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California Polytechnic State University

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Sharpshooter, Tomato Waste, Pitch Canker Among Targets of CSU Ag Research Partnership

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- "Fat-burning" diet pills, a better-tasting, easier-to-cook lamb chop, how to save California vines from the glassy-winged sharpshooter and Monterey Pines from pitch canker are just a few of the projects professors are researching this year at Cal Poly's College of Agriculture, thanks to hefty awards from the state Agricultural Research Initiative program.

This is the third year for the Agricultural Research Initiative, or ARI. Currently, Cal Poly Agriculture professors are working more than 60 Cal Poly ARI projects funded so far by the CSU for a total of almost \$4.2 million in ARI grants. Every ARI project must receive at least equal, additional funding from sources outside the CSU, and many of the projects have been suggested by the industry.

Professor Doug Piirto's five-year, \$550,000 study of Monterey pines began last year. The ARI's half of the budget was matched by the California Department of Forestry. An expert from Finland is in San Luis Obispo this summer helping complete a study of how Monterey pine forests grow both with and without pitch canker.

Professor Joe Montecalvo's work with tomato waste was requested -- and is being co-funded -- by tomato processors and an equipment company. It began two years ago with a modest \$25,000 and is being expanded this year with another \$144,000.

Funding is still uncertain for Professor Michael Costello's research aimed at reducing the damage Pierce's disease could inflict on California vineyards. The \$231,000 ARI portion was approved in the new state budget, but the project's future depends on finding matching funds from the wine industry or other sources.

Among growers supporting Costello's project is Dana Merrill, president of Mesa Vineyard Management Inc. of King City and current chairman of the California Association of Winegrape Growers.

"This project offers the promise of dramatically improving our knowledge base with regard to the sharpshooter and Pierce's disease, which up till now has been limited," Merrill said. "It can help determine where our subsequent control efforts should be directed."

Cal Poly, Fresno State, Cal Poly Pomona and Chico State are the four ARI partners and collaborate on some research projects. The program is administered by the California Agricultural Technology Institute at Fresno State.

More information on Cal Poly professors ARI research, including brief summaries of all Cal Poly ARI projects, is available on the Web at <http://cagr.calpoly.edu/programsAndProjects/ARIProjects.asp>.

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