding citrus greening in a second state, and now in a state bordering Texas, is very worrisome. With your leadership, we must eradicate citrus greening from Louisiana, establish immediate quarantine measures, provide added assistance to ensure compliance with the quarantine, launch an outreach effort to educate the public about the quarantine, provide assistance for intensive surveys for citrus greening in the Houston area and encourage development of a citrus budwood certification program in Louisiana.

I understand that USDA and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry are conducting a delimiting survey around the area where citrus greening was detected. While we await results of this survey, I strongly urge USDA to consider a more aggressive regulatory response than the one administered in Florida where the primary response was regulating the nursery industry which handled host plants for the vector or the disease. If the survey reveals the disease is not widespread in New Orleans, I urge USDA to consider removing infected trees and implementing an aggressive psyllid control program.

TDA stands ready to assist USDA in preventing the introduction of citrus greening into Texas. Please contact me at (512) 463-7476 or Dr. Shashank Nilakhe, Texas' State Entomologist, at (512) 463-1145 if you have any questions or wish to discuss added measures, which could be undertaken jointly against this disease.

Sincerely,



Todd Staples

TS/SN/cl

cc: Mr. Bruce Knight, Under Secretary, Marketing and Regulatory Programs, USDA