

Video Transcript for "Ojai Area Resident Leigh Melander Talks About Gypsy Moth Infestation"

Guest (LM): Leigh Melander, Ojai Area Resident

Interviewer (AW): Adrian Woodfork, Public Information Officer, CDFA

LM: "I understand why people have concerns and I think they're legitimate in a general sense. I think being worried about pesticides is a great thing - but I think this has to do with really evaluating risks. And what we risk with the application of a bacillum that's been used since the 1960s on organic vegetables which has a half life in the atmosphere and in the environment that it's sprayed in of - I think conservatively it's about two weeks versus gypsy moths who once they get established could be here forever and potentially forever change this ecosystem. And I challenge people not to think about this only emotionally but to really be thoughtful and really be rational and analytical about this and say, 'Where is the greater risk here? And what could potentially damage our lives here, our ecosystem here, our lifestyles here, our health?' I don't think there's any comparison. I don't think to be worried about Bt versus gypsy moths - it makes absolutely no sense to me. So, I would plead with people to please think about that, again understanding that we've got lots of historical reasons to be worried about pesticides and asking questions isn't a bad thing. But ask good questions and look to careful sources. There's a lot of misinformation out there. Internet's a fabulous tool, but it also is a place where you can get lost because if you don't know how to read it analytically, you can read stuff that looks like it's gospel and it has absolutely no basis in scientific fact whatsoever. So, let's learn to read carefully. Let's learn to talk to each other and hear each other. And bottom line, I think the question people have to ask about this particular situation in Ojai is, 'Do we want to run the risk of losing this, losing this place?' Because that's what these moths can do. And I think every question and every sense of discomfort about what tactics are used to address the issues of this moth has to have that question in the background: 'Do we want to run the risk of losing this?' If the answer is no, then I think we need to have some faith in the folks that are trying to help us make sure that doesn't happen."

AW: "Are you supportive of the California Department of Food and Agriculture's eradication efforts?"

LM: "I absolutely am supportive of the Department of Food and Agriculture's eradication efforts. I know that none of us are excited about spraying. And I think that in a perfect world that wouldn't happen. But I don't know of any other efforts to eradicate gypsy moths that are even close to as effective as Bt. And I don't think we can run the risks of finding out

what happens if they can get established. I think if you do a risk assessment it's very clear that the risks of a Bt spraying are so much less than the risks of a gypsy moth infestation that I'm absolutely supportive of this program."

"I get it. I get that people are really nervous about implications of spraying and there's a lot of legitimate worries that have emerged over the years from the DDT history and things like that and I think that all of that comes into play with peoples' responses. I think they're very emotional responses. I think they're heartfelt. But I think if you look at this carefully and analytically and there's a risk assessment, there's Bt which gets sprayed very carefully - it's not an aerial spraying. The half life in it is conservatively two weeks and it's gone - versus this moth that if it gets established here in California it could forever change the ecosystem. Forever! The problems on the East Coast is that Bt's been used there, it helps to keep the populations managed, but once the population gets established, nobody's found a way to get rid of them. And, as I've said, this could just be horrendously - horrendously - devastating to this ecosystem. I was talking to a friend of mine the other day and her comment was that she would prefer not to run the risk that the Ojai Valley ends up looking like Las Vegas. And potentially that could happen if there was a serious infestation, given how aggressive these moths are, and how they eat everything. Once they get established and there's a big population, they eat pretty much anything that's green."