

Posted on Thu, Jul. 12, 2007

Another pest worries citrus farmers

By Phil Long

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Already facing citrus greening disease and a longstanding fight with citrus canker, Florida's agriculture officials are dealing with another pest, this one with an appetite for more than a hundred kinds of fruit.

Inspectors found a lone male fruit fly in a trap in a sweet-orange tree in Valrico, east of Tampa, this week, Agriculture Commissioner Charles Bronson said in a statement Thursday.

State and federal inspectors have set more baited traps to see if there are any others.

It is too soon to determine how big of a threat the insect could be, said Mark Fagan, spokesman for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, adding that he's encouraged that so far this week only one of the flies has been found.

"Any time a fruit fly is detected it is a serious matter because of the destruction they can do to more than 100 host plants," Fagan said.

Among fruits, those include citrus, bananas, mangoes, guavas and many other species commonly grown in South Florida.

"They get in there and they render the fruit inedible" by laying eggs that rot the fruit, Fagan said.

The state has an extensive program to combat the Mediterranean fruit fly in South Florida, introducing billions of sterile Medflies to mate with whatever other Medflies there might be.

With one exception, previous appearances of fruit flies elsewhere in the state in the past decade or so have been small and quickly handled.

For more information go to www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/enpp/ento/off.html

Traps being set as fruit fly found in Tampa area

The Associated Press

VALRICO, Fla. --

Agriculture officials are setting traps in farming areas near Tampa after the discovery of a male fruit fly in an orange tree.

The fruit fly was found in a trap during a routine inspection this week, state Agriculture Secretary Charles Bronson said in a statement Thursday. It was believed to be an Oriental fruit fly.

Fruit flies are potentially one of the most destructive pests that threaten agriculture, and they attack more than 100 different fruits and vegetables, including several that are important in Florida, such as citrus.

Females lay eggs under the skin of the fruit, and the larvae then destroy the fruit from the inside.

Bronson said inspectors with the state and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have begun intensive trapping in an 81-square-mile around the location where the male fly was detected.

Oriental fruit flies have been trapped in Florida before, but no major outbreaks have happened in recent years.

Several flies were trapped in the Tampa area and southwest Florida in 2001, but there was no widespread infestation.