Laurel Wilt Video Script

Florida red bay trees are dying at an alarming rate. They are being attacked by a recently introduced dangerous duo - a symbiotic plant pest and disease.

One half of the pair is a tiny non-native insect, the redbay ambrosia beetle, *Xyleborus glabratus*. The second half is a disease called laurel wilt that is caused by a fungus, *Raffaelea lauricola*, which the beetle carries. Symptoms include small holes in the bark, die-back of tree branches, dark sapwood discoloration and streaking. In dry conditions, the beetles leave strings of saw dust from their wood-boring activity.

Unfortunately, there are other host trees susceptible to laurel wilt including swamp bays, sassafrass, pondspice and one of Florida's most highly prized fruit trees – the avocado.

Beetles carrying the fungus, bore into wood, depositing the fungus, which infects the sapwood of host trees, restricting the flow of water, causing the leaves to wilt and the trees to die.

The redbay ambrosia beetle was first detected in the US near Savannah, GA in 2002. Soon after, laurel wilt was identified as the cause of high levels of mortality in red bay trees in South Carolina and Georgia. It was found in Duval County, Florida in 2005, with the same unfortunate result.

Beetles harboring the fungus that causes laurel wilt likely arrived in Florida in wood brought from another state.

Since its US discovery, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and our federal partners the USDA, have been surveying for signs of the disease. For the past few years, the Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey, or CAPS program, has been running traps in eight Florida counties from Pensacola to Miami.

More recently, as the disease moved closer to Florida's avocado industry, heightened survey efforts have been underway.

Florida Agriculture Statistics reports the avocado industry represents a production value of close to $13 million dollars annually, with over 6,500 production acres in Miami-Dade County, and a small amount of acreage in Collier County.

Dooryard avocado trees are also abundant throughout central and south Florida, and some reports claim they make up 10% of the tree canopy in Miami-Dade County.

Recognizing the serious consequences laurel wilt could have on Florida avocados, the Department assembled a working group of agricultural agencies, industry members and local agriculture groups to establish effective management strategies to mitigate potential impacts. This group continues to plan and implement research, regulatory, and outreach efforts.

A multi-agency systematic survey for the redbay ambrosia beetle and laurel wilt is underway in the commercial avocado groves of Miami-Dade County. The CAPS team has surveyed the majority of the groves and placed 18 additional traps throughout the county. Needless to say, the industry is concerned about the proximity of this disease to their groves.

Pathologists and entomologists are uncertain of how the beetle and the disease will react in avocado. In the few dooryard avocados where it has been identified, the disease has caused the sudden decline of the trees. As samples come in, scientists are running the full array of tests to analyze the many organisms emerging including a variety of fungal pathogens and insects. This is a collaborative effort between state, federal and university scientists.

Effective public outreach, vigilant survey and trapping efforts, and continued vigorous research are the keys to managing this challenging pest/disease complex. In the meantime, the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences has prepared control strategies for commercial and urban avocado growers.

Florida is in the process of developing regulatory rules to limit the movement of firewood and other unprocessed wood products into and within the state.

The public can also help prevent the spread of the redbay ambrosia beetle and laurel wilt by following these simple suggestions:

- Become familiar with the signs of laurel wilt disease and redbay ambrosia beetle, and be on the lookout for evidence of the pest or disease on your trees.
- Use local firewood only – Do not transport firewood from other states, because destructive pests and diseases can hitchhike into Florida on infested firewood.
- Do not transport host trees unless purchased from a registered nursery.
- Do not move unprocessed wood products including mulch and solid wood packing material – wood-destroying insects could be present.
- If you are a wood-worker, be sure you know the origin of your materials, they could be carrying harmful pests and diseases.
- If your tree dies, contact your local county extension office for recommended methods of disposal.
- And, be sure to check out the Save the Guac dot com website. www.savetheguac.com

If you suspect your trees may be infected with laurel wilt or you think you have found a redbay ambrosia beetle, visit www.FL-DPI.com to view photographs of the pest and disease or contact the DPI helpline at 888-397-1517.

Slowing the spread of laurel wilt is the overall goal. Ultimately, the solutions arrived at to mitigate its impact will be science-based from the research currently underway.