

Lawmakers Question USDA About Moth Spraying

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(CBS 5) CBS 5 Investigates has been raising questions about the State of California's plans to run an eradication program for the light brown apple moth, which could expose 7 million people in the Bay Area to pheromone pesticides. Now, members of Congress are asking questions about the spraying.

"We don't know why a state of emergency was declared. We don't know anything at this point. What we are saying is, we want the facts," said Congresswoman Barbara Lee of Oakland. "This has been fast-tracked. I don't really quite understand why."

Why and how the Federal and State Departments of Agriculture came up with the plan to spray the Bay Area with pheromone pesticides to get rid of the light brown apple moth, a plan that bypassed California's Environmental Quality Act.

"What that did was allow for a subversion really and going around the CEQA, the environmental impact statement and processes," Lee said. "You know, that just didn't happen."

The California Department of Agriculture has said the moth threatens the state's crops, and trade because growers can't ship plants and produce if the moth is present. But the moth's status as a threat comes from its placement on a USDA list. And its designation of the light brown apple moth as a class-A pest, a designation some experts told CBS 5 Investigates it doesn't deserve, because it's not really a threat.

In a letter to the USDA, Lee told the USDA administrator, "It seems clear that the USDA's decision to mandate this situation as a state of emergency should be carefully reviewed."

"That is why now we have to go back and get them to answer these questions, which they didn't," Lee said. "We can't just spend \$90 million on an effort that we don't know the final results of, and what the alternatives are. Come on!"

Barbara Lee is not the only member of Congress concerned about the USDA's process.

"I think the USDA has the wrong approach," said San Mateo Congresswoman Jackie Speier. "It's spray and ask questions later, and we can't allow them to do that."

Based on her previous interactions with the agency Speier said, "In my experience with the US Department of Agriculture, their first and foremost response is to promote the industry."

Speier is also pressing for answers.

"Accountability is key and we are going to make sure that the USDA is accountable," she said.

And Speier, along with others, sees a simple solution.

"Our job will be to see if administratively we can make the case that the moth should be removed from this list," Speier said. "And in removing the moth from the list there will be no need to spray at all. And that would be the best of all worlds."

Meanwhile the State Senate Agriculture Committee passed a resolution today from Senator Carole Migden calling for a moratorium on aerial spraying until the spray is proven safe and effective.

To see the video of this news report, please visit the following site:

<http://cbs5.com/investigates/moth.spraying.congress.2.750806.html>