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## Oregon takes steps to eradicate sudden oak death fungus

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Associated Press

**PORTLAND, Ore.** - After facing a possible federal quarantine of its leading agricultural crop, Oregon is taking aggressive action to wipe out sudden oak death fungus, trying to ward off a disease that's been threatening commercial nurseries nationwide.

A joint state and federal inspection team began gathering samples Wednesday as part of a temporary program to test nearly every nursery in Oregon in order to certify the state is free of the disease.

Oregon is the second-largest producer in the West of nursery trees, ornamental plants and shrubs. It ranks No. 5 nationally behind California, Texas, Florida and North Carolina.

The top five states account for nearly two-thirds of the entire U.S. nursery crop, a \$13 billion industry that is the largest in the world and a major export commodity.

Sudden oak death fungus was first spotted in Europe in 1993 but had spread to the San Francisco Bay area in California by the mid-1990s, killing off large stands of oak trees. It later infected nursery crops in the Los Angeles area that were shipped across the nation, prompting a federal quarantine on California.

Oregon was threatened with a quarantine after an outbreak discovered last month at a rural nursery north of Portland.

But the Oregon congressional delegation met with U.S. Department of Agriculture officials in Washington, D.C., to fashion a compromise that instead resulted in the state inspection program launched on Wednesday.

Inspectors from the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service will join Oregon Department of Agriculture inspectors to gather and test samples from about 1,400 nurseries around the state during the next two months.

The program was welcomed by Oregon growers anxious to protect a crop worth \$543 million in sales in 2003, according to figures provided by the Oregon State University Extension Service.

"I say get it done so we get on with business," said Julie Holmason, co-owner of the Sauvie Island Nursery in Portland.

"Sudden oak death is something we'll all have to deal with, so the best thing is to get it over with and get your nursery certified," she said.

The program will temporarily require all growers and nurseries to be inspected annually in order to be certified free of the plant disease. The new state sudden oak death inspection regulation also requires nursery growers and dealers who have been inspected and certified to buy plant material only from

other certified suppliers. Otherwise, plant material will be held and tested.

Association dues already cover regular inspections so the new program should add little extra cost or inconvenience, said Cam Sivesing, spokesman for the Oregon Association of Nurseries.

But the disease can be difficult to spot or identify in the early stages, so officials are trying to increase the level of awareness about symptoms for growers and nursery operators.

"We want the rest of the U.S. and export markets to understand that our nursery industry is not infested with sudden oak death, and that any new introduction of the disease will be detected early and quickly eradicated," said Katy Coba, director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Sudden oak death has been found in at least 14 states, and at least 10 states have restricted the sale of infected host plants. Florida has banned the import and sale of all nursery plants from California.

#### **ON THE NET**

Oregon Department of Agriculture: <http://www.oda.state.or.us>

Oregon Association of Nurseries: <http://www.oan.org>