

Citrus Growers Gather To Plan For Drought And Bugs

By Ezra David Romero



Credit Ezra David Romero / Valley Public Radio

Over that last few years the citrus industry was hit hard by a freeze, a drought and a disease. This year, as Ezra David Romero reports from Visalia Thursday, the industry faces even more issues.

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1:17

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Joel Nelson with California Citrus Mutual is leading an effort to preserve the state's citrus industry.

Credit Ezra David Romero / Valley Public Radio

In the heart of California's orange country more than 200 growers met this week at the [2015 Citrus Showcase](#) to collaborate on how to keep their tangelo, lemon and mandarin trees producing ripe and juicy fruit.

Joel Nelson, president of the statewide trade association [California Citrus Mutual](#), put the conference together because he forecasts a rough year for growers.



NELSON: *"It's a one, two, three punch. It started off with the challenge relative to water and the lack of it. The port fiasco and our inability to export and the third challenge is our continued battle against the Asian citrus psyllid."*

The ongoing drought coupled with the nonnative bug has California's \$2-billion dollar citrus industry on edge. The Asian citrus psyllid can carry a disease that slowly kills citrus trees, deforms fruit and shrivels rootstock.

Oranges, tangelos and lemons are just a few of the citrus varieties at risk of huanglongbing.

Credit Ezra David Romero / Valley Public Radio

Nick Hill farms 1,500 acres of oranges, grapefruit and lemons in Tulare and Fresno counties.

HILL: *"What freaks me out the most is that it's the deadliest disease that citrus knows. There is no known cure at this time and everywhere in the world that it's been introduced it's not been stopped."*



California growers like Hill hope to stop the disease before it ever gets to large growing regions in the state by dramatically reducing the presence of the Asian citrus psyllid in the region. A statewide effort is in place to locate the bugs and quarantine any region where the creature is found.