March 21 was celebrated as National Agriculture Day with emphasis on the role of agriculture and the American farmer. Larry J. Thibodeaux, County Executive Director for the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service in St. Martin Parish, said that this year was the ninth observance of National Agriculture Day.

During the observance, some of the facts pointed out are that farmers' ingenuity and hard work and agricultural research are the basis for a food production system that has made it possible for 3 percent of our population to produce our food and fiber--allowing 97 percent of the Nation's people to produce other goods and services that are the basis of our national strength and wealth. Another point, Thibodeaux said, is that our food is the most plentiful, healthful, safe, nutritious, and reasonably priced in the world. Farmers are our number one conservationists of natural resources and are the Nation's champion producers of renewable energy supplies through converting solar energy into food and fiber.

Other significant facts Thibodeaux said is that agriculture is the Nation's number one industry--assets exceeding $1 trillion; the Nation's number one employer--over 23 million people; and the Nation's number one exporter--$39 billion in 1982. Fifty years ago there were 6.5 million farms in the United States; the average size farm was 145 acres; there were 13 million farmers and farm workers each of whom, on the average, produced enough food and fiber for nearly 20 people, compared with 26 people in 1960, Thibodeaux said. Not only on National Agriculture Day--but every day of the year--all of us should be aware of the great value of our American farmers in providing us a bountiful food supply unmatched in any other country.

White peach scales should be treated now. These small but numerous pests can kill peach trees. Their feeding on plant nutrients is bad but the injection of toxic materials that keeps the sap flowing is the critical factor. This injury is easily observed if a small section of bark is removed from the infested trees. The underside of the damaged bark will be red streaked, which is a characteristic of the toxin and the feeding injury. These scales are best controlled now as a small population can build to millions if uncontrolled. Their control later is more difficult labor as a percentage of the new generations settle under the covers of the old females, giving the pest a multiple protection. Sprays, using Diazinon or Ethion plus oil and repeated again in 10 to 14 days, are extremely effective in controlling the scale. These sprays work twofold by direct insecticide contact with the scales under their covers through the respiratory ducts and by the oil plugging the respiratory ducts smothering the remaining females. These results warrant 2 sprays. The oil will act as a blockage of the ducts for about two weeks, and the second spray will block it an additional two weeks. Each scale with its cover can maintain its individual microclimate under the cover for about two weeks. If these respiratory openings are blocked or plugged longer than that they will suffocate.

Coverage by the sprays is most important. The spraying must be applied to the infestation sites and not just allowed to run down from another sprayed area. Remember, just one or two females not controlled is a potential for millions by season's end and possibly a dead or partially dead tree.

The other early season pests come from the trash or litter beneath the trees or from the weedy and grassy ditches and woods used for overwinterings or as alternate hosts while awaiting the onset of spring growth on trees. These pests are called catfacing insects. The stinkbug and the tarnished plant bug feed on the young developing fruit, causing the fruit to fail or be misshapen or knotty in development. This damage is caused by the piercing-sucking mouthparts that kill the cells as they suck the sap from the developing fruits. The plum curculio is an early feeder on the petals of the blossoms and then on the fruit. Its damage, besides feeding, include oviposition which destroys the fruit completely as the larva develops inside the affected fruit. Most infested fruit fall to the ground and the second generation emerges about 30 to 40 days later.

Control of these pests is best accomplished by an application of an insecticide like Thiodan, prior to or up to 10% bloom. Repeat application at 80% petal fall or shock split to help reduce early catfacing problems. Good orchard sanitation and early weed control in and around orchards will also assist in reducing these pest populations.

Peaches are beginning to put forth new growth and this is an ideal time to begin a pest control program. Pests such as scales, stinkbugs, tarnished plant bugs and plum curculio are moving and preparing to attack the trees.

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