



Florida Farm Bureau Federation Issue Briefs

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TROPICAL SODA APPLE

Background:

Tropical soda apple is an aggressive perennial that is native to Brazil and Argentina. Over the past decade it has been discovered throughout Florida and recently infestations have been found in a number of southern states from North Carolina to Mississippi. This noxious weed has already caused great economic losses in Florida where it has spread to over 750,000 acres. Tropical soda apple is an alternative host for numerous pathogens including the cucumber mosaic virus, gemini virus, potato Y virus, tomato mosaic virus, and tomato mottle virus to name just a few.

The primary means of dispersal seems to be livestock (Cattle) and wildlife, such as raccoons, deer, feral hogs, and birds that feed on fruits. Intra- and inter- county and state movement of livestock that have recently fed on tropical soda apple fruit may be the primary vector for its spread. However, contaminated hay, seeds, and bags of manure for composting also serve as a means of its dispersal.

In order to detect and prevent further spread of this pernicious weed in Florida and nearby states the agricultural community has initiated a multi-pronged program of education and notification on this potential weed problem. Early detection is paramount to eliminate the threat of this weed, which has the potential to infest millions of acres of pasturelands, croplands, and natural areas of the Southeast.

Formation of the Regional Tropical Soda Apple Task Force

The purpose of the RTSATF is to foster the development of effective strategies to control and limit the dissemination of *Solanum viarum* Dunal, commonly known as Tropical Soda Apple (TSA).

The RTSATF composed of regulatory, research and industry members will use appropriate research information to develop a regional management plan for TSA.

General Goals and Objectives

- Identify and seek support for TSA control research including biological control.
- Develop and disseminate educational information to increase TSA awareness.
- Develop and recommend for implementation appropriate regulatory measures to effectively slow the spread of TSA.
- Engage appropriate regulatory agencies and industry stakeholders (i.e. Plant Industry, Animal Industry, Land Managers, Seed Harvesters) in the regulatory process.

There are several excellent web sites for TSA information: <http://www.invasive.org/tsa> , (RTSATF site), <http://tsa.ifas.ufl.edu/> (the University of Florida site) and <http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/TSA/TSAtask.thml> (Florida Department of Agriculture site).

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.

Action:

Florida must continue a multi-pronged program of education and notification to insure prompt action and pest management. Producers should continue to follow TSA Best Management Practices to prevent spread of this pest plant. Florida Department of Agriculture should continue efforts to expand TSA Task Force to include other states that are affected. Southeastern states should jointly fund research for biological control to reduce economic damages caused by TSA infestations.