

# CROP CURRENTS

Contra Costa &amp; Alameda Counties

From: Kamyar Aram, Specialty Crops Advisor

APRIL 2020

**UCCE serving you during COVID-19 response:**

We continue to serve our clients and community as our nation takes unprecedented measures to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus causing the COVID-19 pandemic. I am a new farm advisor serving the East Bay counties; a short introduction is included in this newsletter. The Stay-at-Home Orders put in place in mid-March, now reinstated for the Bay Area through May 3, 2020 (see county websites: [contracosta.ca.gov](http://contracosta.ca.gov) and [acgov.org](http://acgov.org)), have forced all of us to try to adapt to restrictions on our usual ways of doing business. I have put together a list below of some online resources that you may find helpful. I will be working to get these resources and others up online, so please check the website:

[http://cecontracosta.ucanr.edu/Commercial\\_Agriculture/Crops/](http://cecontracosta.ucanr.edu/Commercial_Agriculture/Crops/)

Also please bring to my attention any ideas or resources that you think others will find helpful:

Email: [kamaram@ucanr.edu](mailto:kamaram@ucanr.edu)

**PESTICIDE SAFETY TRAINING in Spanish****CANCELED: April 16 training for field workers**

- Trainings scheduled for **May 7** (pesticide handlers) and **May 28** (field workers) will be reconsidered based on official guidelines as those dates near.
- Please check for updates at:

[http://cecontracosta.ucanr.edu/Commercial\\_Agriculture/Crops/](http://cecontracosta.ucanr.edu/Commercial_Agriculture/Crops/)

**\*\*\*WORKERS MUST STILL BE TRAINED\*\*\***

- Agricultural workers and pesticide handlers must still be trained on an annual schedule. Resources at the following website may be used to help meet this requirement:

<http://pesticideresources.org/wps/training/percvids/>

**GENERAL RESOURCES for California Farms:**

- Marin County UC Cooperative Extension has a great and thorough "Frequently Asked Questions" guide, COVID-19 FAQs for Farmers:

[http://growninmarin.org/For\\_Farmers\\_and\\_Ranchers/COVID-19/](http://growninmarin.org/For_Farmers_and_Ranchers/COVID-19/)

- Community Alliance with Family Farmers COVID-19 Resources:

<https://www.caff.org/covid19/>

- California Farm Bureau Federation: <https://www.cfbf.com/covid-19-information/>

- EcoFarm Resources for Farmers:

<https://eco-farm.org/supporting-farmers-food-systems-during-covid-19>

- USDA Resources for Farmers: <https://www.farmers.gov/>

- American Farmland Trust: <https://farmland.org/farmer-relief-fund/>

## Agri-tourism and direct sales:

- Farmers markets and farm stands are considered essential services and remain open.
- There are reports of farms without usual retail outlets or set up for online sales using social media along with apps like PayPal and Venmo, and designated pickup spots to quickly implement this approach. If you have experience with this and any tips you'd like to share with others, please let me know: [kamaram@ucanr.edu](mailto:kamaram@ucanr.edu)
- **UC ANR's California Agricultural Tourism Directory** is compiling resources to help businesses looking for new sales opportunities:  
[http://www.calagtour.org/Shelter-in-Place\\_Resources/](http://www.calagtour.org/Shelter-in-Place_Resources/)

## Food safety during COVID-19 pandemic:

- UC Davis, Food Safety during COVID-19:  
<https://ucfoodsafety.ucdavis.edu/covid19-food-safety-resources>

## New Pest in the Bay Area: Plum Bud Gall Mite

While disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are no doubt the main concern at this moment, growers of **plums, apricots, and peaches** should be aware of a **new pest emerging in the Bay Area** that may affect these crops, as well as hybrid varieties, such as pluots. The Plum Bud Gall Mite (PBGM, *Acalitus phloeocoptes*) is an eriophyid mite (similar to those causing growths on grape or oak leaves) that colonizes certain stone fruit trees, **producing swollen galls** and potentially weakening trees over time if unchecked. In Europe and the Middle East, the species is also reported on **almonds**, but so far anecdotal reports suggest that they are not affected in the Bay Area where the pest has been found on other *Prunus* trees. Anecdotal accounts suggest that severity may be cultivar dependent. The CDFA currently lists PBGM as an **A-rated pest** ("an organism of known economic importance subject to state enforced action") but **research is needed** to confirm its **host range**. PBGM was first noticed in Santa Clara County in April 2019, but has since been confirmed in Bay Area counties including San Mateo, Alameda, Contra Costa, and has anecdotally been reported from Marin County. It has also been confirmed in Santa Cruz County. So far, it has not been reported from any commercial orchards, being largely detected on homeowner trees or non-managed orchards, though a report from Santa Cruz County indicates that it was found on trees at the UCSC farm. Mites **emerge** from **overwintering galls** in the **spring** and colonize buds of growing shoots where they feed, multiply, and eventually produce new galls. They are primarily **dispersed by wind**, but can also be transferred by animals or through **movement of infested budwood**. If you see signs of infestation (see image inset), please report to the Department of Agriculture. Look out for more info on this pest from me.



Photo: Aparna Gazula, UCCE Santa Clara County



## Kamyar Aram East Bay Specialty Crops Advisor

University of California Cooperative Extension  
Contra Costa and Alameda Counties

2380 Bisso Ln. Ste. B ~ Concord, CA 94520

(925) 608-6692 office ~ (925) 381-8778 mobile

kamaram@ucanr.edu

[http://cecontracosta.ucanr.edu/Commercial\\_Agriculture/Crops/](http://cecontracosta.ucanr.edu/Commercial_Agriculture/Crops/)



### **New UC Specialty Crops Advisor for the East Bay:**

I wish that I was introducing myself under happier circumstances, but I am honored nevertheless, and perhaps more so now, to be serving you as a new University of California Cooperative Extension farm advisor, serving **specialty crops** in **Contra Costa** and **Alameda** counties. I am honored also to be following in the legacy of **Janet Caprile** who retired in 2017 after a long and distinguished career serving **commercial horticulture** in the East Bay, and who I know is so widely respected and appreciated here.

I started this position in August 2019, and have been busy with a schedule of farm visits, technical trainings, and conferences, getting to know agriculture in the region and building a network that will help me serve its diverse needs. The great **diversity of crops and farming businesses** in the East Bay was a major factor drawing me to the position. It has been a great pleasure to get to know those of you that I have met, and I look very much forward to meeting the rest of you and getting to know your operations, hopefully soon.

I come to you most recently from **UC Davis** where I earned a doctorate in **Plant Pathology**, doing research on **fungal diseases of trees** (specifically on *Sudden Oak Death* caused by a *Phytophthora*), and where I also worked on an **outreach and research** project on the spread of **grapevine virus diseases** (mainly *leafroll* and *red blotch*). Previously, I earned a Master's degree in **Vegetable Crops** from **Cornell University** with research on the use of **compost for nitrogen fertility and suppression of soilborne diseases**. I also worked for some years in the wine industry, both in **viticulture** and **winemaking**.

As my background might suggest, my interests are broad. I am very interested in the biological, chemical, physical, and ecological underpinnings of crop production, but I am also very interested in a holistic view of what makes for **success and sustainability in agricultural** businesses. I am eager to engage with currently hot topics in agriculture, such as **integrated pest management, soil health, water management, and mechanization and data technologies** for agriculture. I am also very interested in learning about things that may not be on my radar yet. I am a strong believer in the **land grant mission** of serving the public with university research and knowledge networks. I would love to meet you, learn about your farm and business, and to learn how I can best serve you. I encourage you to reach out to me (see my contact information above). I wish you and yours health and well-being as we work together to get through the disruptions and challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

~ Kamyar

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UCCE – Contra Costa County  
2380 Bisso Lane  
Concord, CA 94520



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