

AG ISSUES UPDATE
Edited by Brad Hollabaugh
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Penn State Researchers Develop Stink Bug Monitoring Tool

As crop growers and homeowners brace for another year of infestations by the brown marmorated stink bug, Penn State researchers have released a Web-based tool that they hope will help enhance their understanding of this invasive insect pest. Developed in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the mapping tool is embedded in a website found at <http://stinkbug-info.org/> online.

"The goal of this tool is to give us another source of information about the population dynamics of the brown marmorated stink bug," said John Tooker, assistant professor of entomology in the College of Agricultural Sciences. Tooker developed the tool with Douglas Miller, associate professor of geography and director of the Center for Environmental Informatics in the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences.

RMA States Position on Crop Insurance for Stink Bug Damage on Fruit

As the 2010 apple crop was coming out of cold storage, it was quickly evident that there was a meaningful amount of damage from stink bugs. This damage was not readily recognized prior to storing the apples. However, the stink bug "signature" damage was quite distinctive after apples had spent some time in cold storage.

Earlier this year, Secretary of Agriculture, George Greig, addressed this concern in a letter composed to William J. Murphy, Administrator, USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA). The suggestion was set forth that RMA might keep claims open until apples are removed from cold storage since the detection of late season stink bug feeding is difficult at the time of harvest.

Mr. Murphy stipulated that "damage caused by the brown marmorated stink bug [BMSB] is an insured cause of loss provided the damage is evident before the apple production has been removed from the field and placed in cold storage". So, the issue is not whether the damage is covered by crop insurance. Rather, the detection of the injury prior to harvest is the problem.

He continued to stipulate that the "Apple Crop Provisions do not authorize storage coverage because at the time apples are removed from cold storage, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether the damage was due to an insured cause of loss (i.e., BMSB) that occurred within the insurance period, or if the apple was first damaged after harvest and while in storage. Additionally, when apples in storage are commingled with other producers' damaged or diseased crops, it is nearly impossible to make an accurate loss determination. According to the Federal Crop Insurance Act (Act), insurance is prohibited to extend beyond the period during which the commodity is in the field. . . Thus, to provide coverage for an insured cause of loss that occurred after harvest, a change in the Act would be required."

Although RMA is sensitive to the impact on the agricultural community, there is no immediate provision to extend any claims beyond harvest. Perhaps if the BMSB problem persists, early identification of injury will be perfected and crop insurance may be accessed. In the meanwhile,

either a change in legislation or a reinterpretation of the regulation will be necessary in order to address the cold storage damage issue from BMSB.

PA Preferred Legislation Advances

House Bill 1424, which would authorize the state Agriculture Department to obtain, administer and enforce trademark rights for the PA Preferred program, has been approved by the House. The program promotes the marketing of Pennsylvania-produced or processed agricultural products.

House Bill 1435 has been introduced by Rep. Mark Keller (R - 86th Dist.) as a companion measure to legislation introduced in the Senate (S.B. 395) to limit liability for operators of Agritourism and Agritainment enterprises such as corn mazes, hay rides and farm vacations.

Senate Bill 263, the Data Quality Control Act, has been reported out of the state Senate Appropriations Committee. The measure would require that information used in setting state regulations is based on sound science and provable, acceptable data.

Huber, Masser Re-elected Penn State Trustees

Delegates from county agricultural associations have elected two incumbents to the Penn State Board of Trustees. Re-elected to three-year terms are Keith Masser of Schuylkill County and Betsy Huber of Chester County. Masser heads the Sterman Masser Inc. and Keystone Potato Products LLC. farm family potato growing, packing, processing and shipping operations. He also serves on the PFB State Board of Directors.

Huber is a former Master (President) of the Pennsylvania State Grange and currently serves as the organization's Legislative Liaison. A total of six trustees, plus the state Agriculture Secretary, George Greig, represent the interests of agriculture on the 32-member governing board for the university.

Farm Bureau and Secretary Vilsack Call for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and AFBF President Bob Stallman held a conference call with reporters recently during which they called for comprehensive immigration reform that would not just focus on enforcement. He said immigrant labor plays an important role in America's role as a producer of high quality, affordable food.

"Every time someone in America takes a bite of American food, someone has picked it, processed it, shipped it, stored it, trucked it and shelved it. And many of these folks who have done all those tasks are immigrants. I met farmers and ranchers all over this country who worry about the broken immigration system. They're unable to find the necessary number of farm workers and sometimes they struggle to verify their work authorization papers, all the while wondering if they'll get enough help for the next harvest," Vilsack said.

Ramifications of E-Verify on Farmers

The House Judiciary Committee expects to consider a bill that would require private sector firms to use the E-Verify program for hiring workers program, rather than just for federal contractors

as currently required. If Congress passes such a bill, it will establish a regulatory route that may hamper the labor supply for the entire country, not just agriculture.

The accuracy of E-Verify has been called into question numerous times since its inception. Although the accuracy of the system is reportedly improving, there are reports that the system not only fails to properly identify legal workers but also fails to flag illegal aliens who are defrauding the system by using documents of people who are otherwise authorized to work (see Westat Corporation study done in 2010).

Although there is a consistent desire to control illegal immigration, Congress has a responsibility to establish systems that will assure that the agricultural community has an adequate labor force. The current H-2A system does not meet the need. Accordingly, some type of transitional solution must be addressed by Congress so that there is no sudden disruption to the labor supply.

Bob Stallman, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, urged the Judiciary Committee recently "not to approve any E-Verify requirement for agriculture unless it is coupled with provisions that provide farmers and ranchers the assurance that they will in fact have a supply of legal workers available." He also stated that "Farm Bureau economists estimated that \$5 billion to \$9 billion of annual production would be at risk were this labor not available".

Survey Shows 30 Percent Losses from Honey Bee Colonies

Total losses from managed honey bee colonies nationwide were 30 percent from all causes for the 2010/2011 winter, according to the annual survey conducted by the Agriculture Department and the Apiary Inspectors of America.

This is roughly similar to total losses reported in similar surveys done in the four previous years: 34 percent for the 2009/2010 winter, 29 percent for 2008/2009; 36 percent for 2007/2008, and 32 percent for 2006/2007.

"The lack of increase in losses is marginally encouraging in the sense that the problem does not appear to be getting worse for honey bees and beekeepers," said Jeff Pettis, an entomologist with USDA's Agricultural Research Service who helped conduct the study. "But continued losses of this size put tremendous pressure on the economic sustainability of commercial beekeeping."

Produce Groups Concerned USDA Data Will be Misinterpreted

The produce industry is concerned that the annual [Pesticide Data Program](#) by the Agriculture Department on pesticide residue on fruits and vegetables will be misinterpreted by the public.

Eighteen produce trade associations wrote to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently stating that the USDA data have "been subject to misinterpretation by activists, which publicize their distorted findings through national media outlets in a way that is misleading for consumers and can be highly detrimental to the growers of these commodities."

"There are some organizations with agendas that do want to scare people away from fresh produce," said Kathy Means, a vice president at the Produce Marketing Association. "We don't

want anyone eating unsafe foods, of course. But for those products that are grown legally and the science says [the pesticide] is safe, we don't want people turning away."

Food Plate to Replace Food Pyramid

The Agriculture Department will soon unveil its replacement for the Food Pyramid and is calling the new icon a "monumental effort" to improve America's health. The new design is a plate-shaped symbol divided into wedges for the basic food groups and half-filled with fruits and vegetables.

Robert Post, deputy director of the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, said a new icon is needed because the pyramid really does not capture the public's attention anymore. "Consumers can look forward to a new, simple, easy-to-understand cue to prompt healthy choices," Post said.

SUPERVALU'S Produce Division Focuses on Hyperlocal

In a column in the June issue of AFBF's Foodie News, Dan Bates, director of merchandising for SUPERVALU's W. Newell Produce Division explains how the grocery company is focusing on the hyperlocal strategy in its produce business, partnering with growers who have deep ties and meaning to their region, be it the beloved apple orchard or the pick-your-own strawberry field that shoppers visited as children.

"And even if consumers aren't familiar with a specific grower, we strive to build awareness, loyalty and a deeper connection to our communities by showcasing the farmers' photo and history in our store displays, point-of-sale and other promotional vehicles," Bates writes.

"It's wonderful how far growers have come to help make hyperlocal a reality. As they've understood the market opportunity and retailers' interest, they've made the necessary investments in technology upgrades. Growers really have stepped up to the plate to provide retailers with the consistency and quality of produce that we depend on to distribute to our stores. State Farm Bureaus have made a difference, too, supporting farmers in terms of produce marketing."

SUPERVALU Inc. is one of the largest companies in the U.S. grocery channel with annual sales of approximately \$38 billion. SUPERVALU serves customers across the United States through a network of approximately 4,294 stores.

New Study: Weed Science Lagging Behind Other Disciplines

While invasive plant species continue to grow like—well, weeds—costing millions of dollars in damage and control attempts, the field of weed science is not keeping pace. There is demand for further knowledge of herbicide persistence, movement and toxicity in the environment, and the biology and ecology of weeds. But the number of weed science researchers, educators and Extension agents are few.

A new [study](#) in the April-June issue of the journal *Weed Technology* gauges the numbers of faculty and courses devoted to each of three plant pest disciplines—weed science, entomology

and plant pathology—at 76 U.S. land-grant universities. The authors found that the current university faculties of weed scientists are insufficient to meet a growing need.

Weed science is lagging behind its companion disciplines. The study found that compared to weed scientists, there are more than four times as many entomologists and three times as many plant pathologists at the 76 universities studied. There are five times as many undergraduate entomology courses and two-and-a-half times as many plant pathology courses as those in weed science. This may lead to reduced availability for training opportunities for weed scientists compared to other disciplines.