



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

An onion field near Nyssa, Ore., is irrigated in this July 2015 photo. Onion thrips, which can transmit a virus that can devastate onion fields, have made another early appearance in the Treasure Valley area.

## Devastating onion thrips appear early in Treasure Valley region

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

NYSSA, Ore. — Onion thrips were found in commercial fields in the Treasure Valley region in late April this year, much earlier than normal.

Thrips are a vector for the iris yellow spot virus, which can severely reduce onion yields. The virus was detected in onion plants the last week of May and researchers said they were likely infected in mid-May.

Onion growers in this area historically haven't been concerned about thrips until about Memorial Day and the virus in past seasons has made its initial appearance in July or early August, said Oregon State University Cropping Systems Extension Agent Stuart Reitz.

The virus was detected the first week of June last year,

which was an extremely early appearance, he said.

"They're just coming earlier every year," Reitz said, a development he contributed to the recent warmer than normal winters and early springs. "I think more of their populations survived over the winter so they were out spreading the virus around earlier than we've seen in past years."

There are no good biological methods for controlling onion thrips in the Treasure Valley area of Southwestern Idaho and Eastern Oregon, which produces about 25 percent of the nation's fresh bulb onion supply.

The only effective way to control them is by spraying.

With their earlier appearances, that means growers have to spray more to control them.

"If growers are having to spray another month of the

season, that's another huge cost for them," Reitz said.

Thrips, and the virus they transmit to onion plants, will devastate an onion field if not controlled and not spraying is not an option, said Oregon farmer Bruce Corn.

"Sometimes you have to close your eyes to the cost because you won't have a crop if the virus gets in early and you don't spray for it," he said. "As a grower, if you expect to have a crop, you have to be very vigilant and proactive on it."

Spraying for thrips costs between \$20 and \$100 an acre, depending on what chemical is used, according to Corn and Paul Skeen, president of the Malheur County Onion Growers Association.

Because there is a limited number of chemicals available to growers that effectively control thrips, rotating them

is critical to avoid the insects building up resistance to them, Corn said.

That means growers also have to use the more expensive chemicals. Skeen estimates the average cost of spraying at about \$50 an acre. "If you're spraying eight times, that's a lot of money," he said. But, he added, "You won't have a crop if you don't."

To try to find a solution to the thrips problem, OSU researchers in Ontario last year started a field trial with some experimental onion varieties to see if they offer some resistance to thrips and the iris yellow spot virus.

Some of the varieties showed promise, Reitz said, but it will take several years to test them more, then isolate the beneficial traits and breed them into commercially accepted varieties.

## State fines Washington Potato Company for safety violations

### Company marked as 'severe violator'

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

A potato processor has been fined \$213,160 for repeated safety violations, including one that led to a worker being seriously injured, the Washington Department of Labor and Industries announced June 14.

The state initiated an investigation in early December after a worker at the Washington Potato Company in Warden caught his arm in a piece of machinery, an L&I spokeswoman said. Another worker started the equipment without realizing the other worker was cleaning it.

The company had previously been cited three times for not having safety procedures to prevent machinery from being started during maintenance, according to L&I.

In all, state investigators reported finding five serious and three general safety violations that the company had previously been cited for, along with 15 other serious violations.

The plant is owned by the Oregon Potato Company, which does business in Washington under the name Washington Potato Company.

L&I has identified the company as a "severe violator" because of the repeat violations. About 20 busi-

nesses have been classified as severe violators since 2011, the spokeswoman said. The designation could lead to more inspections at the company's other plants.

Efforts to reach the company June 15 were unsuccessful.

The company can appeal the fine.

Other violations cited by L&I included:

- In two instances, rotating shafts weren't equipped with safety guards.

- Two employees used a 6-foot aluminum ladder with two broken steps for two months.

- An unprotected pulley and drive belt exposed workers to broken bones and cuts.

- A 15-foot deep wastewater well was uncovered, exposing workers to the risk of drowning.

- The company did not properly manage pits, vaults, boilers and other confined spaces that workers must enter. The company did not develop a complete written program to control access and to train workers in safety and rescue procedures.

- A floor did not have guardrails to protect workers from a 15-foot fall.

- The employer did not cover all electrical wiring and did not ensure extension and power cords were in good condition.

L&I conducts about 4,600 safety inspections a year and about eight result in fines of more than \$200,000, the spokeswoman said.

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## Bill would remove population targets for predator fish

By TIM HEARDEN  
Capital Press



Denham

TURLOCK, Calif. — Congress is giving a boost to momentum for leaders to address the predatory fish problem that farm groups believe has led to stricter controls on pumping from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

A bill by U.S. Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Calif., that would eliminate population requirements for striped bass in the Central Valley Project Improvement Act is headed to the floor of the House of Representatives.

The legislation passed the House Natural Resources Committee unanimously on June 15, and Denham believes

its bipartisan support will enable it to sail through Congress and be signed by President Barack Obama.

"It is the congressman's hope the bill can be passed by the House and Senate soon, especially since the Obama administration supports" the legislation, Denham chief of staff Jason Larrabee said in an email.

In an effort to boost fish populations, the 24-year-old CVPIA mandated population doubling for both native species and non-native predator fish, including striped bass. As a result, millions more acre-

feet of water has been flushed through the Delta and out to the ocean rather than being used for other purposes, Denham argues.

The Turlock lawmaker's bill comes as the California Farm Bureau Federation and Western Growers are among a broad coalition that has petitioned the state Fish and Game Commission to ease or remove fishing controls on several types of bass.

The farm groups believe that solving the predator problem could lead to the easing of pumping restrictions that have deprived growers of needed surface water in recent years, Western Growers spokesman Cory Lunde has said.

Denham argues that removing predator fish from the doubling requirement will also give native fish species a better chance to repopulate while saving water and money.

Since its introduction in February, his bill, the Save Our Salmon Act, has gained support from 15 water agencies and irrigation districts throughout California as well as from the U.S. Department of the Interior.

"Reclamation and the Department appreciate the interest in reducing threats to the survival of listed fish in the Bay Delta," Deputy Assistant Interior Secretary Tom Iseman said in written testimony to the House Natural Resources Committee.



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