



March 31, 2023

Re: Thrips parvispinus

Dear South Florida Horticulture Stakeholder,

As observed at our “thrip threat” meeting held on March 28, 2023, one can see how worrisome this pest is to the whole of agriculture in South Dade and indeed, all of Florida. I wanted to reach out with some takeaways from said meeting and suggestions for all involved on how we, as a community, can deal with this ongoing issue and situation threatening our industry.

First, it is important to understand that the urgency of this threat could not have come at a worse time. Our horticulture industry is at its most busy time of the year. From late March to early June, it is not unusual for our growers to work 10-12 hours+ per day and 6-7 days a week. It is known as our “Spring Shipping Season” and is when our industry is able to turn their fiscal year into a financially positive one. Without our heavy sales and shipping for these 6-8 weeks our growers and farmers would not be able to operate and cease to exist. Quite simply, any actions related to stopping these operations from selling and shipping puts hundreds of millions of dollars in sales and tens of thousands of jobs at risk.

At our meeting, representatives from the Tropical Research and Education Center, Division of Plant Industry (DPI), and those assembled, advised and discussed the following:

- This particular Thrip was discovered in Lake County, FL in 2020 and thought to be an isolated incident. Since that time it has been found throughout the South Florida region and is theorized to also be found in the landscape. Our growers report that there are rumors it is already found outside the State of Florida but no positive ID has been located at this time by other States. Hence, it remains a Florida issue and concern.
- It is thought that this pest invaded our shores by coming in one of our very many ports of which too little is done by way of inspecting imports of produce and other food crops. **It is important we do a better job of inspection at said ports of entry to preclude these**

crises from occurring in the first place, whereby we end up punishing our own, and in many circumstances, much too late, where mitigation has little chance to succeed.

- Our growers are internally battling pest and disease in an effort to prevent Thrips parvispinus. This is coming at great expense to our operations byway of an unprecedented amount of chemical expense and disbursement as well as dedicating extra labor towards such efforts. Employees are also being redirected, per the advisement and in agreement with DPI, as scouts are being utilized throughout our growing areas to prevent the development and/or spread of pests. **We ask that any and all efforts be made by relevant parties to ensure price gouging and efforts to squeeze our industry in the interest of greater profits, be monitored and handled swiftly during this time of need, as it relates to chemical expenditures and other supply resources needed in this fight.**
- DPI Inspectors are currently being instructed to visually inspect crops that may be infected with Thrips parvispinus. These inspections may be as an aside to regular visits to our nurseries and growers such as the issuing of a Phyto or regular annual inspections.
- Should inspectors encounter any Thrip activity a quarantine will be issued. Specifics about what is quarantined and at what scope/size is subjective (as it should be) and **we appreciate the Department understanding that inspectors, in collaboration with our growers, can best decide whether only a specific crops' bench or area is under such quarantine, as opposed to acres of land, an entire farm location, or the entity as a whole.**
- A sample Thrip will be collected by the inspector and sent to DPI's lab in Gainesville, FL for identification. It was advised that the quarantine is issued immediately and there is currently a wait time of around 2+ weeks for identification. We can and should do much better here. There were suggestions from the assembled **that DPI should institute mobile ID stations in South Florida in order to speed up this very lengthy delay.** As already stated, hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue is at stake and every hour counts as it relates to an operation being under quarantine and not selling/shipping their plants. To wait for 2+ weeks **when this pest can be identified by experts in our local field is something that should be looked into immediately and put in place by DPI as soon as possible.** In the case where the Thrips is not identified as parvispinus a quarantine order could be lifted that much faster, allowing our growers to get back to the business of selling and shipping.
- There are currently 17 growers currently under a quarantine. I am sad to say this was the number that DPI shared with us at the meeting a few days ago. Since that time, I'm aware of at least 2 additional (large) operations that have gone under quarantine as well.

As the hours and days go by this is surely to increase putting all of our livelihoods and the livelihoods of our employees at risk.

Due to the facts mentioned above, and risks involved, it is imperative that our community of elected officials, the Division of Plant Industry, our local leaders, and horticultural organizations join forces in activating the suggestions outlined here within. Our final recommendation is that work begin in an effort to **compensate those farms, nurseries, and growers who may be unable to sell and ship their material during this key window we have during the year. Furthermore, other funds be made available for the unprecedented amount of extra expense our growers are going to in thwarting this pest, as noted above.** Should more and more quarantines be issued, this could amount to millions of dollars of lost revenue and it is imperative funding be made available to ensure their ultimate survival throughout the remainder of the season and the year(s) ahead. Perhaps this funding can be made available via the Farm Service Agency within the USDA as other similar threats have been handled in years past, from hurricane assistance, to the Coronavirus, etc. our growers have relied on the FSA in years past for just such crises and this one is proving no different.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter and please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or should you wish to discuss this issue further.

Best regards,



Jeffrey DeMott

Miami-Dade Chapter FNGLA President
Redland Nursery, Inc. President
Alpha Foliage, Inc. Executive Vice President

18455 SW 264th Street
Homestead, FL 33031

305-248-5109 | Jeffrey.DeMott@RedlandNursery.com

CC *Carolina Gonzalez, Outreach Coordinator – U.S. Senator Marco Rubio*
 Lea Padron, Regional Director – U.S. Senator Marco Rubio
 Dr. Trevor Smith, Plant Industry Director – Division of Plant Industry
 Jorge Abreu – FDACS Regional Director
 Talmadge Coley, Chief Executive Officer – FNGLA
 Eric Smith, President - FNGLA
 Daniella Cava – Miami-Dade County Mayor
 Bobby Bracy, District Director – Miami-Dade County Commissioner Danielle Cohen Higgins
 Charles LaPradd – Miami-Dade County Agricultural Manager

Dr. Edward Evans, Executive Director – Tropical Research and Education Center
Dr. Alexandra Revynthi, Assistant Professor – Tropical Research and Education Center
Teresa Olczyk, County Extension Director – UF/IFAS Miami-Dade County Extension Office
Jocelyn Guilfoyle, Executive Director – Dade County Farm Bureau
Barney Rutzke, Jr., President – Dade County Farm Bureau | Vice President, Miami-Dade FNGLA
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