

Stockton Record

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Congressman Jerry McNerney (D-Pleasanton) has introduced a bill that would make it easier for farmers hurt financially by agricultural quarantines to get federal loans or grants.

McNerney said in a written statement that the Fairness for Family Farmers Act would "streamline assistance" for farmers who have lost crops and income due to federal quarantines.

In September, federal authorities quarantined a 118-square-mile area including Stockton for the Oriental fruit fly. That quarantine required farmers to adopt strict processing and handling procedures in order for their walnuts, grapes, tomatoes, peppers and other crops to be shipped out of the area.

McNerney's statement said that quarantine cost Stockton farmers more than \$1 million.

Such quarantines are becoming common. Area farms were quarantined in 2010 for the European grapevine moth and in 2009 for the light brown apple moth.

McNerney said there were 107 federal farm quarantines ordered across the nation in the last three years, including 26 in California.

The bill would eliminate the requirement that farmers must first be rejected for a private loan before they can qualify for a federal loan. The bill also requires the US Department of Agriculture to develop a system to provide direct assistance to farmers hurt by quarantines.

Although the bill is aimed at family farms, corporate-owned operations could also receive the money, a McNerney staffer said.

The California Farm Bureau Federation has endorsed the bill.