

Pest Alert

DACS-P-01694

Pest Alert created 20-September-2004

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Plant Industry
Charles H. Bronson, Commissioner of Agriculture

Fruit Fly Larvae Found in Habaneros Peppers

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On August 23, 2004, a shipment of Scotch Bonnet habaneros manifested from the Netherlands was inspected at the Miami Port by USDA/PPQ Officers and found to be infested with fruit fly larvae, *Ceratitis* sp. The larvae were initially identified as likely *Ceratitis rosa*, the Natal fruit fly. However, two independent laboratories analyzed DNA of these specimens and both unambiguously ruled out Natal fruit fly and confirmed that they are *Ceratitis capitata*, the Mediterranean fruit fly. Morphological characteristics of these larvae are clearly atypical of Mediterranean fruit fly, and this finding alters our concept of the range of their physical variation. Both the Mediterranean fruit fly and the Natal fruit fly attack a wide host range of fruits and vegetables.

This shipment, which consisted of four boxes of habaneros and other host fruits, were confiscated and destroyed. Trace forwards by SITC revealed that six total shipments from the same importer entered Miami during the month of August and all but a small amount have been accounted for. One shipment consisting of 220 boxes of peppers was being delivered to a produce dealer in Jacksonville, Florida which was returned to the warehouse for safeguarding. The peppers were all manifested from the Netherlands but their origin has now been determined to be Africa.

Habanero peppers, *Capsicum* sp. or Chile peppers, are currently imported into Florida but are prohibited from several countries, including Africa.

At this time we do not have information on other stores in Florida which may have received this product. We are requesting that all state agriculture inspectors conduct inspections at all produce markets and distributors that may be selling habanero peppers. Look for signs of oviposition punctures and soft areas on the fruit.

If you suspect you may have purchased habaneros peppers from this shipment or you have habaneros peppers that have insects in or associated with them, please call the DPI help line at **888-397-1517**.



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Adam H. Putnam, Commissioner



Shipment of habaneros peppers



Shipment of habaneros peppers in carton



Close up of larvae in habanero pepper