

The Fight Against Pierce's Disease and the Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter *Industry and Government Working Together*

It wasn't a battle anyone was looking for or even expected. A small bug, the glassy-winged sharpshooter (GWSS), an invader from outside the state, seemed like a rather benign pest when first discovered in Southern California in the early 1990s.

But in 1999, grape vines started dying on a massive scale in Temecula. A century old wine industry foe, Pierce's Disease (PD), was hitting the area hard. It had long been known that native sharpshooters carried PD but generally did not cause widespread epidemics. However, that wasn't true of the newly introduced GWSS. In a short time it had spread the disease throughout the vineyards of Temecula and was poised to do the same throughout California, seriously jeopardizing the state's \$45 billion wine and grape industry.

Winegrape growers throughout California formed alliances to find ways to halt the spread of the GWSS and to find a treatment for the Pierce's Disease it was carrying. Measures were quickly put in place to control and contain the spread of the disease, and the state government authorized emergency funds for containment programs and research. But industry leaders soon recognized that containment of the GWSS was only a short-term answer. The real solution

would be to find a cure or treatment for PD.

In 1999, the California Department of Food and Agriculture appointed the Pierce's Disease Advisory Task Force to advise the Department on research and management of PD/GWSS. In 2001, winegrape growers aggressively lobbied for Assembly Bill 1394 to establish an assessment on themselves to fund research, with an advisory board (the Pierce's Disease and Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter Board) also created to recommend how the assessment was used. The 15-member board, comprised of winegrape and vintner growers, develops recommendations for spending the approximately \$4 million raised each year by the assessment, directing those funds to promising research projects and other program activities that will most benefit the industry.

To date the assessment has raised approximately \$14 million and funded nearly 100 research projects. But perhaps even more importantly, the assessment has been a catalyst for raising other monies to help in the fight against PD/GWSS. Legislators charged with approving additional funds recognize the importance of the industry's initiative in assessing itself, indicating that the growers are taking this fight seriously and deserve the government's help.

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