

Department Press Release

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Crawford Unveils Bold New Canker Plan

TALLAHASSEE - Faced with the rapid spread of disease by both man and weather, Florida Agriculture Commissioner Bob Crawford today announced a major initiative to expedite the eradication of citrus canker in Florida. It includes a request for more funding and manpower, more intensive cutting of citrus trees and a continuation of the canopy replacement program for residents impacted by the effort.

The goal of the plan, Crawford said, is to eliminate citrus canker in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties within the next year.

"The economy of the State of Florida is in jeopardy if we allow this devastating disease to take over," Crawford said. "Every citizen in this state benefits from property and sales taxes and other revenue generated by the citrus industry. Florida is identified worldwide for its citrus and fresh orange juice."

Citrus is an \$8 billion dollar industry, providing nearly 100,000 jobs for Floridians. Since citrus canker, a highly-contagious bacterial disease that damages fruit and weakens trees, was detected within a half mile of Miami International Airport in 1995, it has spread to more than 300 square miles of Miami-Dade and Broward Counties.

Tropical storms last fall have spread the disease to more than 1,000 acres of commercial lime groves in South Dade, and isolated outbreaks have been detected in Collier, Manatee, Hendry and Hillsborough Counties as a result of individuals moving infected plant materials to those locations.

To date, about 200,000 residential trees have been cut and burned, and more than 300,000 commercial trees have been destroyed in the eradication effort.

Spread by wind, rain and physical contact, citrus canker is a foreign, invasive disease that is believed to have been brought into the state by an international traveler in 1995.

To prevent any further spread of the disease, Crawford's initiative calls for:

- Up to \$100 million dollars this year to accelerate the eradication effort, including a request for at least \$35 million from Florida's "rainy day" fund and \$65 million from the state and federal government in general appropriations.
- The establishment of a command center in the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' office in Broward County where incident command teams trained in dealing with emergency operations will carry out the significant initiative.
- A compliance agreement program with the citrus industry to ensure that all equipment and workers are properly decontaminated before moving into or out of citrus groves.
- Cutting infected citrus trees and those that are located within 1900 feet, which are considered 'exposed'. This policy comes as a result of a scientific experiment which showed that normal rainstorms can spread canker more than 4000 feet. However, 95% of the spread occurred within 1900 feet. This is the most conservative cutting zone possible without putting the eradication effort in jeopardy.
- A canopy replacement program in which all residents who lose citrus trees from their yard are eligible for a \$100 voucher which can be used to buy non-citrus trees, bushes, shrubs or other garden items. The program will be funded with \$7 million dollars the federal government has set aside for that purpose.
- An aggressive public information campaign to keep residents and local officials informed of all program activities. This will include public meetings, public service announcements and the toll-free helpline set up to answer residents' questions and concerns. That number is **1-800-850-3781**.
- Billboards will also be set up to alert the public about the dangers of spreading canker. Crawford said the underlying strategy of the effort is to contain the bacterial disease within its current boundaries and eradicate it as quickly and aggressively as possible so it cannot spread further.

"To do less is to risk a future without citrus in Florida, which is just unthinkable," Crawford said