

Posted on Fri, Jan. 11, 2008

Shipping of Florida citrus trees banned

Associated Press

The U.S. Agriculture Department on Friday extended a quarantine zone to prevent the spread of a major citrus disease, preventing the shipment of all Florida citrus trees outside the state.

The action on citrus greening is another blow to Florida's citrus industry, which endured devastating hurricanes in 2004 and 2005 and two decades battling a less-severe bacteria called canker.

The USDA action revises a quarantine issued in November on 28 counties. The quarantine was expanded after citrus greening was found in Hernando and Lake counties.

Citrus greening, also known as huanglongbing, is a bacteria harmless to humans but deadly to thousands of trees infected since its arrival in Florida. Greening is believed to have arrived in Florida on infected Asian plant material in 2005. The disease gradually kills a plant's vascular system and sours fruit, making it unusable.

Once infected, there is no cure for a tree with citrus greening, the USDA said in a news release.

Nursery stock from quarantined areas can only be moved out of state for immediate export accompanied by a permit that prohibits distribution to any citrus-producing states or territories, the department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service said.

The order does not prevent the movement of citrus fruit out of state, but under the federal citrus canker quarantine, fresh citrus from Florida cannot be shipped to any citrus-producing state or territory.