



Florida Farm Bureau Federation Issue Briefs

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SUDDEN OAK DEATH

Background:

What is Sudden Oak Death?

Sudden Oak Death is a serious fungal disease that affects not only oaks but also other plants including azaleas, rhododendrons, camellias and maples. At least 40 different plant species as hosts for the fungus. Although it does not kill most of the species, scientists say it is unprecedented to have a pathogen spread across so many native plant species so quickly. No symptoms of the pathogen have yet been detected on the East Coast. This disease is not harmful to humans or animals. Because of the many unknowns associated with this disease, the plant host list continues to grow.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Approach

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) verified the presence of sudden oak death disease in six Florida nurseries on plants imported from an infected nursery in Southern California. They have since halted the importation of nursery stock from California and put a hold and stop sale order on Monrovia products already in Florida. More than 100 plant samples were taken from nurseries in Florida that were customers of Monrovia Growers in Azusa, California following the announcement on March 12 that the disease was present in that facility. Only seven samples have tested positive for *Phytophthora ramorum*, the fungus that causes sudden oak death. The nurseries have been notified and the Department, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture, will do follow-up visits to destroy infected plants and to determine what additional regulatory action is necessary.

Florida Farm Bureau Policy:

Plant and Animal Pests and Diseases

Invasive plant pests and animal diseases pose a serious threat to all Floridians. Florida is a sentinel state for pest introductions and should receive increased focus and support to strengthen our pest protection efforts. Pest and disease exclusion should be the top priority for State and Federal agencies with regulatory authority for invasives. We support the creation of a federal funding source, for exclusion and eradication that is not tied to annual budgeting requirements. We support streamlined agency cooperation to reduce duplication among the various agencies. We support increased penalties for smuggling of agricultural products. Increased emphasis on education for all stakeholders is necessary to protect our natural resources in the future.

FFB Position

Florida Farm Bureau requests that Congress and the USDA increase funding toward interdiction and eradication of diseases such as SOD and the numerous pests that threaten our industry.

The Florida Farm Bureau supports the protocol FDACS is using to keep SOD from becoming established in Florida. As an agricultural organization we know it is less expensive to keep an invasive species from becoming established than it is to eradicate it.