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Citrus Canker Eradication Project to Resume Cutting Exposed Trees

TALLAHASSEE- A year-long scientific experiment conducted in Miami-Dade County shows that cutting trees exposed to citrus canker, but not yet showing signs of the canker, is necessary to eradicate the devastating disease. The Citrus Canker Eradication Project will now resume cutting exposed trees. Meanwhile, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has formed a citizens' committee to discuss the concerns of residents.

The scientific study was done at the request of Miami-Dade County citizens, who questioned whether it was necessary to cut trees with no canker symptoms, but that were located within 125 feet of infected trees. Project officials stopped cutting exposed trees on March 1, 1998 and began a series of experiments to determine whether cutting only infected trees would eliminate the outbreak in an urban setting. Previous studies were limited to commercial groves.

The results of the experiment are not promising and indicate it may be necessary to cut trees beyond 125 feet in order to halt the spread of citrus canker. For now, project managers will cut within the 125 foot radius but will continue to review the data and may have to expand the cutting area in the future, especially in highly infected zones.

A newly formed citizen's committee will hold its first meeting on June 18 to discuss community concerns and to keep the public informed. The committee will also include members of the scientific, regulatory and agribusiness communities. The charge of the committee will be to facilitate communication, understanding and efficiency in the Citrus Canker Eradication Program. The committee will meet Friday, at 9:30 a.m. in Miami Springs City Hall.

Representatives of the Department of Agriculture, USDA and the scientific panel that conducted the experiment will hold a press availability Thursday, June 17 at 1:30 p.m. at Miami Springs City Hall to answer any additional questions about the study and program changes.