

Research and trapping help keep pests out of crops

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NEWS EDITOR

Pests can pose a serious threat to crops, but the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center is on the case.

Silvia Rondon, the extension center's entomologist, said staff are currently setting up for the yearly trapping program that serves as an alert system for growers in Oregon and Southeast Washington.

Insect traps are dispersed to farmers' fields around Umatilla and Morrow counties, and then brought back to the lab at HAREC each week, so that pest counts can be emailed out to more than 500 growers and added to an online map.

"We've got 50 years worth of data, and we're able to create models to predict when pests will be showing up," Rondon said.

The models, combined with alerts to where pests are showing up at the moment, helps farmers know when they need to start applying chemical or biological controls to protect their crops, saving area growers millions of dollars each year.

Rondon runs HAREC's trapping program, but also oversees the trapping system for Oregon State University statewide. She said when she was first asked to run it in 2006 she didn't want to, but now she believes it's one of the most valuable things she has done for OSU.

"I think it provides an excellent program for the growers," she said.

Bugs they look out for include the Colorado potato beetle, leafhoppers, aphids, Lygus bugs and potato tuberworms, to name a few. In addition to the trapping program, HAREC also runs a variety of research projects on how to sustainably and effectively control pests found in the area.

They work in outdoor crop circles, greenhouses



Photo contributed by Silvia Rondon
Silvia Rondon, an entomologist for the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center, takes a selfie with other members of the entomology team, who are continuing their work with social distancing measures in place.



Photo contributed by Silvia Rondon
Three different variety of traps set up in a field collect samples of different kinds of pests.



Photo contributed by Silvia Rondon
A yellow sticky trap catches insects in a field as part of the trapping system set up to alert growers to the presence of pests that can harm their crops.

MURDER HORNETS?

Rondon said she has gotten a lot of calls and emails about the Asian giant hornet, dubbed a "murder hornet," since it started making headlines recently.

The hornet can be nearly 2 inches long, has sharp jaws, a painful sting and the ability to decapitate a hive full of honeybees. A nest was found in British Columbia, Canada, and a few months ago a single dead giant Asian was found just over the border in Washington.

Rondon said so far reported sightings in Oregon have all turned out to be other similar-looking insects.

"It's not present here as far as we know, and the pictures we have been sent here are absolutely not that hornet," she said.

and labs at the station. Rondon said the entomology staff are running experiments on crops ranging from corn to hemp, but their biggest focus is potatoes, since in the Columbia Basin, "potatoes are king."

Sometimes, a new pest

migrates to the area, sparking new research to respond to the new threat.

"We have progressive growers, who are well-informed and always adapt to new things that come their way," Rondon said.

Since HAREC staff don't

have the resources to monitor every field on their own, farmers also set their own traps, and Rondon trains their staff. She said many of the people who she trains pick it up so well she tells them they should become entomologists, but she's also

available to help identify something if people are having trouble figuring out what it is.

"I provide them my cell-phone number and they send me pictures," she said.

One thing Rondon enjoys about working at HAREC

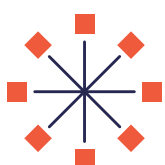
is the diversity of the staff, who come many different countries.

"We have been constantly bringing people in from all over the world, to bring that expertise and to share our expertise," she said. "It's been a great experience."

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