

Statement of the Secretary

In August of 1999, alarmed grape growers in Temecula who saw unprecedented numbers of their vines scorched and dying with Pierce's disease, went to their Board of Supervisors looking for help. The Board declared a state of emergency and contacted the California Department of Food and Agriculture to see what resources were available to help them meet this crisis.

The magnitude of the threat, not only to California's grape crop but to other important crops like almonds, citrus, alfalfa and ornamental plants, made it clear that this challenge had statewide implications but no easy answer. A coalition made up of affected industry groups, government, and the university, formed in record time and became determined to develop a sustainable plan to combat both the disease and its new carrier, the glassy-winged sharpshooter.

The first priority of this group was to identify and support the research that would be necessary to manage Pierce's disease outbreaks. The second focus was to stop the spread of the disease carrier before it became established in other premier grape-growing areas in the state. I am proud of the Department's role in this effort and I am also extremely impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm shown by other members of this coalition.

We have made a great start at developing a comprehensive program to contain the spread of the sharpshooter and will continue to improve it through continued meetings with local communities, environmental groups, the agricultural industry and other stakeholders. In the long term, we hope that research will provide management tools to control the disease. I look forward to continuing to expand the partnership that is making this program a success.

Secretary William (Bill) J. Lyons, Jr.
California Department of Food and Agriculture