

## Natural solution urged for fire ant problem

**United Press International**  
AUSTIN — Because imported fire ants cannot be eradicated with pesticides, researchers should try to develop a natural parasite to control the pesky insect, a University of Texas zoologist says.

But Dr. Lawrence Gilbert says financing for fire ant research is controlled largely by chemical companies who want to make a profit and politicians who want a quick fix for the problem.

"There's no incentive to solve the problem because it doesn't make anybody any money," Gilbert said. "The chemical companies are not interested in something that can't be patented."

Gilbert, who is director of UT's Brackenridge Field Laboratory, warns that widespread use of pesticides to kill imported fire ants could diminish native ant species, which occur in great numbers in Texas.

"No pest has ever been eradicated," he said. "That's virtually impossible. To do that you'd have to adopt a scorched earth policy and get rid of some good things."

"We have to face the fact that it's (imported fire ants) one of our ants in Texas and the South," said Gilbert.

Most researchers are looking

for the "chemically magic bullet" that will wipe out imported fire ants, but he said the answer to long-range control may be in natural parasites that now plague native ant species.

In native ants, the parasites, which are phorid flies, complete their life cycles in the ant's body, eventually killing the ants.

"The debate is whether these particular parasites are potential control agents," he said. "To date, very little research money has gone into studies of the population biology of ants."

Gilbert said opponents of parasite research claim it takes too long, is too expensive and that parasites tend to affect only the worker ants and not the queen ants.

But Gilbert claims that the reduction of worker ants could eventually control the fire ants by reducing the number of worker ants available to compete with other ants for food and territory.

But he said once the use of pesticides has begun, the cycle is hard to break because imported fire ants "are much more effective at re-colonizing than native species."

Gilbert said there is no evidence that fire ants are economically damaging or dangerous,

blaming the concept on "media hype."

"There is no evidence they are anything more than a nuisance, but there is political pressure to do something quick," he said.

The ants, which can afflict a painful sting, were accidentally imported from South America through the port of Mobile, Ala., in 1930.

The mound-building ants reached east Texas in 1956 and now range across 112 of the state's 254 counties. They have also infested all or part of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Puerto Rico.

More than \$250 million has been spent on fire ant insecticides, but Gilbert said the spread of the insects has continued.

The latest chemical touted, Pro-Drone, is being tested by the state Agriculture Department on large plots of land in south Texas. The substance kills ants by interrupting their reproduction cycle.

"My objection to Pro-Drone is that it doesn't just kill fire ants, it kills other ants," said Gilbert. "They (native ants) are the most resistance (that imported fire ants have). If you wipe out all the competition, guess who'll come back?"



staff photo by Eric Evan Lee

### Four-H art exhibit

Emma Fischer, of Buckholts in Milam County, along with Celeste Glaser, 8, also of Buckholts, observe Four-H students art work in the G. Rollie White Coliseum Wednesday afternoon. Four-H students from all over Texas competed in different exhibits.

## Labor Department apologizes for statements to Gov. White

**United Press International**  
AUSTIN — The U.S. Labor Department apologized to Gov. Mark White for remarks made by its regional director in Dallas, saying the criticism of the Legislature's failure to extend the life of the Texas Employment Commission was "premature and inappropriate."

Floyd Edwards, regional administrator, was quoted last week as saying the federal government would not assume TEC's duties or absorb its 4,200 employees should the state agency fold. Unless the Legislature extends the TEC, Edwards said, reports that unemployment benefits for 150,000 jobless Texans could cease by Oct. His comments came after the legislature failed to pass a bill that would have continued the

agency as part of its "sunset" review.

In a mailgram to White, Albert Angrisani, assistant secretary of labor employment and training in Washington D.C., Tuesday apologized for the statements.

"Any statements or intervention by the Dallas regional office have been both premature and inappropriate," he said. "I regret that the regional administrator has interpreted state actions and consequences on his own initiative."

White has been urged by some lawmakers to meet in a special session before Sept. 1, but the governor said last week Texas law allows for a one-year "phase out" of any agreement not renewed by lawmakers.

The governor said he believes

the TEC could be salvaged by a legislative vote after Sept. 1, when the TEC technically goes out of business under the "sunset" act.

In addition to the loss of un-

employment benefits and jobs placement funds, Texas employers could face a \$1 billion hike in their federal unemployment taxes through a loss of tax credits.

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