

Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences
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FACT SHEET #FS6120AG
Date: June 2008

First Biocontrol Agent of Tropical Soda Apple

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Tropical soda apple (TSA) *Solanum viarum* is a perennial weed native to Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina that has spread throughout Florida since it was first discovered in Glades County in 1988. It has also spread to a lesser degree to Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Pennsylvania.

On May 20, 2008, Joe Walter in cooperation with Ken Hibbard of Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, made the first release of *Grantiana boliviana*, a beetle that eats TSA, in Brevard County. TSA is a perennial weed native to South America that has spread throughout Florida very rapidly during the last two decades. It is estimated to have infected over one million acres. TSA plants have invaded many areas in swamps and hammocks that are either inaccessible to spray equipment or not cost effective for hand application of herbicide to control them. The beetles are hoped to play a role in the control of the TSA in these areas. This beetle lays up to 300 individual eggs on the TSA leaves and petioles during her 3-4 month life cycle. The eggs take 5-6 days to hatch at 77 degrees. This beetle has five larval instars that can be completed in 15-18 days. The larvae feed on the leaves of the TSA plant leaving holes in the leaf and causing defoliation. Releases site for the TSA Beetle in Brevard County in May 2008 were: G.A Tucker Far Reach Ranch, Deseret Ranch, and Kempfer Ranch. Additional releases are planned for this summer as beetles become available. For additional information about the *Grantiana boliviana* beetle or Tropical Soda Apple and its control contact Joe Walter at 321-633-1702 or jwalter@ufl.edu.