

People & Places

Guarding plants against sneak attacks

Cindy Cooper of WSDA works to prevent spread of plant diseases

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Bugs hop from leaf to leaf nibbling and spitting Xylella fastidiosa, a plant-scorching bacterium that bedevils Europe.

Across the globe, the Washington State Department of Agriculture's Cindy Cooper will lead a far-reaching probe to show Europeans that the pathogen doesn't live in her state.

At stake is the export to Europe of thousands of blueberry, grapevine, raspberry and other fruit plants cultivated in Washington nurseries.

Because of X. fastidiosa, the European Union bars 179 species of plants from entering the 28-nation market. Washington wasn't singled out. The ban goes for anyplace that can't say it's free of X. fastidiosa.

To say that, WSDA will have to check thousands of plants this summer in nurseries and on the landscape. Plants that look suspicious will be tested in a laboratory.

The USDA has granted WSDA \$217,000 to help pay for the search. If everything goes right, Europe and Washington nurseries will resume the trade by Thanksgiving.

Battling diseases

That's one example of the work done by WSDA's plant services program, which Cooper manages. Fending off plant diseases is a constant battle. "With plant movement, with fruit movement, you have pest movement," she said.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington State Department of Agriculture plant services program manager Cindy Cooper at her desk in Olympia. She helps keep plants shipped to and from nurseries free of pathogens.

Cooper, 56, has worked for WSDA 17 years. She started as a plant inspector and worked her way up, becoming the program manager about two years ago. She's on the board of the National Clean Plant Network, an association overseen by USDA dedicated to keeping the country's planting stock pathogen-free.

Cooper earned a degree in horticulture from Washington State University and owned a nursery before becoming a state employee. She gardens, of course. "A new nursery is like a candy store to me," she said. "I knew from the age of 10 that I wanted to grow plants."

Her program includes 10 plant inspectors. In a year, they do about 700 inspections at nurseries. There are more than 5,000 nurseries. Cooper said they have to pick their spots. High-volume garden centers, big-box retailers and nurseries that export plants get the most attention.

'Ebola of olive trees'

The unexpected happens. Again, X. fastidiosa is an ex-

ample. The disease is known in the Americas. A strain commonly referred to as Pierce's disease has long bothered California grapevines.

X. fastidiosa crossed overseas and was found in Italian olive groves in 2013. To stem the disease, a European court ordered Italian olive farmers to destroy thousands of trees. X. fastidiosa still spread to France and Spain. A Spanish newspaper coined a phrase constantly used since in press reports, calling the disease the "Ebola of olive trees."

In May of 2015, the EU barred the importation of the large number of plants vulnerable to X. fastidiosa and set rules for regaining market access.

To complicate matters, the disease was found the following October in pear plant material at the USDA germplasm repository in Corvallis, Ore. The only other time the disease had ever been documented in pear trees was in Taiwan in the 1990s. The disease had nev-

er been found in the Northwest.

"It was a huge surprise to everyone," Cooper said.

The glassy-winged sharpshooter spreads the disease in California, but Northwest winters are too cold for that bug. The blue-green sharpshooter and common spittlebug are under suspicion for carrying the pathogen in the Northwest.

Infected plant material from Corvallis had gone to a nursery in Hood River County. From there, material went out, including to about 40 residences in Washington.

Search continues

Oregon responded by surveying for X. fastidiosa. By February 2016, the USDA told the EU in a letter that 12 Oregon counties were free of the disease.

The following summer, two Washington nurseries funded a WSDA search for the disease in Thurston and Grays Harbor counties. In November, the USDA told EU those two counties were clean.



Western Innovator

Cindy Cooper

Position: Washington State Department of Agriculture plant services program manager

Age: 56

Education: Bachelor's degree in horticulture, Washington State University

Memorable: The discovery in 2003 of sudden oak death, a tree disease, leading to the destruction of thousands of nursery plants. "It was terrible," Cooper said. "We had to dig holes, bury plants and burn them."

This summer, WSDA will extend the search to Benton, Chelan, Clallam, Clark, Franklin, Grant, King, Lewis, Snohomish, Whatcom, Whitman, Yakima and Skagit counties.

The counties were selected because they have nurseries that export plants or are fruit-growing areas.

Besides proving to Europe that the state does not have X. fastidiosa, WSDA wants to make sure the disease isn't in a position to threaten Washington crops, particularly grapevines.

WSDA will follow up and search again in the summers of 2018 and 2019 to make sure there is no X. fastidiosa. And if it is found?

"We would have to meet with all stakeholders and understand the risk to trade brought up by that revelation," Cooper said.

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Index

California 14
Dairy 11
Idaho 10
Livestock 11
Markets 13
Opinion 6
Oregon 9
Washington 8

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Calendar

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Friday-Sunday

March 24-26

18th Annual Northwest Horse Fair and Expo. 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday. Linn County Fair and Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road, Albany, Ore. Three days of clinics, seminars and performances for horse enthusiasts. Cost: Adults \$12 a day, children ages 6-12 \$6 a day. Parking \$4. www.equinepromotions.net

Friday-Monday

March 24-27

Oregon FFA State Convention. Deschutes Fair & Expo Center, 3800 S.E. Airport Way, Redmond, Ore. www.oregonffa.com

Saturday, March 25

Clackamas Tree School. 8:15 a.m.-5:15 p.m. Clackamas Community College, Clairmont Hall Room 117, 19600 S Molalla Ave., Oregon City, Ore. Tree School attendees can learn about basic forestry from "A to Z" — tree identification, woodland management, pest management, wildlife enhancement, chainsaw operations, safety and maintenance, truffle hunting and cultivation, among many other topics. Advanced sessions focus on business management, managing for timber, forest roads, wildlife and biodiversity. Cost is \$50 per person in Clackamas County, \$65 per person outside Clackamas County and \$25 for youths 13-18 with an adult. http://bit.ly/1Tt8Lk

Monday-Thursday

March 27-30

Outlook 2017 Agribusiness Conference. DoubleTree Hotel, 2233 Ventura St., Fresno, Calif. This is California's premiere agribusiness conference where key agricultural issues are addressed, commodity updates are provided and the highly regarded Trends in Agricultural Land and Lease Values publication is released. Appraisers, farm managers, consultants, lenders, accountants, real estate brokers, government employees, farmers and educators will benefit from the education, networking and the Trends publication. agprolink.asmfra.org

Wednesday, March 29

Exploring the Small Farm Dream. 5-8 p.m. OSU SOREC Research Building Library, 569 Haley Road, Central Point, Ore. This three-session course provides an excellent framework to help new farmers assess their skills and interests, learn the realities of farm business ownership, and become connected to local resources. The aim is to help those thinking about small-scale commercial farming learn what it will take to start and manage a farm business, and decide whether that is something they really want to pursue. \$50 per person, \$75 for two from the same farm. Website: http://bit.ly/JacksonSmallFarmDream

Wednesday-Thursday

March 29-30

International Mass Timber Conference. Oregon Convention Center, 777 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Portland, Ore. Explores the entire supply chain for cross-laminated timber, nail-laminated timber, glulam panels, laminated veneer lumber and other mass timber; and the opportunities and obstacles for mass timber building in global construction. Benefit from 80 speakers, four focused educational tracks, 60 exhibits in the exhibit hall, multiple networking receptions, and one of the largest gatherings of CLT and mass timber experts in the world. www.masstimerconference.com

Friday-Saturday

March 31-April 1

High Desert Stampede. 6-10 p.m. Bank of the Cascades Center, 3800 SW Airport Way, Redmond, Ore. High Desert Stampede, in concert with the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, will be presenting a full rodeo performance lineup complete with bull, bareback and saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, team roping, calf roping and barrel racing. www.highdesertstampede.com

Saturday-Sunday

April 1-2

Spring Farming Days. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Eastern Washington Agricultural Museum, 99 Fairground Road, Pomeroy, Wash. Old-time horse and mule farming on 13 acres, plus static and active equipment and vehicle displays and artisan displays. RV and camping available and hot lunch available both days. Cost: Free. www.co.garfield.wa.us/museum

Tuesday, April 4

Understanding and Applying

Farm Market Reports. 6-8 p.m. OSU Extension Auditorium, SOREC, 569 Hanley Road, Central Point, Ore. Have you ever wondered what that Market Report at the back of the Capital Press really means? Perhaps you just ignore those pages, hoping it won't hurt your business too much. This class will teach you about market reports. You need to understand the terminology, where to find reputable market reports, get a market report update and learn how to apply the information gleaned in market reports to your operation. Cost: \$20 one/ \$30 two from same farm. http://bit.ly/JacksonSmallFarms

Wednesday, April 5

Exploring the Small Farm Dream. 5-8 p.m. OSU SOREC Research Building Library, 569 Haley Road, Central Point, Ore. This three-session course provides an excellent framework to help new farmers assess their skills and interests, learn the realities of farm business ownership, and become connected to local resources. The aim is to help those thinking about small-scale commercial farming learn what it will take to start and manage a farm business, and decide whether that is something they really want to pursue. \$50 per person, \$75 for two from the same farm. Website: http://bit.ly/JacksonSmallFarmDream

Wednesday-Saturday

April 5-8

86th Idaho FFA State Leadership Conference. College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls. www.idahofa.org/conferences-conventions/

Thursday, April 6

Second Annual Friends of Idaho FFA Banquet. 4:30-7 p.m. Canyon Crest Event Center, 330 Canyon Crest Drive, Twin Falls, Idaho. The silent auction and social hour start at 4:30 p.m., followed by dinner, a program and live auction. Cost: \$25 per person, or \$300 for a table of eight. Website: http://bit.ly/2nGkZzQ

Saturday, April 8

Goat Seminar. 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. 7211 40th Ct. NE, Olympia, Wash. Learn about goat healthcare and nutrition, along with a short session about packgoats. Cost: \$25 public; \$7.50 4H/FFA. Website: http://eddelweissacresobers.com/

Tuesday, April 11

Do Your Kids Want the Business? Planning for Yes or No. 7:30 to 9 a.m. Hayden's Lakefront Grill, 8187 SW Tualatin-Sherwood Road, Tualatin, Ore. Presented by Steve Bennett, Farleigh Wada Wit

and the Austin Family Business Program, Oregon State University. 800-859-7609, http://bit.ly/2h3k8Ck

Wednesday, April 12

Exploring the Small Farm Dream. 5-8 p.m. OSU SOREC Research Building Library, 569 Haley Road, Central Point, Ore. This three-session course provides an excellent framework to help new farmers assess their skills and interests, learn the realities of farm business ownership, and become connected to local resources. The aim is to help those thinking about small-scale commercial farming learn what it will take to start and manage a farm business, and decide whether that is something they really want to pursue. \$50 per person, \$75 for two from the same farm. Website: http://bit.ly/JacksonSmallFarmDream

Local Meat Marketing and USDA Processing Workshops. 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Expo Center, 45224 284th Ave. SE, Enumclaw, Wash. Workshops will focus on market demand for local meats, economics and processing options to help determine what is best for your livestock enterprise. Contact: Patrice Barrentine at King County Agriculture Program at Patrice.Barrentine@kingcounty.gov or (206) 477-1556. Cost: Free. Website: https://goo.gl/forms/JENmH-1PAWkQzDaH2

Saturday, April 15

Oregon Women for Agriculture 30th annual auction and dinner. 5-9 p.m. Linn County Fair & Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road E, Albany, Ore. Website: owaonline.org

Friday-Saturday

April 21-22

Second Annual Horsedrawn Vehicle and Equipment Auction, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Yamhill County Fairgrounds, 2070 NE Lafayette Ave., McMinnville, Ore. Preview starts at 8 a.m. both days. Auction benefits the Youth Educational Scholarship Foundation. www.pacificoverland-expo.com

Saturday, April 22

Local Meat Marketing and USDA Processing Workshops. 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Carnation Farms, Carnation, Wash. Workshops will focus on market demand for local meats, economics and processing options to help determine what is best for your livestock enterprise. Contact: Patrice Barrentine at King County Agriculture Program at Patrice.Barrentine@kingcounty.gov or (206) 477-1556. Cost: Free. Website: https://goo.gl/forms/JENmH-1PAWkQzDaH2