July 24th, 2021

Dear Processing Tomato Growers, Processors, and Allied Industry in the Sacramento Valley -

As we progress through the 2021 field season we are getting a clearer picture of the situation we have in front of us with Branched broomrape. The official reports (over 500 acres since 2017) have been limited to Yolo County. Although the information is piecemeal, it is evident that this official acreage estimate is far from reality and that the range of this pest potentially extends outside the bounds of Yolo County. In the words of one local grower, "This is no longer a grower only problem, this is an industry concern." Agreed.

A few questions:

1. What is the plan?
2. What actions must be taken now?

What is the plan:

Starting with the first recent find in Yolo County (2017) the work of the CTRI, alongside the CTGA, has been 3-fold:

- **Get instances of all broomrape pests included under Federal Crop Insurance.** This would support individual growers, in the sense that the current devastating losses taken by these growers could be softened. This would also allow the industry to have a more realistic picture of the scale of our actual problem; informing control actions. This work is ongoing. The USDA Risk Management Agency continues to ask questions to inform their decision and understands that the longer we wait the worse the situation will be on the ground. We have stressed that the situation is urgent. The amount of time this process has taken is frustrating for all. At this point in time the best path forward is to continue answering their questions. If they were not motivated to find a solution here they would have already told us that our request was not possible. This is not what they have done.

- **Using the existing platform of the California Tomato Research Institute (CTRI) to direct and fund research around spread reduction, eradication of the existing seed bank in known fields, and long term management** (multiple CTRI, CDFA, and IR4 funded projects in 2019, 2020, and 2021). This research is ongoing. Our project lead, Brad Hanson out of UC Davis, updated the industry on this work in January. [This presentation can be found here.](#) Our trials in 2021 include duplicating our work in both Chile and California to gain a field season. In 2021 we are trialing several iterations of the Israeli long term management program, and in addition, have rimsulfuron, Actigard® and anhydrous ammonia in our trials. There is not yet a clear path forward for either eradication or slow down of broomrape development outside of the use of methyl bromide. Updates on 2021 findings will be reported as they come in. If there is a treatment identified which provides a significant level of broomrape emergence inhibition, even if it is not complete control, this finding will be reported. In 2022 we will continue these efforts, with greater focus on inhibiting broomrape emergence and identification of genetic solutions. To expand these efforts we will need additional grower partners in impacted fields.
• Gain regulatory permission to use the only known method (methyl bromide) of eradication of the seedbank of this pest in known fields, and build a program to use it. We were initially told this was not possible. This is why we were pleased - after working through the USDA, CDFA, DPR and the Yolo County Ag Commissioner - to be granted this permission in March of 2021. The Yolo County Ag Commissioner, Humberto Izquierdo, who started in this role in January 2021 has been very receptive to industry concerns and, I believe, wants to work with the industry to come to a solution to this problem which is mutually agreeable. After Yolo County agreed to this use other counties began coming on board. Today, Yolo, Solano and Colusa Counties have agreed to allow methyl bromide applications. The Sutter County Ag Commissioner is still making this decision.

What actions must be taken now:

Impacted growers have been instrumental in the creation of this plan. The CTRI and CTGA will continue to work through it; seeking input and collaboration along the way from any interested stakeholders. But, this work cannot be done only by impacted growers and industry associations. We need your help to accomplish the following:

• **Reduce the spread of this pest by not harvesting infested blocks, and by practicing sanitation of equipment between fields.** Sanitation alone will not completely stop the spread, but it is one component of a holistic strategy to slow its progression. This is particularly important, today, as we have no long term management solution within grasp. Sanitation steps can be found on our website, here: [http://www.tomatonet.org/branchedbroomrape](http://www.tomatonet.org/branchedbroomrape). Retired Farm Advisor for Yolo, Solano and Sacramento Counties, Gene Miyao, recently produced a helpful and thoughtful field observation document which reviews the importance of sanitation, lays out the practical steps, and includes some considerations around the current state of the infestation. You can [find that document here](http://www.tomatonet.org/branchedbroomrape).

• **Support the fumigation effort.** Like sanitation, fumigation alone will not completely stop the spread, but it will slow down the movement of seed to non-infested areas; buying us much needed time to produce a workable long term management solution. A grower survey was sent out in early July to all growers in Yolo, Solano, Colusa and Sutter counties asking for their willingness to contribute to a voluntary assessment for the sole purpose of fumigation. With an over 67% response rate, over 65% of the acres in these counties are supportive and have expressed a willingness to contribute an average $0.41/paid ton. As the grower side of this commitment becomes clearer we will be looking to processors, seed dealers, breeding companies and other impacted industries to maximize the impact of this effort. Fumigation companies have already been contacted and would be able to begin, if not complete, the acres reported thus far this fall. It is possible to clean up these acres. It will take the real dollars, of all industry stakeholders, to make it happen.

The above plan and direct actions will move us forward down the path of containing and controlling this pest. As the original Director of the CTRI, Dr. George Johannessen commented to a New York Times reporter in 1987, “We’ve got some very, very serious problems in the processing tomato industry; but we have the ability to fight and survive in the world market.” Let’s get to it.

Thank you for your time, attention, and action. Do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions or concerns.

Zach Bagley
Managing Director