Bacterial Leaf Scorch Disease in Rabbiteye Blueberry Orchards

Dr. Elina Coneva, Extension Fruit Crops Specialist, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Dr. John F. Murphy, Plant Pathologist, E. Vinson, Research Associate, and K. Jernigan, Research Technician

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Bacterial leaf scorch (BLS) of blueberry, caused by the bacterium *Xylella fastidiosa* (*Xf*) is an emerging disease in southern highbush blueberry (Figure 1) production and is accountable for significant yield losses. A state-wide survey was undertaken during 2010-2011 in commercial blueberry orchards in Alabama, aiming to determine the incidence of BLS disease in rabbiteye blueberry cultivars and the distribution of the disease in major blueberry producing regions. A total number of 654 tissue samples were collected during each season from eight commercial orchards located in South, Central, and North regions in the state. Tissue samples from rabbiteye blueberry cultivars ‘Alapaha’, ‘Austin’, ‘Brightwell’, ‘Climax’, ‘Powderblue’, ‘Premier’, and ‘Tifblue’ were collected and analyzed at the plant pathology lab to detect the bacterial infections. BLS disease was found in blueberry tissue representing all of the commercial orchards tested. The percentage of diseased rabbiteye blueberry bushes was 16.2% in 2010 with the highest disease incidence of 29% found in blueberry orchard located in Houston County. In the spring of 2011, the BLS disease was found in 14.1% of the samples tested. The greatest disease incidence of 24% was found in a blueberry operation located in Autauga and Elmore Counties, while the lowest percentage (3.7%) infected blueberry bushes was recorded for Madison County. The BLS sampling will continue through the summer and fall of 2011 and an update on the survey will be provided upon project completion.

Figure 1. Marginal leaf burn and scorch symptoms on southern highbush blueberry plant.