Research station fights back against rose stem girdler

Insect discovered in blackberry, raspberry fields

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

Geroge Plaven/Capital Press

David Bryla, research horticulturist with the USDA Agricultural Research Service, discusses using drones to monitor growth and irrigation needs of raspberries during the annual Caneberry Field Day at Oregon State University's North Willamette Research & Extension Center.

A new pest has burst on the scene at Oregon State University's North Willamette Research and Extension Center.

Rose stem girdler, a small, metallic-looking beetle that bores into raspberry and blackberry canes, was discovered last year at the station, prompting faculty to come up with a plan of attack to control the insect.

With reports of rose stem girdler in cane fruit on the rise across the Willamette Valley and southwest Washington, researchers discussed the latest infestation during Caneberry Field Day Wednesday at the station in Aurora, Ore.

Patrick Jones, faculty research assistant, said the problem first arose in late July and early August last season, when they noticed wilting among the tops of blackberry and raspberry plants.

Typically, Jones said the plants will die all the way down the crown if there is an issue with root rot or general health. These canes, however, were snapping around the middle.

"That was the big tell that we had a new pest problem," he said.

Jones figures rose stem girdler was present at the station for years, but last year they did not conduct early season spraying for spotted wing drosophila, which may have allowed the beetle population to explode.

"It was just kind of a fluke year," he said. "At least it's on everybody's radar now."

In response, the station began spraying pesticides to control rose stem girdler, based on a 2015 Utah State University Extension report. While it is still tell, Jones said he is optimistic the results will be positive.

"I think we'll do better than last year," he said.

About 50 growers attended Caneberry Field Day, which featured updates on field trials for new varieties of blackberries and raspberries, along with presentations on pest and weed control.

Oregon produced 42 million pounds of cane fruit in 2017-18, according to the state Raspberry and Blackberry Commission. Those numbers were down from 59 million pounds in 2016-17, though Bernadine Strik, berry crop specialist for OSU, said part of that is due to growers tearing out older varieties of blackberries to replace with newer ones more highly sought by processors — namely Black Diamond and Columbia Star.

Together, Black Diamond and Columbia Star accounted for more than 70 percent of plant sales in Oregon in 2017. The next closest was Marionberry, at just more than 8 percent.

As for raspberries, Tom Peerbolt, director of the Northwest Berry Foundation, said he is excited about several new varieties in development that he hopes will break through the "bottleneck" currently facing growers.

Oregon grew roughly 4.5 million pounds of red and black raspberries last year, with 72 percent of sales from just four varieties: Cascade Delight, Cascade Harvest, Cascade Gold and Meeker.

Peerbolt said he is particularly enthused about Cascade Premier, a just-released variety from Washington State University.

"I think these guys really have potential to be grown here economically in heavier soils," Peerbolt said. "If we can help accelerate that even a year or two, it could really help growers out there, and the industry as a whole."

Anheuser-Busch expands barley sustainability efforts

By JOHN O'CONNELL
For the Capital Press

John O'Connell/For the Capital Press

John Drake, director of western malting operations for Anheuser-Busch, samples barley in the malting process at the Idaho Falls malting plant during a July 13 tour. The tour was part of the company's Grower Days, recognizing 50 years of buying barley from Idaho.

IDAHO FALLS — Officials at Anheuser-Busch have set a goal of including 100 percent of their U.S. barley growers in a corporate sustainability program, called SmartBarley, by 2025.

Already, nearly 80 percent of the grower base participates in the voluntary sustainability program, which surveys growers about their production methods, irrigation usage, agronomic inputs and yields.

The company provides growers with anonymous data comparing their practices to others in the region, and throughout the world, hoping growers will implement the best practices to improve efficiency. The program already includes 525 U.S. participants, and 4,500 participants worldwide. Company officials declined to say if they would ever mandate participation to reach their goal.

Idaho is the nation's top barley-producing state, with an estimated 530,000 planted acres this season.

During a July 13 Grower Days event at its Idaho Falls malt plant, Anheuser-Busch celebrated 50 years of working with Idaho growers.

"Almost half of the beer we deliver to consumers (in North America) is dependent on barley grown in Idaho," said Dave Taylor, an Anheuser-Busch brewmaster and vice president of supply. "Our partnership is essential to us, and we are the biggest buyer of barley in Idaho."

The event included a SmartBarley booth, where staff showed growers a cluster chart on nitrogen application rates. They explained they'll likely contact growers represented by a few outlying dots who appear to be overapplying fertilizer.

"It gives us a good comparison on where to benchmark what we could be doing and what others are doing," said Hamer, Idaho, grower Justin Place. "We all need to be looking at a way to conserve and maintain our quality of what we're doing, using less fertilizer and inputs of water."

In addition to SmartBarley, the company is helping growers improve sustainability through development of new barley varieties, crop-management trials, funding AgriMet weather stations to provide farm-specific evapotranspiration data and research into new pivot irrigation technology designed to conserve water and power.

The company recently updated its overall sustainability goals — covering its own operations and its entire supply chain through 2025.

In addition to its grower program, the company is working to improve water stewardship, reduce energy use and emissions and to boost the amount of reused and recycled material in manufacturing and packing.

"Every time we've launched sustainability goals, we've achieved them much sooner than our original timeframe," said Ingrid De Ryck, vice president of procurement and sustainability for Anheuser-Busch. "The difference now is we've raised the bar significantly. We're going wider."

The company, which reduced its water use by 38 percent during the past decade, aims to conserve another 9 percent by 2025. At its Idaho Falls malt plant, John Drake, director of western malting operations, explained the company is investigating a plan to reuse a million gallons of wastewater per day, or to clean it and inject it into the aquifer to boost groundwater levels.

Mitch Lies/For the Capital Press

Betsy Verhoeven, seen in a wheat field outside Salem, is the new field crops OSU Extension agent for Marion and Clackamas counties.

New OSU Extension agent hired for Marion, Clackamas counties

By MITCH LIES
For the Capital Press

Betsy Verhoeven, an agricultural scientist with international credentials, is coming home.

Verhoeven, whose mother, Mary Verhoeven, worked in the wheat program at Oregon State University, and who worked in OSU barley breeder Pat Hayes' lab as a teenager, has been named Oregon State University Extension's new field crops agent for Marion and Clackamas counties.

Verhoeven holds a Ph.D. in agricultural sciences from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, or ETH-Zurich, as well as a master's in soils and biochemistry from University of California-Davis, and a bachelor's degree in biology from Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio. She started June 20.

"What you see in Betsy is someone who grew up in (OSU's Department of) Crop and Soil Science, someone with a great foundation, and somebody who well identifies with agriculture as we know it here in Oregon," said Jay Noller, head of the College of Agricultural Sciences' Department of Crop and Soil Science.

"She is super intelligent, loves solving problems, including big problems, and she wanted to come home, so here she is," Noller said.

Verhoeven said she chose to return to Oregon "to be closer to family" and because of her connection with the state.

"Growing up here, both the natural and farmed lands of Oregon were a huge part of my life," she said. "I want Oregon agriculture to thrive, because I want it to be there and be prosperous for many future generations."

She said her immediate plans are to connect with growers in the mid-Willamette Valley, listen to their concerns and "get the word out that there is someone here."

"Longer term, I want to work with growers, faculty and researchers to develop and improve practices that maintain and enhance the long-term productivity of Oregon lands," she said.

Verhoeven is the third field crops extension agent recently hired by OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences, including the second serving the Willamette Valley, and she is the first field crops extension agent to serve Marion and Clackamas counties since Tom Silberstein left in 2013 to take a position as faculty research assistant in Klamath Falls.

Will Jessie, an Oklahoma native, was introduced May 23 as field crops extension agent for Linn and Benton counties and parts of Polk County.

Christy Tanner started June 25 with the Malheur County Extension Service.

"These hires represent the commitment of the College of Agricultural Sciences and OSU Extension to place faculty where they are needed," Noller said. "We recognize that doesn't happen as fast as everyone would like, but, nevertheless, it has happened."

Bryan Ostlund, administrator of three Oregon grass seed commissions, as well as the Oregon clover and mint commissions, said the industry is looking forward to working with the new hires.

"It is a long time coming," Ostlund said. "Grower issues seem to be stacking up more and more all the time, and we've got a lot of work to do, so it is nice to see new people come in."

Ostlund said he appreciated the commitment of College of Agricultural Sciences Dean Dan Arp to bring on the new field crops personnel.

"There is a lot of pressure on OSU budgets, and it is much appreciated that he came through for us and put in these new agents," Ostlund said.

Noller said the latest round of new hires may not be over, noting that he hopes in a few weeks to announce the hiring of a weed scientist who will fill the position formerly held by Carol Mallory Smith, who has retired.

He added: "And I think we have a few more surprises coming up."