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California Coalition Urges Obama Administration to Pull Controversial Moth off “High-Risk” List

San Francisco - It turns out the controversial “Light Brown Apple Moth” isn’t such a significant threat to crops after all.

In a letter delivered today to newly confirmed Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, a broad coalition of organic farmers, community groups and pesticide policy reform advocates called on Vilsack to immediately strip the tiny moth from USDA’s “high-risk pest” list.

“This pest has been in Hawaii for more than 100 years without doing much harm at all,” says Margaret Reeves, a Senior Scientist with Pesticide Action Network North America and lead author of the letter. “Other countries have managed the moth effectively for years -- dramatic action simply isn’t needed to keep this bug under control.”

The California-based groups argue that the US Department of Agriculture’s listing of the moth as a high-risk pest is based on outdated data. “The moth poses no significant economic or ecological threat,” notes the letter, which goes on to point out that USDA’s current “high risk” classification of the pest triggers “quarantine measures and associated eradication efforts [that] impose real and unnecessary economic hardship on growers, in many instances compelling pest control activities that constitute a further threat to human health and the environment.”

The letter also notes that experts in entomology and invasive species suggest that the pest has likely been in California for decades. Yet it’s official identification in 2006 spurred dramatic action from the California Department of Food and Agriculture, including a controversial (and now abandoned) plan involving aerial spraying over populated areas of the state.

The moth is a native pest to Australia and has been established in New Zealand for a century, as well as in New Caledonia, Hawaii, the United Kingdom and Ireland. It can be found on a wide variety of plants, flowers, fruits and vegetables.

Like the many other leaf roller moths in California—none of which are considered significant pests—LBAM has been shown to have effective natural enemies that keep populations under control.

Available for Interviews:

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Resources:

February 4 Letter to Agriculture Secretary Vilsack,
http://www.panna.org/files/PANNA_LBAM_Reclassif_Ltr_4Feb09.pdf

Background, press coverage and additional documents: www.panna.org/resources/lbam

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