



14 December 2009

Citrus industry on-guard for Huanglongbing

Local citrus growers have returned home from the annual Australian Citrus Industry conference, a major focus of which was a reminder to be on-guard against a potentially devastating exotic disease Huanglongbing and the insect that transmits it, the Asian citrus psyllid.

While Australia is so-far free of Huanglongbing (HLB) disease (otherwise known as citrus greening) and its vector, Technical Advisor to Citrus Australia, Mrs Patricia Barkley, says a discovery of the insect and/or HLB could be just a matter of time.

“In Asia, it is their worst citrus disease; and both HLB and the psyllid are on our doorstep.

“The greatest threat is the illegal introduction of budwood and other vegetative citrus material from affected regions including Kaffir lime leaves and even curry (*Bergera koenigii*) leaves.



“Another threat is cyclones; strong winds could carry Huanglongbing-infected psyllids over the Timor Sea to northern Australia.”

She says the best approach for the Australian industry is being aware of the risks and looking for the vector.

“Being an island country, we’ve been very lucky in not having many serious pests or diseases. And we’ve had very strict quarantine to help. But the citrus canker outbreak at Emerald (now eradicated) was a wakeup.

“Orchardists and nursery operators should put their own biosecurity measures in place.”

There is no doubt Australia is very vulnerable; we have native citrus species, backyard citrus trees and Orange Jasmine (*Murraya* spp.) in gardens which can host the psyllid and Huanglongbing as well as other diseases (such as citrus canker), and allow them to spread.

For more information on Farm Biosecurity visit www.farmbiosecurity.com.au



The psyllid and Huanglongbing are moving across the USA. Florida's citrus industry is being devastated and the psyllid has reached southern California.

And the Americans are very worried: as a measure of its impact, production costs in Florida have increased 40% due to this disease alone, as growers try to manage the disease and prevent further spread.

The measures they've put in place to 'live' with Huanglongbing in Florida and Brazil provide an insight into the problems it can cause:

- Florida: orchard and nursery surveys 4-8 times/year to detect infected trees for removal. More replanting and alternate management strategies are required
- California: now moving to put nursery trees under insect-proof screens
- Brazil: laws to remove Orange Jasmine trees (vector host) in urban areas and gardens in citrus areas
- Florida and Brazil: all nurseries have to go under insect-proof screens by law; near half these businesses have folded in Florida as they couldn't afford the additional costs
- California, Florida and Brazil: 'harder' pesticides have to be used disrupting Integrated Pest Management .



Greg Fraser, Plant Health Australia's Executive Director and CEO, notes that growers are an important part of Australia's biosecurity system.

"Our system is built on industry and government partnership, coordinated by Plant Health Australia. We now have the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD), we have the *Industry Biosecurity Plan for the Citrus*

Industry and we have contingency plans for HLB and its vectors and for citrus canker.

"The EPPRD sets out very clearly how governments and industries are involved in every step of developing and deploying an incursion management program. It also covers agreed 'reimbursement' provisions (known as Owner Reimbursement Costs) and funding arrangements for responses to outbreaks, including how much governments and industries will contribute for different pests.



“There are stringent quarantine measures in place to try and keep these pests out of the country. However, growers are regularly checking their orchards and are



therefore the best chance for early detection, containment and/or eradication.

“It is much easier and cheaper to reduce the risks now, than to try and live with these pests if they were to establish and spread, as is the situation in North America.

“The most important thing growers can do is be aware and report anything unusual,” he said.

Growers can do this by calling the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

Citrus greening Short Facts

- Citrus greening, or Huanglongbing, is a highly destructive bacterial disease of citrus
- It is transmitted by Psyllid insects or by contaminated grafting material
- It is the most serious disease of citrus worldwide
- It seriously affects production in India, Asia, South-East Asia (including Indonesia and The Philippines), the Arabian Peninsula, and Africa
- If it arrived in Australia, early detection of the disease and the Psyllid insects is vital to ensure eradication can be assessed and industry impact is minimised

Simple Biosecurity

Farm hygiene is critical to maintaining effective farm biosecurity.

Ensuring that people, vehicles, machinery and equipment do not carry exotic pests or diseases onto your property, will offer protection from the expense and potential devastation of an exotic pest incursion.

By following the simple steps, you can improve biosecurity on your farm:

- Check that all visitors clothing and footwear are free of soil or plant matter before entering or leaving the property

For more information on Farm Biosecurity visit www.farmbiosecurity.com.au



- Keep farm vehicles free of soil, grass and weed seeds and insects, especially after visiting other properties.
- Request that all contractors clean their equipment before entering your farm.
- Regularly clean all tools and equipment used on the farm, preferably with an antiseptic solution.
- Have designated parking areas away from your fields and storage facilities.

Plant Health Australia has produced an *Orchard Biosecurity Manual for the Citrus Industry*, which is available online at www.farmbiosecurity.com.au in the toolkit section.