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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Victorian farmer on a high as finalist for award**

Lynn and Ian Rathjen, owners of 'Whistling Eagle' at Colbinabbin, have been on a high since they were told that they are finalists in the 2011 Biosecurity Farmer of the Year Award.

The Rathjens' property is a successful vineyard with some cereal crops, pastures and stud Border Leicester flock.

They make red and white wines on site from the 30 hectare vineyard but also sell fruit to others. The wine is sold at boutique outlets Australia wide.

The Rathjens sell rams and use 60 hectares of cereals and pastures for mulch, hay and supplementary stock feed. They also manage a 20 hectare native tree plantation which adds aesthetic value to the property, improves biodiversity by providing habitat to many species of birds and provides future income options when the stand matures.

Judges for the award were impressed with the integration of biosecurity across a highly mixed enterprise and their commitment to pursuing recommended biosecurity practices in each area of farming activity.

For the Rathjens, biosecurity largely means preventing the entry of pests and diseases through good hygiene practices.

They recognised the threat presented by both plant pests (grapevine Phylloxera) and animal diseases (ovine Johne's) in their district and implemented measures that would help ensure the long-term freedom from both of these threats.

Mr Ian Rathjen said: "We implemented strict biosecurity practices because there was an immediate threat to our income and way of life.

"It also made sense to ensure we did everything we could as 'good citizens' to not contribute to the spread of pests and diseases.

"We are very aware of our obligations and responsibilities to our industry and the district.

"Grape Phylloxera is the biggest threat to our livelihood. Currently we are zoned in a Phylloxera Exclusion Zone (PEZ). This PEZ status is worth protecting at all costs – our livelihood depends on it.

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For more information on Farm Biosecurity visit [www.farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au)

“The threat of ovine Johne’s disease (OJD) has also driven our biosecurity practices. Most procedures to protect our small flock from OJD are in parallel with those keeping out grapevine Phylloxera.

“We currently have a flock declared free from OJD and get audited every year by veterinarians. Every effort must be made to ensure the integrity of our flock and restrict the spread of this devastating disease.”

The success of this enterprise relies on everybody sticking to the hygiene rules. “We are all affected in that it does take a little extra time out of the day to ensure we stick to our hygiene rules, but we can’t afford not to,” Mr Rathjen said.

The Biosecurity Farmer of the Year Award is part of the Australian Farmer of the Year Awards co-hosted by Kondinin Group and ABC Rural. As in past years, there are separate awards in the categories of plant biosecurity and animal biosecurity, sponsored by Plant Health Australia and Animal Health Australia.

The nominations of all of the finalists demonstrate that successful biosecurity practices are not only part of responsible farming – they can also be great for business.

Winners of all categories in the Australian Farmer of the Year Awards will be announced at a ceremony in Sydney on 7 September.

**-ENDS-**

**For more information, or to arrange an interview, contact Sharon Abrahams, PHA, on (02) 6215 7711. Photos of Ian Rathjen are available.**



## Further Information

### The Farm Biosecurity Initiative

Farm Biosecurity, a joint program managed by Animal Health Australia (AHA) and Plant Health Australia (PHA), is a national education and engagement campaign which provides producers with information and tools to reduce the risk of diseases, pests and weeds. Producers are encouraged to check their properties regularly and if they see anything unusual to call the **Exotic Plant Pest Hotline** on **1800 084 881** or the **Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline** on **1800 675 888**. For further information visit [www.farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au).

### Animal Health Australia

AHA is an innovative partnership involving the Australian Government, state and territory governments, major livestock industries and other stakeholders. We work with our members and stakeholders to strengthen Australia's national animal health system and maximise confidence in the safety and quality of Australia's livestock products in domestic and overseas markets. For further information, visit [www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au](http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au) or call (02) 6232 5522.

### Plant Health Australia

Plant Health Australia is the national coordinator of the government-industry partnership for plant biosecurity in Australia. As a not-for-profit company, we service the needs of Members and independently advocate on behalf of the national plant biosecurity system. Our efforts enhance Australia's plant health status, assist trade, safeguard the livelihood of producers and support the sustainability and profitability of our plant industries and the communities that rely upon them. For further information, visit [www.phau.com.au](http://www.phau.com.au) or call (02) 6215 7700.

### Hotlines

The Exotic Plant Pest Hotline (1800 084 881) and the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline (1800 675 888) are free-call telephone services provided for people to report unusual plant and animal pests and diseases. The hotlines allow callers to directly report suspect detections to an area where action can be taken by knowledgeable staff.

