AG DIGEST

Sudden Oak Death is spreading in Monterey County

The number of bay laurel trees in Big Sur infected with the Sudden Oak Death (SOD) pathogen has increased by 27% since 2015, according to the 2016 SOD survey.

This pathogen lives on bay laurel leaves and can infect nearby oak trees.

The pathogen doesn't kill bay laurels but it can cause death in oak trees by clogging the pathways these trees use to get proper nutrition, according to Katie Harrell, a UC Berkeley public information officer.

Oak trees are critical for wildlife because they provide food and habitats. In addition, SOD and drought-related mortality are two factors that prime forests for harsher wildfires, according to Matteo Garbelotto, who studies forest pathology and fungi at UC Berkeley.

The best time to protect against SOD is in the fall when laurels are infected but the surrounding oak trees are still healthy, Garbelotto said. Oak trees that are treated in the fall should be more resistant to infection by spring, when SOD is most likely to spread.

SOD surveys are completed by "citizen scientists," or volunteers who have been trained to survey trees and submit samples to the Garbelotto lab for testing. This is one of the few programs in the world where volunteers collect data to track a disease, according to Garbelotto.

For more information about SOD and treatment options for oaks, please visit suddenoakdeath.org or matteolab.org.

— *Sarah McQuate*

STEVE TJOSVOLD/AP

California has seen a dramatic increase in the number of trees infected with the disease known as Sudden Oak Death.

Brussels sprouts in high demand

It looks like even more people are looking to buy Brussels sprouts in 2016, according to the latest Ag Alert from the California Farm Bureau Federation. Production throughout Monterey County is on the upswing, and resulting high prices continue to keep farmers happy. A 25-pound carton of Brussels sprouts is currently selling for $30.

Ippolito International in Salinas, one of the largest fresh-market Brussels sprouts growers in North America, has had to expand production acreage to keep up with demand. Ippolito grows sprouts in Monterey County, Oxnard and Mexico as it tries to stay on top of the expected demand for the November and December holidays.

This increase in culinary interest might be explained by the recent reappearance of Brussels sprouts in food magazines and TV cooking shows.

— *Aylin Woodward*

Local grower harvests solar energy, cuts on emissions

Merrill Farms, a fourth-generation vegetable and berry grower in Salinas, announced last Friday the beginning of its solar energy harvesting. Merrill's new solar projects, in partnership with Alta Energy, will lead to roughly $12 million of energy savings over 25 years. It will also eliminate the equivalent of eight diesel trucks' worth of yearly carbon dioxide emissions.

The new solar systems at Merrill, which will take up six acres of farmland, will counteract nearly 80 percent of the electricity consumption on two of their growing sites.

Merrill Farms, which grows lettuce, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, onions, raspberries, and strawberries, has marked itself as an alternative energy pioneer.

This solar project is one of the first of its kind in the Salinas Valley.

— *Aylin Woodward*

Register now for almond production course next month

Both new and experienced almond growers are invited to attend an in-depth, comprehensive course on successful almond production Nov. 8-10 in Modesto. This event is co-sponsored by UC Agriculture and Natural Resources and UC Davis.

Registration costs $950 and includes three days of lectures, course materials, three lunches and two receptions, and continuing education credits. There will also be networking opportunities with other almond growers and professionals in the field.

Deadline to register is Monday. For more information about the course, hotel information, and registration, visit http://ucanr.edu/sites/almondshortcourse.

— *Sarah McQuate*