

# Medfly Uproar Political Bug-a-Boo

**H**YSTERIA surrounding the California effort to bring Mediterranean fruit flies under control appears to have been deliberately generated to create confusion, dissension and political chaos.

It is based upon erroneous information, over-regulation and inadequate insect-control methods. The conflict of interest appears to be more political than chemical.

The infestation of medflies did not come on suddenly. Last January, professor J. Gordon Edwards of San Jose State College, an authority on insect control, wrote to warn this writer that such an outbreak was imminent. It could have been headed off a year ago.

"The irrational fear of insecticides that authorities have permitted to continue unchecked for so long has at last struck with a vengeance," Edwards wrote.

He said the area infested with medflies in Santa Clara County spread from two square miles to 150 square miles last summer while a controversial "sterile fly" experiment was tried and failed.

During the winter, nearly 2,000 la-

borers were put to work stripping tons of fruit from backyard trees. Ground crews sprayed soil under the trees with Baytex, but one-sixth of the pupae survived.

Although the proven chemical control, malathion spray, has been used for 30 years without causing difficulties, it should be used carefully in least possible amounts for desired results, and will be.

Demands for wholesale evacuations of residents and gas masks worn by those parading before TV cameras are not necessary and lend an air of a campaign staged for purposes other than protecting the public.

The movement to stymie effective control by aerial spraying resembles the movement that brought about the banning of DDT and other useful chemicals, along with the controversial Delaney amendment.

DDT has saved more lives and prevented more diseases in underdeveloped countries than any other chemical in history, with no record of harm to human beings. DDT was banned because of demands by pressure groups using superficial, ques-

tionable research reports and unproved statements by pseudo-authorities that confused many people.

One of the present effects of this ban is defoliation of millions of acres of forests in Northeastern states by gypsy moth caterpillars. They could be controlled by DDT, but so far other methods, including the government's "integrated pest management" program, have failed to stop the spread of the voracious, tree-killing pests.

It would be foolish to argue that there is no risk in the use of chemicals for control of plant and livestock pests and diseases. As one official expressed it, "there are two kinds of risks in production of food and fiber — risk to human physical well-being and risk of starvation."

The spraying to control medflies is an obvious necessity to protect food producers and the public. There is no question but what it can be done without undue risk to humans, animals or birds.

Without adequate pest control, starvation is a greater risk.