

**CALIFORNIA CITRUS PEST AND DISEASE PREVENTION PROGRAM
PUBLIC CONTINUATION HEARINGS**

Hearing Minutes

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) held four hearings to receive public comment from the citrus industry and the general public on whether the California Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Program (CPDPP) and the Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Committee (CPDPC) should be continued. Food and Agricultural Code, section 5921, requires one or more hearing no later than June 30, 2013. After that, the Secretary is charged with conducting a review process every four years to determine whether the operation of CDFA's citrus disease prevention activities should continue. The last hearings were held in June 2017.

The hearing information was shared on the CDFA and Citrus Insider websites, and as a direct email to citrus growers and packinghouses. The hearing details were as follows:

VISALIA HEARING

Date: May 25, 2021
Time: 5:00-7:00 p.m.
Location: Visalia Marriott
300 South Court Street
Visalia, CA 93291

Visalia Hearing Attendees:

Holly Deniston	Jessica Leslie	Ram Uckoo
James Gorden	Neil McRoberts	Keith Watkins
Chris Greer	Alexis Silveira	Judy Zaninovich
Melinda Klein		

CDFA Staff:

Kelley Aubushon	Victoria Hornbaker	Jennifer Willems
Amelia Hicks		

VIRTUAL HEARING

Date: May 27, 2021
Time: 5:00-7:00 p.m.
Location: Webinar

Virtual Hearing Attendees:

Robert Atkins	Khoa Lam	Krista Smith
Brad Carmen	Dylan Lomanto	Judy Zaninovich

Casey Creamer
Bruce Kelsey

Cressida Silvers

Sandra Zwaal

CDFA Staff:

Kelley Aubushon

Anmol Joshi

Keith Okasaki

Kiana Dao

Sara Khalid

Derek Schulz

David Gutierrez

Daniel Lee

Michael Soltero

Amelia Hicks

Zachary McCormack

Claudia Vazquez

Victoria Hornbaker

Jana Mescevic

Jennifer Willems

Laura Irons

Alex Muniz

VENTURA HEARING

Date:

June 1, 2021

Time:

5:00-7:00 p.m.

Location:

Four Points by Sheraton Ventura Harbor
1050 Schooner Drive
Ventura, CA 93001

Ventura Hearing Attendees:

Ameer Atrash

Alyssa Houtby

Alexis Silveira

Kevin Ball

Marcy Martin

David Wirta

Casey Creamer

Joey Mayorquin

Ed Williams

Holly Deniston-Sheets

CDFA Staff:

David Gutierrez

Victoria Hornbaker

Michael Soltero

RIVERSIDE HEARING

Date:

June 3, 2021

Time:

5:00-7:00 p.m.

Location:

Marriott at the Convention Center
3400 Market Street
Riverside CA, 92501

Riverside Hearing Attendees:

Lori Apodaka

Warren Lyall

Chandrika Ramadagu

Robert Atkins

Marcy Martin

Georgios Vidalakis

John Gless

Joey Mayorquin

Alan Washburn

John C. Gless

Neil McRoberts

Irene Washburn

Tracy Kahn
Manjunath Keremane

Tom Mullen
Jessica Naquin

Sandra Zwaal

CDFA Staff:

Paul Figueroa
David Gutierrez

Victoria Hornbaker
Anmol Joshi

David Morgan

Opening Comments

Victoria Hornbaker, Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Division (CPDPD) Director welcomed attendees at the Visalia and virtual meetings. David Gutierrez, CPDPD Branch Chief, welcomed attendees at the Ventura and Riverside meetings. Attendees were informed about the purpose of the hearings and the comment process was explained. The following information was presented at each hearing:

“The CPDPP is set forth in statute in the Food and Agricultural Code, Sections 5911-5940, and was implemented in 2009 for the purpose of preventing and managing citrus diseases. The CPDPP’s activities are funded by mandatory assessments upon all citrus producers in the State who propagate and market citrus.

The hearing comments will be considered by the Department in determining if the CPDPP and the CPDPC will be authorized to continue. If the hearing record documents that the CPDPP is fulfilling its declared purposes, the Department may authorize the CPDPP to operate for another four years without the need for an industry referendum.

However, if the Department finds from the hearing record that a substantial question of opposition exists among affected producers regarding whether the operation of this article should be continued, the article shall be submitted for approval through the referendum process.

The call of this hearing is limited to the receipt of public comments regarding:

Whether the CPDPP and the CPDPC have met their statutory requirements under the Food and Agricultural Code, Sections 5911-5940.

All comments pertinent to the call of this hearing will be received and become part of the official hearing record.”

Staff Presentation

An informational PowerPoint was presented at each of the hearings. The presentation included background information on Asian citrus psyllid (ACP) and Huanglongbing (HLB) finds in California, the formation of CPDPC and the Committee’s duties, which include:

- Outreach and education programs for the public on prevention of pests and diseases,
- Programs for surveying, detecting, analyzing, and treating, and
- Advising CDFA's Secretary on issues pertaining to the implementation of the work plan including budgets, adoption of regulations consistent with duties of the Committee.

The presentation included information about CPDPD's urban treatments, regulatory activities, biocontrol, and a summary of achievements, such as:

- Establishment of the regional ACP quarantine zones,
- Preventing movement and establishment of ACP by implementing mandatory tarping regulations,
- Continuing to survey for and remove HLB infected trees, and
- Maintaining vigilance for other citrus diseases.

Public Comments

Attendees were notified that the meeting was being recorded and that comments were limited to three minutes per speaker.

Comments were received at the public hearings and are summarized by location.

Visalia Public Comments:

1. Neil McRoberts, University of California Davis

Commenter presented a clarifying question to ask whether the public hearing is the only way for industry to offer comment the continuation of the program. Commenter further stated that the price to operate the program is approximately \$130/acre per year, of which industry stakeholders are paying only half. The other half is funded by the state and the federal Citrus Health Response Program. Accordingly, industry stakeholders are funding approximately \$65/acre per year to provide detection up front on invasive diseases; a relatively low cost for not having to live directly with HLB. Commenter further shared that the scientific literature shows that the cost of living with invasive species is much higher than not living with invasive species. Commenter closed by stating that the CPDPP is delivering on its promise and operating economically.

2. Jim Gorden, Tulare County Grower and CPDPC Chairman

Commentor provided background of his experience in citrus growing as a medium size citrus producer in Tulare County. Commentor held a leadership position on the Citrus Research Board (CRB) when ACP were first found in San Diego County, California. The industry recognized this as an existential threat to the industry. Commentor was involved in organizing some of the beginnings of the response to threat – trapping, organizing industry to run this program, organization of the CRB laboratory for which there was great need. The existential threat seen by the industry in 2008 still exists to a large extent. Commenter stated that the activities of the Program have been a significant factor in preventing movement of HLB into commercial citrus in California. Commenter further stated that the CPDPP is not perfect, but it is a work in progress and deserves to be continued.

3. Ram Uckoo, Wonderful Citrus

Commenter's written statement noted that the program thus far has done an excellent job. He stated however, that the Program in its current operation is not sustainable in the long run, citing that the area in which operations are occurring is too large. Commenter noted that since 2012, there has been an increase in ACP population and detections. The area impacted by HLB is much less than the area that should be surveyed. Commenter stated that the program as is, is not effective because the area surveyed is too low. He commented that the number of ACP and plant samples have been decreasing. Commenter further stated that the Program is economically burdensome noting that the annual budget allocation is \$40 million, or \$120 million for the last three years, with only 2,200 HLB trees identified and removed, translating to a \$50,000 expenditure per tree removal. Commenter reiterated that the Program can fine tune the edges but is not sustainable in the long run.

4. Keith Watkins, Vice President of Bee Sweet Citrus Inc. and CPDPC Member

Commenter shared his background as a grower operating 11,000 acres of citrus in California and having been involved in CPDPC for 5-6 years and understands the concerns over costs but looks at the successes. Commenter noted his experience discussing the California situation with Floridians at which time the opinion was that HLB would be widespread in California in 3-5 years. He noted that the current situation in California is that the industry is still doing commercial farming as it is always done and he sees this as a success of the Program. Commenter stated that maintaining this success requires the ability to evolve and adapt, noting that the Program is rising to this challenge. He stated the Program staff look at the issues and make improvements. Commenter noted it's a dollars and cents world and it has to be that way to be economical and to date the Program has been successful. He further noted that we don't know what's out there, but by minimizing ACP populations and their movement we have been successful.

5. Christopher Greer, Tulare County Deputy Agricultural Commissioner

Commenter stated his support of the Program. Commenter noted that the work of the Program staff has helped minimized the number of ACP in Tulare and throughout California. He further stated that the Tulare County Agricultural Commissioner's Office feels that they have the support of Program staff and that they support continuation of the Program.

Virtual Public Comments:

1. Bob Atkins, Fallbrook Citrus Grower and Statewide Grower Liaison Coordinator

Commenter stated that as a small grower, from 2008 to present the program has kept HLB out of San Diego County. This is the best program of its kind in the world and has held off the progression of ACP and HLB, buying time for a permanent solution. He congratulated the Program.

Ventura Public Comments:

1. Kevin Ball, Citrus Grower, Ag Land Services LP and CPDPC Member

Commenter supports the program to continue with all the functions it does. He noted that the Program has been a remarkable success especially when you go back and look at what was being forecasted in the beginning of finding HLB in California, Commenter noted the Program is full of different successes, from prioritizing growers ability to continue to farm and have a profitable business at the same time being able to move back and forth between the best ways to stop ACP and HLB from spreading but at the same time still allowing growers to make money. Commenter stated that this program needs to stay for more than 4 years because as things change, they can be reorganized and done in different ways, but the threat from HLB and ACP is not going away in the near term. If that changes it will be great news, but we need to maintain focus on the goals of the committee, and that is preventing HLB from deteriorating the citrus industry. The Program has met the key strategic points, by looking at all aspects of how to control and eradicate this disease and until we have a better handle on that, this program needs to continue.

2. Ed Williams, Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner

Commenter supports continuation of program. We would have a much higher incidence of both ACP and HLB had this program not been in effect. He noted that this program has been effective in slowing the spread of these major impacts to this industry. The citrus industry in particular is a huge economic driver in Ventura County, close to \$300 million industry, it supports many framers and farm workers and it is very important to the Ventura economy. This is one the last places in the world where citrus is relatively free from this disease in the commercial areas of the state and it is critical that these programs be maintained. County staff have been busy with citrus bulk citrus monitoring and have seen a definite increase in compliance over the last four years. Commenter also noted that County staff have been involved in helping remove some of the neglected or abandoned trees and orchards. Commenter stated that he is in definite support of this program for at least another 4 years.

Riverside Public Comments:

1. Alan Washburn, Riverside Grower and owner of Washburn and Sons

Commenter noted that he and John Gless are on the Biocontrol working group and that they went through a lot of efforts in Hemet with biocontrol, Dr Stouthammer's groups has been helping and the only place that biocontrol is working is in yards that are not being sprayed, that are between properties that are sprayed. He recommends tripling the number of biocontrol agents being released. He recommends more outreach and more biocontrol in Hemet. Commenter noted that citrus in Hemet is well protected.

2. Tracy Kahn, Curator of the Givaudan Citrus Variety Collection and Friends Board of the California Citrus State Historic Park

Commenter spoke on the need for additional outreach at the California Citrus State Historic Park, noting that additional handouts and materials would be good to have at the park. She noted that the Park had and big program in spring where they were letting families pick citrus

and take it home, of course they were wiping the citrus off, but more can be done to get outreach material to the California Citrus State Historic Park. Commenter reinforces the need to continue the Program, noting that it is important in many different ways and is a very extensive program and she hopes it is continued.

3. Warren Lyle, San Diego Grower and President of the San Diego County Citrus Pest Control District

Commenter noted that as a representative of the San Diego County Citrus Pest Control District they desire to see the program continued, they see this as a very valuable tool. Commenter stated that being in Southern California and close to HLB, they see themselves as the protectors of the industry in the state and what goes here in Southern California makes a big difference for what happens in the Central Valley and other areas of the state. Commenter expressed full support for continuation of the Program and thanked the Program for what has been accomplished so far.

4. Casey Creamer, President and CEO of California Citrus Mutual

Commenter stated that California Citrus Mutual (CCM) has had a member of their team at each hearing listening to the comments and feedback and they also stay very close to the Program. CCM works with their growers to make sure the program is first and foremost effective and cost effective as well. CCM is pleased to support the Program, they have witnessed since the beginning of the program, a continual evolution to what it is now. He noted improved effectiveness, improved science, improves regulations, improved outreach and improved cost-effectiveness which is very important for their members. Having said that he noted the Program needs to do more, we can't rest on our laurels. He would like to see more improvements to the science through working with CRB, working with our partners in Florida and Texas to learn more about the disease and ACP and to continue to ring cost effective solutions to California growers. Commenter stated that CCM is committed to working with CDFA and the state and federal governments to bring additional resources to the Program so growers don't continue to bear the burden of the Program. Commenter reiterated CCM's support of the program.

5. Georgios Vidalakis, Citrus Clonal Protection Program at the University of California, Riverside

Commenter stated that two days ago he gave a presentation to a group of growers, scientists, and government officials from the European Union (EU) and the message is that the world is watching what is going on in California. He noted that the EU's closing statement is that California told us what we need to do, and we need to do it if we want to be successful in Europe. Commenters opinion is that the Program needs to be continued, with room for improvement. In discussion with growers, he has heard that they are assessed for multiple programs to the tune of up to \$250-\$300 per acre, so we need to be conscience of the cost and make science-based decisions. Commenter reiterated the comment that the world is watching, and the work and Program need to continue.

Letters of Support

Letters of support were received at the public hearings, via email and U.S. mail and are summarized here:

Marcy Martin, President of the Citrus Research Board
Brad Carmen, Pest Management Director at Sun Pacific Farming and CPDPC Member
Keith Watkins, Vice President at Bee Sweet Citrus and CPDPC Member
Roger Smith, CEO AC Foods Nursery & Genetics and CPDPC Member
Jeffrey Steen, Chairman, Tulare County Pest Control District
Dennis Johnston, Chairman, Kern County Citrus Pest Control District

Letters of Interest

The following letters pertain to the request for realignment of funding from the Program to local pest control districts and are neither supportive nor opposing.

John N Fisher, IV, Chairman, Central California Tristeza Eradication Agency
Jim Zimmerman, Chairman, Southern Tulare County Citrus Pest Control District

Letters of Opposition

There were no opposing letters received.

Closing Comments and Adjournment

Victoria thanked the attendees at each location for their participation and notified them that the Department will render a decision as required by applicable statutes and regulations. Attendees were also informed that it is the Department's goal to render a decision within 30 days of the closing of the hearing record.

A final call for additional comments was made and with none received. Victoria officially closed the Visalia and virtual hearings and David officially closed the hearings in Ventura and Riverside.