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## REIMBURSEMENT

### Citrus-canker fund feels the squeeze

Associated Press

ORLANDO -- (AP) -- Funds used to compensate residents whose citrus trees were destroyed in Florida's canker-eradication program have been depleted for months, yet many homeowners awaiting reimbursement are only learning of that now.

"Why are they still cutting trees if they know they don't have the money to pay for them?" Orlando resident Jack Raymond asked. "That's like a bankrupt insurance company collecting premiums knowing they can't afford to pay any claims."

The state had been giving \$100 vouchers to homeowners who had one tree destroyed in the eradication program, then an additional \$55 in cash for each subsequent tree.

The account used to buy the vouchers was depleted in June, and the money allocated for the cash payments was gone in September. A backlog of 46,000 residents awaits reimbursement.

"Everything is tight because of the additional trees exposed or infected because of the hurricanes," state Agriculture Department spokeswoman Denise Feiber said. "The money's just not there."

Citrus canker is caused by bacteria that causes blemishes on fruit, making it harder to sell. It's harmless to humans, but weakens citrus trees and is a major threat to the \$9 billion industry.

The state has destroyed more than 800,000 residential trees in an effort to rid Florida of the disease. Once canker is found, the state requires that citrus trees within a 1,900 foot radius be destroyed and a quarantine prohibiting the movement of fruit and trees usually is established.