UCCE offers latest in Ag science and management

By EDWIN DELGADO, Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, December 8, 2017 1:00 am

IMPERIAL — As new technology and better practices emerge, local farmers need to remain informed about the latest developments in the agricultural industry.

On Thursday, the University of California Cooperative Extension of Imperial County held the 28th annual Fall Desert Crops Workshop to cover a wide range of topics which interest local farmers and growers.

Among the 14 different presentations given Thursday included water management, nutrient management, sunflower crop water use, and comparison of drip and furrow irrigation for onions, invasive pest species in Imperial County, cover cropping in the low desert and Rhodes grass.

"This is a forum for the growers to come and share information," UCCE Agronomy Advisor Oli Bachie said.

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Jose Aguiar UCCE Riverside County speaks to the growers in attendance about the importance of crop rotation and the benefits which it entails. EDWIN DELGADO PHOTO

Every year, the UCCE hands out a needs-assessment survey to local growers to offer ideas on some of the topics they wish to be addressed in the annual workshop.

One of the main presentations was given by plant pathologist/entomologist from the Agricultural Commissioner's Office Laura Arellano, who gave an update on invasive pest species in Imperial County.

She highlighted that to date the county has managed to control the presence of glassy-winged sharpshooter, which carries Pierce's Disease which blocks water flow within a plant's xylem vessel and also causes Alfalfa dwarf disease. The Imperial County is the only county in Southern California without the insect.

Arellano said the commissioner's office has carried two delimitations in two retails nurseries where the glassy-winged sharpshooter was found.

Jose Aguiar, Vegetable Crops Farm advisor for the UCCE of Riverside County, focused his presentation on cover cropping for the desert. In his presentation, he said one of the main concerns he has in the Coachella Valley is the monoculture and practice of planting the same crop again and again.

He explained that some of the issues that can arise from this practice are an increase of nematodes and viruses, a depletion of nutrients in the soil; while crop rotation helps in the reduction of weeds and improved soil quality.

Another method he highlighted, which has been used in Coachella, is the use of green manure. The practice involves leaving uprooted or sown crop parts to wither on a field so that they serve as a mulch and soil amendment. The plants used for green manure are often cover crops grown primarily for this purpose.

One of the most popular ways in which this practice has been carried out in Riverside County is to plant cowpea surrounding dates to have the same water source and help protect the dates and increase the levels of nitrogen in the soil.

Bachie closed the day of activities with a presentation on Rhodes Grass. Bachie talked about its features and how it could become a good crop locally since it's drought resistant, requires less water than other crops such as alfalfa (about the same as Bermuda grass) and is still good in producing hay.

The reason he believes the crop could work well in the Valley is because of its tolerance to extreme temperatures and noted the crop germinates quickly and is highly productive.

For the UCCE, the focal goal for this workshop is to offer the local growers whom they work closely with, receive feedback from them, to get a better understanding of the type of research the growers would like the UCCE to conduct.

"Crop production and the science of agriculture is a dynamic process, and there are changes happening constantly," Bachie said. "That's why the topics we cover are not dogmatic; we have to talk about not just the science behind it, but also current events and agricultural conditions."

Staff Writer Edwin Delgado can be reached at edelgado@ivpressonline.com