

PRESENTATION TO FOREST/PEST CONFERENCE

My exposure to invasive pests started when I was working in a produce departments and fruit flies kept telling me where the spoiled fruit was located in some of my displays.

Then there was the medfly eradication program in Northern California while I was working in the produce industry in Los Angeles. This was the occasion when we had a young governor by the name of Jerry Brown who sought to stop the eradication program only to be over ridden by the federal government which recognized the threat to more than agriculture. It was a threat to some 400 plant products, to commerce and to jobs.

Then there was the Medfly eradication program some 20 years ago in Eastern Los Angeles County and Riverside County.

Henry Voss was Secretary, there was a brand new Congressman and everybody was attempting to help the ag community by initiating the eradication effort, which called for helicopters and malathion applications.

We did the consumer meetings one, twice and I don't recall how many times. I was there to inform and educate. There was the family man, the PhDs, mothers and others. Being fairly adept at communicating I was able to modify my message to the targeted audience. I was yelled out, spat upon and otherwise treated rather rudely. My vast experience and strong message wasn't really working too well.

The Medfly is a little pest that is voracious in consuming the host and there are several hundred hosts. It multiplies like the dickens and if you don't eradicate the vast majority of fresh fruits and vegetables would be reduced in volume significantly. Since fruit is the host the opportunity to export would be lost. Since fruit is the host the ability to move into states with host material is lost. It would

be a visual and economic disaster. The spread of the medfly would be disastrous for the environment requiring, best case scenarios, a significant increase in pesticide use. And that is assuming we could eradicate because control or suppression just doesn't work.

Well after that combat duty we knew something else had to be developed and within a short period of time a sterile medfly was developed that mated with a female who soon after mating would die. (normally after dropping thousands of eggs) The male dies soon thereafter as well. That became our tool of choice and it has worked well.

Just a few years ago California had another major infestation, the Light Brown Apple Moth or LBam. While citrus is a host the infestation was far enough away and there were sufficient commodities in the production area that would provide the education leadership. We had a new CDFA leadership team and a Secretary who had a ponytail! He was a male by the way and the assumption was the diversified commodity leaders, a pony-tailed Secretary and a voracious pest that attacked more than agriculture would be a strong foundation for eradication without controversy. WRONG.

What could go wrong did go wrong. Members of the University system stepped in, but they were a split community. Agriculture was a split community. CDFA, as it turned out was not quite as adept with this new team in messaging and that faltered. It was a public relations nightmare. When you have a PR nightmare you have an agitated consumer body and this recipe is one that bakes a disaster. USDA tried to step in and I would argue from a polished and honest perspective. They were too late even with all their sophistication.

It wasn't too long after that when messages from Florida were being received about this new deadly disease. It was called citrus greening! Trees were dying, the vector was multiplying and the industry was at a loss. It was happening in other parts of the world. This greening disease originated in China, was found in Brazil, now in Florida, also in Belize and in SE Asia. The vector, the Asian Citrus Psyllid was in Texas and Mexico. It was on the march and it was coming to our 285,000 acres. As USDA eventually stated in their messaging; they're hungry and they're coming.

Industry members went to Florida to see what was all the fuss. It was as bad as we heard with one of the problems being an unprepared industry and subsequently a general public that was even less informed. On the flight back home we chatted in earnest as to how our industry could thwart the advancement of the pest, educate the industry and educate the general public.

We recognized that reliance on government and all their tools would be a mistake. Our state was falling over the fiscal cliff and their ability to detect, treat, eradicate and educate would be minimal if at all. Could we count on the USDA to carry the flag? One would hope so but did we want to count on that one avenue of approach. The answer was no. Meanwhile the scope of the disaster was becoming clearer. 200,000 acres of citrus was pulled in Florida, 2 million trees eliminated in Brazil. We learned that China, because they could, simply destroyed the citrus industry in one geographical location and moved it someplace else.

Fortunately there were several members of our industry that had experience with eradication efforts. There were members of our industry that learned the lessons from the LBAM fiasco, the medfly issues and understood the shortcomings that occurred in Florida.

We came back home and immediately drafted and introduced legislation that would create an assessment on all producers, their production that is, that would underwrite a program to do what was necessary depending upon government's willingness and ability to engage in the effort. In six months we had the legislation written passed and signed by the Governor. Two months after that we were ready to collect the assessments. But we were too late.

The ACP was discovered in Southern California most likely introduced via Mexico. CDFA at that time was able to engage and USDA was prepared to partner. Fortunately we had another mandated program, a Citrus Research Board that had reserves and had cash flow that could be redirected towards this effort temporarily. But we wanted this to be a partnership. If we were going to suffer like colleagues in Florida and the Southern Hemisphere we wanted to direct the war, we wanted to be an equal partner, not just a stakeholder. We wanted to educate and create support. We were conscious of big brother telling the homeowner this eradication effort, at a minimum trapping and detection, was good for them.

We knew our battle ground would be Southern California. We knew it was target audience rich. We knew the demographics, the dialects but most importantly we knew we didn't know everything. The industry hired a professional firm to conduct focus groups in Los Angeles and San Diego areas. We asked the members about eradication programs and all that they entailed. We told them about citrus greening, yellow dragon disease or Huanglongbing. We told them it would destroy their backyard tree before it killed our industry. Notwithstanding the need for educational material how best could we enlist their support?

They said call the disease Huanglongbing. It is more sinister, more scare not exotic and certainly not environmentally friendly such as greening. The term in California is Huanglongbing, perhaps HLB, but certainly not citrus greening or

yellow dragon disease. We created educational material that came in various sizes, shapes and forms. The vehicles were as diverse as they were creative.

Book marks for the University

Magnifying glasses for the kids

Printed material for the Master Gardners

Talking points for local government

Visuals for the media

Shelf talkers for the big box stores and retailers

Our messengers were equally diverse. The Co-op Extension, elected officials, cartoons, commercials and even phone aps.

The industry, USDA, CDFA and the University all took turns creating new and innovative messaging. We talked with local government, local media an elected reps in all the districts of Southern California. We paid for a lot of the material. The industry generated \$15m for the entire effort with most of that devoted to filling voids that government was unable to do. Most of it was in trapping, detection and treatment. We spend several hundred thousand dollars of our own money in consumer education. We now budget about \$800k per year. We talk, publish or otherwise print in several languages.

And by the way we had to market this entire effort, before it could begin, to the industry. We videotaped tree removal in Florida. As we talked about the looming disaster a continuous loop played showing tree removal. What was a boring set of pictures repeated in 15-20 minutes was an everyday occurrence in Florida we reminded the growers. And when their eyes glazed over we clapped our hands and told them what tree removal in Florida sounded like.

Today Southern California is infested with the psyllid, primarily in Los Angeles and Riverside areas. We expect endemic populations in San Diego if they don't already exist. Our partners in government are constantly seeking

homeowner cooperation to set traps, return and examine, tree if necessary and in one case only so far, remove a tree because HLB was discovered.

We're doing what no other production area has been able to do. We have slowed the spread of ACP, we're actively looking for HLB and we're doing it with the help, not the hindrance of the general public. There have been homeowners less than cooperative but generally speaking our messengers have been very adept at getting their cooperation.

So our partnership went from industry and within industry, to state government, to the federal government and to the general public. It includes local government and elected officials. The media and the university are part of the partnership. There is no one audience, there are multiple audiences. There is no one message, there are multiple messages. There is no one package there are multiple packages. But there can be only one conclusion and that is success. The alternative is no alternative. Can I promise continue success, eventual elimination of the vector and the disease potential?

No – but I can promise you a model program that will continue to carry the fight for as long as we can.