NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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Red imported fire ant found in Stanislaus County near Turlock.

Stanislaus County – Stanislaus County Agricultural Commissioner Dennis Gudgel reported that an infestation of Red Imported Fire Ants (RIFA) have been discovered in a pasture one-half mile south of Turlock.

On October 11, 2006, Stanislaus County Agricultural Commissioner inspectors responded to a complaint from a person who was stung by ants while handling a bale of hay. RIFA was discovered on the property in a pasture and adjacent almond orchards. Ant samples collected were confirmed to be RIFA by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) entomologist on October 16, 2006.

CDFA personnel, with help from Agricultural Commissioner staff, have begun surveying areas around the initial find to determine the extent of the infestation. As with other finds, with the cooperation of the property owners, all infested properties will be put under an eradication program that consists of treating the colonies with a material that sterilizes the queens to eliminate the colony.

There have been six infestations in Stanislaus County dating back to 1998. One infestation was in the Newman area and five near Hickman. All previous infestations have been found in almond orchards. It is suspected that RIFA arrived aboard bee shipments during the spring almond blossom. Four of the infestations have been declared eradicated, while two infestations near Hickman have been treated and are undergoing monitoring.

RIFA is not native to California or the United States. It was accidentally introduced into Mobile, Alabama, from South America in the late 1930's. The ants are an established pest in 11 southeastern states. In California, RIFA has been detected in the central valley and Southern California.

RIFA can be a dangerous insect as the ants are very aggressive. They attack and sting anything that disturbs them, including humans and domestic animals. Red Imported Fire Ant

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biting and stinging behavior is generally a defensive reaction for protecting food and water resources or their nesting sites. When a mound is disturbed, large numbers of worker ants come to the mound surface to defend the colony. An unsuspecting victim can be rapidly covered with ants.

The ants anchor themselves with their mouthparts and then sting repeatedly injecting venom into the skin. The sting causes an intense burning sensation at the sting site and results in a white pustule on the skin within 24 hours, which last for several days. Although stings are not usually life threatening, a small percentage of the population is hypersensitive to the venom, and may experience complications.

RIFA infest residential yards and gardens, agricultural fields and pastures. The ants also infest electrical equipment and chew on the insulation and have caused short circuits in air conditioners and traffic signals. They are also a hazard to native and endangered species of plants, birds, reptiles. Also agricultural field workers can be injured and damage to crops can be extensive. It is estimated that in Texas alone, the RIFA causes more than $300 million annually in damage to crops, animals and people.

The Red Imported Fire Ant has a reddish-brown colored head and thorax with a shiny opaque black abdomen. Worker ants vary in size ranging from 1/8 to 1/4 inch. The ant colony may contain 500,000 workers, several winged ants, and queens. Mounds are similar to gopher mounds, except soil deposited is of finer texture. Mounds vary in size, from golf ball to basketball size. The queens can live seven years or more while the workers live about five weeks.

If you believe you have encountered Red Imported Fire Ant, please call the Red Imported Fire Ant Hotline: 1-888-4FIREANT or the Stanislaus County Agricultural Commissioner at (209) 525-4730. Additional information can be obtained by visiting the CDFA website at: www.cdfa.ca.gov/phpps/pdep/rifa/.

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