

Why is LBAM not an Emergency?

Dr. James Carey, entomologist and invasive species expert at UC Davis, recently testified before the California Assembly Agriculture Committee¹ that LBAM could not have spread to its present range in California unless it had been in the state for 30-50 years.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) has repeatedly stated that no crop damage has been attributed to LBAM in the state.

If LBAM has been present here for decades and no damage has been observed, there is little justification for claiming that LBAM poses a threat to crops and native flora.

Dr. Daniel Harder, botanist and Executive Director of the UCSC Arboretum, recently released a report² that documents that “LBAM is considered a minor pest that does not cause economically significant crop damage or have detrimental effect on native flora” in New Zealand where it has been an established exotic species for more than 100 years.

The Harder report also notes that LBAM in New Zealand is 80-90% controlled by natural predators -- the same generalist (i.e., not specifically co-evolved only to prey on LBAM) natural predators of LBAM that exist in California, including birds, spiders, trichogramma wasps, lacewings, and several others.

Putting together Dr. Carey’s analysis of LBAM’s tenure in California with Dr. Harder’s research on the lack of damage from LBAM in New Zealand and the presence of natural predators for LBAM in California, it seems clear that California’s ecosystems and natural predators have likely already adapted to LBAM and we may well have been cohabiting with it for decades without noticeable effect.

Thus, there is no justification for an emergency campaign of aerial spraying against LBAM.

With regard to the State’s claim, based on a set of unreviewed CDFA trapping data from 2005 in which no LBAM were reportedly detected, that LBAM has not had time to damage crops because LBAM arrived in the state only last year, Dr. Carey’s Agriculture Committee testimony states:

The argument that LBAM is a recent invader because no populations were detected by the CDFA in 2005 cannot be reconciled with LBAM’s current widespread distribution. This recent invader argument is simply not credible. For the ‘recent invader’ argument to be valid, the assumption would have to be made that the pest is capable of spreading 4,000 to 8,000 square miles annually or, alternatively, from 50 to 100 miles outward per year. However, there is no precedent for this rate of spread for any insect. Not even close.

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¹ Dr. Carey’s testimony is available on Assemblymember John Laird’s website at:
<http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a27/moth.htm>

² Dr. Harder’s paper *Integrated Pest Management of the Light Brown Apple Moth in New Zealand: Implications for California* is available on Assemblymember John Laird’s website at:
<http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a27/moth.htm>