



San Diego Food Bank – Press Release

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For immediate release:

Fruit Fly Quarantine Costing Food Bank Thousands

San Diego, Calif – Sept 1, 2009 – The US Department of Agriculture's Mediterranean Fruit Fly quarantine regulations are costing the Food Bank thousands of dollars every month, and hundreds of volunteers are being diverted from essential operations to implement stringent USDA regulations.

Since the quarantine was introduced in June, the Food Bank estimates that compliance regulations have costing thousands of dollars per month, jumping to over \$14,000 with the inclusion of volunteer labor hours.

Costs include additional staff time, materials including 33,000 plastic bags per month and thousands of yards of mesh netting, special transportation arrangements and professional waste disposal fees.

Every \$1,000 spent on the quarantine would provide the equivalent of 3,000 meals since the Food Bank can provide 3 meals for every \$1 donation.

In order to comply with USDA regulations, the Food Bank is purchasing approximately 33,000 plastic bags per month to "double bag" produce for distribution to families in need. USDA regulations state that "fruit must be distributed in double, leak proof, plastic bagging." Prior to the quarantine, the Food Bank distributed loose fruit to families who would bring bags and boxes from home.

In order to comply with USDA regulations, the Food Bank has enlisted an army of volunteers whose value, based on minimum wage, would total over \$10,000 per week to inspect, sort and “double bag” fruit for distribution.

In addition, since loose fruit is prohibited from being transported with other food items the Food Bank has been forced to make multiple trips to food distribution sites adding thousands of extra miles to deliveries, truck overhead fees and driver hours.

At the Food Bank’s 106 distribution sites all fruit must be covered by mesh netting to prevent fruit fly infestation. To comply with these regulations the Food Bank is providing thousands of yards of netting for its 106 distribution sites and at its Miramar warehouse.

Since most fruit donated to the Food Bank is near its expiration date, a percentage of each donation arrives spoiled and must be discarded. USDA regulations stipulate that all fruit waste must be discarded in separate trash bins. To comply with regulations, the Food Bank has been forced to rent an additional large waste bin costing hundreds of dollars every week.

The Food Bank is also prohibited from accepting donations of backyard fruit from San Diego County residents. This represents thousands of pounds worth of fresh fruit donations over the summer months. Instead, the Food Bank may only accept fruit donations from certified commercial distributors.

Commenting on the quarantine, Food Bank CEO J. Scofield Hage said, “The fruit fly quarantine has been in effect since June and is likely to be extended until November. Over the six month period, the quarantine will have cost the Food Bank essential time and tens of thousands of dollars that has been diverted from its core mission of feeding San Diego’s hungry. This could not have come at a worse time for the Food Bank which is feeding more people than ever before during the worst recession since the Great Depression.”

Measures the Food Bank is taking to meet USDA regulations:

- The Food Bank is prohibited from accepting backyard fruits from donors preventing thousands of pounds worth of fresh fruit from being distributed to families in need.
- Fruit cannot be transported with other food products forcing the Food Bank to rent additional trucks and make “double trips” to its 106 distribution sites. The average roundtrip costs \$125 per distribution. This has been doubled to \$250 so that the fruit can travel separately from other food products.
- All fruit must be pre-bagged prior to distribution in double, leak proof, plastic bags. The Food Bank is purchasing approximately 33,000 bags a month.
- Hundreds of additional volunteers have been recruited to inspect, sort and bag fruit for distribution.
- The Food Bank must discard all fruit waste in a separate dumpster costing hundreds every week for storage and collection fees.
- The Food Bank must provide thousands of yards worth of costly netting to cover fruit at each of its 106 distribution sites.

EDITORS NOTES:

According to the California Department of Food & Agriculture, the Mediterranean fruit fly (Medfly) is considered the most important agricultural pest in the world.

It has been recorded infesting over 300 fruit, nuts and vegetables, making them unfit for human consumption. A great number of crops in California are threatened by the introduction of this pest including: apple, apricot, avocado, bell pepper, fig, grape, grapefruit, lemon, lime, melon, nectarine, orange, peach, pear, persimmon, plum, pomegranate, tangerine, tomato and walnut.

Establishment of these flies would result in increased pesticide use, ban on the export of whole fruits to other states and countries resulting in an estimated annual lost of \$1.3 billion to \$1.8 billion to California’s agriculture industry, according to the CDFA.

The Medfly is native to Africa, but has spread to other parts of the world including southern Europe, Australia and the New World tropics.

On August 25 the quarantine imposed for a 93-square-mile area around Spring Valley in 2008 was lifted. Despite the eradication of Medflies in Spring Valley, quarantines still remain in effect in Mira Mesa and Imperial Beach.

For more information visit: www.cdfa.ca.gov/phpps/

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