

Meanwhile, annual ODA inspection of nurseries for P. ramorum more than half done

Nurseries proactively deal with sudden oak death threat

July 23, 2008... Oregon nurseries now have a couple of new tools to proactively deal with the threat of *Phytophthora ramorum*, the fungus that causes sudden oak death. A grower-assisted inspection program and an online training course both offer voluntary options to go along with the mandatory inspection and certification program conducted by the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

"We like both of these programs and feel they can provide additional assurance to other states and federal officials that Oregon is working hard to minimize the threat of *P. ramorum*," says Gary McAninch, supervisor of ODA's Nursery and Christmas Tree Program.

There is much at stake, now that sales of Oregon nursery products has topped the one-billion dollar mark. As much as 80 percent of that plant material leaves the state, making it crucial that *P. ramorum* does not become an industry-wide problem. Federal regulations require a rigorous state inspection program of all nurseries that ship plants susceptible to *P. ramorum*, such as rhododendrons and camellias. This includes taking samples for laboratory analysis. ODA also conducts visual-only inspections of nurseries that do not grow the kinds of plants most susceptible to the fungus. Taken together, there are roughly 2,000 nurseries required to be visited by ODA inspectors each year.

"It has been a mighty task these past few years," says McAninch. "The program is very labor intensive. As a result, it is very money intensive. We think there are other tools out there that will help us do a better job of protecting Oregon's nursery industry from *P. ramorum*."

The Grower Assisted Inspection Program (GAIP) empowers nurseries to do their own inspections and adopt management practices that lessen the likelihood of finding *P. ramorum* and other *Phytophthoras* on site. GAIP uses a systems approach that is becoming more common within agriculture. The principles of HACCP—Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points—shift the emphasis of inspection from the end product to the process itself. Key elements of the program include focusing on how the plants are produced and developing an individualized plan to reduce the risk for disease introduction. It is also vital to have a plan to manage *Phytophthora* if it is found at a nursery. ODA inspectors audit the participating nursery to ensure it is following its own plans.

Currently, nearly two dozen Oregon nurseries are voluntarily participating in GAIP and are at various stages of developing their "mitigation manual"—the nursery's game plan for dealing with *Phytophthoras*. ODA has not yet started auditing those nurseries but is anxious to get started.

"We are looking for more nurseries to volunteer for this program," says McAninch. "It would be great if we could get another 50 to participate by next year.

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The other new program, launched this spring, is an online training course on *Phytophthoras*, developed and managed by Oregon State University's Extended Campus, in partnership with ODA. The free, non-credit course includes training on the biology of the fungi, including symptoms and diagnosis. It also provides instruction on disease management and the specific regulatory aspects of *P. ramorum*. For an optional \$100 fee, nursery growers can earn a Certificate of Mastery after successfully completing an online exam. A Spanish version of the online course will soon be available.

While only a handful of participants have actually completed the exam, many more have at least visited the Web site and presumably have learned something about *Phytophthoras*.

"It is difficult for nursery workers to devote time to an all-day workshop, especially during the busy shipping season," says Jennifer Parke, an author for the course and OSU associate professor in both Crop and Soil Science, and Botany and Plant Pathology. "This way, they can take the course at their convenience. We also thought that providing the information online would allow nursery growers to come back to the course again and again as a useful resource. I think the online training will be the key to preventing disease. The course is based on early detection and changing the cultural practices in nurseries to reduce infection."

There should be a bump in the number of participants who take the online exam as well as the training course. ODA's Pesticides Division is offering recertification credits for those who want to renew their pesticide license. In addition, nursery workers participating in the Grower-Assisted Inspection Program will be required to complete the online course and exam.

Meanwhile, ODA has completed more than half of this year's inspections of Oregon nurseries as part of its annual regulatory program for *P. ramorum*. That includes sampling and certification so far of nearly 1,000 targeted nurseries around the state as part of the federal requirements. There have been only four nurseries where *P. ramorum* has been detected— one more than all of last year but down from the dozen or so positive nurseries of both 2005 and 2006. As part of the protocol, nurseries with *P. ramorum* must isolate the disease, and destroy all infected and susceptible plant material before ODA can declare them *P. ramorum*-free. The process can take several weeks, but ODA works with the nurseries to get them back and running relatively quickly.

"Discovery of nurseries with *P. ramorum* in Oregon has become less sensational," says McAninch. "Other states, countries, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have confidence in our inspection and certification program. We've been administering that program for about six years now and are finding fewer and fewer nurseries with a problem."

For now, the mandatory program is not going away. But with GAIP and the online training course now available, nurseries can help themselves by being proactive when it comes to *Phytophthora* concerns.

For more information, contact Gary McAninch at (503) 986-4785. To access the OSU *Phytophthora* Online Course, visit <<http://ecampus.oregonstate.edu/phytophthora>>.