

For Immediate Release

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**CALIFORNIA FARMERS, NURSERY OWNERS, AND BUSINESS PEOPLE
SEEK TERMINATION OF MOTH ERADICATION PROGRAM**

Decry waste of taxpayer money, economic losses for local producers

March 8, 2010 (Sonoma, CA) --- Farmers, growers, nursery owners, plant wholesalers, produce distributors, restaurant owners, and business proprietors from around California have signed a letter asking that the Light Brown Apple Moth (LBAM) eradication program be ended along with its quarantines; and that the classification of the moth be changed from Class A (serious pest) to Class C (of minor concern).

Farm Bureau member and apple grower Dave Hale (Sebastopol, CA) says "The current program accomplishes nothing except more paperwork" for farmers.

Signatories from Sonoma Valley to Yolo County to the Monterey Bay area to Fresno want the program ended because it wastes taxpayers dollars and its quarantines hurt local producers. The economic damage from LBAM has stemmed solely from government-mandated sanctions and not from the insects themselves. Since 2007, a berry grower from Watsonville, for example, might be prohibited from selling in a Marin farmers' market.

"The LBAM eradication program puts domestic producers at a disadvantage over foreign ones," says Chris Mittelstaedt, CEO of The Fruit Guys (South San Francisco, CA), which supplies fresh fruit to workplaces nationwide from regional hubs. "Our local growers are suffering under much harsher protocols imposed by our government than what their equivalents in New Zealand are subjected to when they export to the United States."

Almost \$100 million was funneled through the program in 2008. Millions more have been spent since then. Program funding and restrictions largely originate from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Laguna Farm's Scott Matheson (Sonoma, CA) says that "For an insect that has not caused any documented damage to crops, I'm really disappointed in the program's waste of taxpayer money. The classification should be changed and we should focus on other real pests. The quarantines are a real distraction for people trying to grow food for the public."

Businesses from farm-supply stores to restaurants to custom bicycle-makers have come out in support of farmers and growers, recognizing the gratuitous economic hardship inflicted by an unresolved trade dispute.

"We support our local farmers" says George Goeggel of Napa Valley's world-famous Auberge du Soleil (Rutherford, CA) restaurant.

Farmers and growers can easily manage LBAM in their fields and do not feel there is any need for government intervention. Up until now, many have been afraid to speak out for fear of retaliation from regulatory agencies.

Peggy da Silva of Veritable Vegetable (San Francisco, CA), the oldest distributor of organic produce in the United States, says "For more than 35 years, our company has supported farmers who approach pest problems in ecologically sound ways. Many smaller independent farmers have been hurt by regulations that do not respect the great skill farmers have in managing their farms, producing healthy crops, and contributing to our state's economy."

The LBAM eradication program, with its zero-tolerance policy, has meant that a single potential sighting of LBAM in a field or nursery can shut down an entire operation for weeks. DNA testing for LBAM is not yet accurate enough to definitively demarcate LBAM from its close relatives, California native leafrollers. Former California Farm Bureau Federation President Doug Mosebar has said "The trading restrictions pose a particular burden for organic farmers and for small-scale farms."

LBAM is native to Australia, and has been naturalized in New Zealand for 150 years. The moth has been established in Hawaii for almost 100 years, where it has caused no damage; it has been present in California for decades.

Almost 100 conventional and organic farms and nurseries, both large and small, have signed the letter. An equal number of business supporters of the farmers have also signed on.

Among the signatories are farmers Jim Eldon (Fiddler's Green Farm, Yolo County), Tony Coturri (Coturri Wine, Sonoma County), Dan Bambury (Catherine Bonneau Vineyard, Sonoma County), and Joe Shirmer and Stella Schlesinger (Dirty Girl Produce, Santa Cruz County); and farmer-supporters Paul Grant (The Granary, Sonoma County), Dave Straus (Sloat Garden Centers, Marin/San Francisco/Contra Costa Counties), and Kevin Sadlier (Green Jeans Garden Supply, Marin County).

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