

# Laurel Wilt/ Redbay Ambrosia Beetle Working Group Update Spring 2014



The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) continues to work closely with the avocado industry and the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF-IFAS) to review the current status and chart effective management strategies to mitigate the potential impact of the redbay ambrosia beetle and laurel wilt disease on the Florida avocado industry. A working group was formed in 2009 to assemble research, regulatory, outreach/extension and industry expertise. The state's laurel wilt website can provide more detailed information on the working group and provide distribution maps of the disease.

Laurel wilt has been detected in all but 19 Florida counties affecting mostly redbay trees, but as feared, in 2012 was identified in the northern tier of the avocado production area in Miami-Dade County. Since that time approximately 35 locations, both commercial and residential, have had avocado tree samples positively identified with laurel wilt. In 2013, laurel wilt was identified in Broward County. The disease has spread rampantly throughout the state on bay and other trees in the Laurel family, eliminating any potential for mitigation measures aside from educating the public about the risks involved with moving invasive species around. State efforts are now concentrated on the economically important avocado industry concentrated in Miami-Dade County.

## Trapping /Survey Data and Diagnostics

- FDACS services 45 funnel-shaped traps every two weeks in Miami-Dade County near the commercial avocado production area. Every six weeks, 26 sticky board traps are checked.
- During the fiscal year 2013-14, 1,019 beetles were collected from the funnel traps. Two hundred and nine (209) were collected from the sticky traps.
- Entomologists identified all the beetles collected from the traps, and determined that one hundred thirty-five (135) were redbay ambrosia beetles, the vector of laurel wilt.
- There are currently 19 sentinel sites with avocado trees that area inspected monthly. Three sites were discontinued due to disease detection.
- The department has responded to 16 helpline calls this year and 13 referrals from other sources related to suspected laurel wilt disease. Out of these 29 properties, 16 were determined to have trees with laurel wilt. Thirty plant specimen samples were collected and sent to the FDACS pathology lab for diagnosis – 19 were positive for laurel wilt.

## Research

- UF/IFAS is conducting a number of research studies that involve evaluating beetle behavior as well as plant pathology and treatment options. Some encouraging results indicate that research has demonstrated that avocado fruit do not carry laurel wilt in the pulp or seeds. Also encouraging is that the beetles seem to prefer redbay trees to avocados; however, in the absence of redbay trees, avocado trees are at risk.
- An enormous amount of credit must be attributed to the avocado industry itself, including Pal Brooks of Brooks Tropicals and other growers who are conducting applied research projects and developing promising mitigation strategies. Alan Flinn, Executive Director of the Avocado Administrative Committee, (305) 247-0848, has also been instrumental in this partnership with industry and UF/IFAS.
- Research updates can be obtained from UF's Dr. Jonathan Crane (305) 246-7001 x209, (786) 255-5878 or [jhcr@ufl.edu](mailto:jhcr@ufl.edu).

## Outreach/Extension Efforts

- The state's Save the Guac program and website continue to distribute messages about steps that can be taken to prevent the introduction of harmful pests and diseases like laurel wilt. For example, simply buying local firewood and burning all firewood before leaving a campsite are easy ways to prevent the spread of wood-boring disease-bearing insects.
- For more information, contact the state's helpline at 1-888-397-1517 or contact your local Extension office for information on disease management options.
- Visit the updated Save the Guac website and share it via your social media channels: <http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Plant-Industry/Save-the-Guac>

**"The state remains committed to working closely with the avocado industry and UF researchers to find the best management programs for the control of laurel wilt," said Richard Gaskalla, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Division of Plant Industry Director. "Our survey and diagnostic efforts are only part of the equation," Gaskalla reports, "but to be successful, advances in research are critical." "Failure is not an option when it comes to Florida's vibrant avocado industry," Gaskalla added.**

For more information:

**[www.FreshFromFlorida.com](http://www.FreshFromFlorida.com)**

Helpline:

**1-888-397-1517**