

**Statement to the State Personnel Board:
June 14, 2018 Meeting**

My name is Suzanne Latham, and I am a Senior Plant Pathologist and the Primary State Mycologist. I have a M.S. and Ph.D. in Plant Pathology from UC Davis. This is my colleague Marc Epstein, Senior Insect Biosystematist, who has a M.S. and Ph.D. in Entomology from the University of Minnesota. Marc and I are both scientists at The California Department of Food & Agriculture's Plant Pest Diagnostic Center in Sacramento.

The scientists in the Center have a critical and immediate need for reclassification into the Research Scientist classification, especially given our responsibilities and the level of expertise required to perform our job duties.

One could say that our scientists are prime candidates for Governor Brown's class consolidation initiative of state positions. Our Center presently has 18 scientists in 7 different classifications because, when these classifications were written, scientists were partitioned by area of expertise in different pest groups **[note: on 12-22-2020 we have 16 scientists in 5 different specialist classifications, in a less than a year the last remaining Associate level person will be Senior level]**. However, all our specialists use the same scientific process to perform our diagnostic and research responsibilities involving the identifications of pests.

California Agriculture is a major contributor to the state's economic engine, one that now ranks 5th in the world. CDFA plays a major role in protecting agricultural commodities and trade, both domestically and internationally by safeguarding shipments of plant materials. In 2017, our scientists provided more than 450,000 scientific identifications, many having significant regulatory and economic consequences. Accuracy of our identifications is critical. In other words, a false positive can result in the destruction of valuable commodities and significant economic losses, while a false negative could lead to the introduction of a damaging invasive species. Thus, retention and especially recruitment of qualified scientific experts is essential to maintain the high-level operations at our Center.

All 18 of our PhD level senior scientific experts fit well within the boundaries of the Research Scientist class specifications. In addition to regulatory diagnostics, our scientists now conduct more independent and collaborative research than ever before, and all publish in international scientific journals. Our research includes the identification and characterization of new species to science, and the development of new molecular diagnostic assays or morphological diagnostic keys that are used worldwide.

Among our present priorities is research on the detection of citrus greening or HLB, a disease that has devastated citrus production in Florida and is of utmost concern to California's citrus industry. Other pests of concern include medfly and oriental fruit fly. On grape, we have been part of successes, including the discovery and eradication of the invasive European Grapevine Moth in CA.

The Plant Pest Diagnostics Center is often considered the heart of the CDFA Plant Health Division. Without accurate and timely determinations by our scientific experts, none of the other Plant Health Branches would be able to successfully perform their missions. Reclassification of our 18 scientists

into one broad classification addressing all work done at the lab is critical to maintain the high-quality services that CDFA provides. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.