



Thursday 26 March 2010

CropSafe – a biosecurity model protecting Victoria’s grains industry

While the risk of significant exotic plant pest incursions continues to climb, with increased international travel and movement of plant materials and farm products, a comforting blanket of biosecurity is draped over the Victorian grains industry.

There is an active, self-help ‘eyes in the field’ surveillance system now operating over the Victorian grains belt looking out for new pests and diseases.

Conceived in 2006, launched in 2007 and independently evaluated in 2008, CropSafe® has now become a fixture, and is a model for other states - and industries – to use in the effort to prevent or minimise pests and diseases.

John Taylor, Project Manager for Plant Biosecurity in the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) says it’s been very encouraging that there have been no detected exotic plant pest incursions to date.



“We have a network of over 100 very experienced agronomists continually looking for new pests and diseases, so we can be far more confident that our grain crops are free of exotic pests.”

“Together with agribusiness and Victorian DPI support, Cropsafe® is a streamlined process for early pest and disease discovery, reporting and response.”

John says it has also provided important side-benefits.

“Industry is now far better placed to provide assurance to its customers about the absence of certain pests and diseases. This allows claims of area freedom and helps access to markets. People appreciate the importance of vigilance and they’re coming around to the fact that biosecurity is a shared responsibility.”

The success of CropSafe® was acknowledged in the National Farm Biosecurity Awards of

2009, where it was one of four finalists.

“The main thing I took from this award was the opportunity to recognise the commitment of agribusiness to the program and the benefits to be gained from a partnership approach to biosecurity.”

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



Preventing pests and diseases is vital to the Victorian plant-based agriculture sector, as they could harm the \$3.2 billion return agriculture provides to the State's

economy every year, with grains alone earning \$1 billion in export income.

John explains that several points had to be addressed to establish the initiative.

"To shield industry from the many hundreds of exotic pests and diseases, we had to get the 'buy-in' of the commercial sector and private agronomists.

"While industry has a very strong stewardship culture, we offered pest and disease identification training and no-cost laboratory diagnostics for submitted samples.

"We also streamlined sample receipt, analysis, reporting back and record-keeping; individual agronomists are emailed results and the whole network receives a monthly update on disease occurrence and trends"

"The concept at work is that experienced agronomists are highly skilled in identifying existing pests and diseases, therefore are well placed to spot anything new or unusual. They filter out the common pests and send unknowns on for further analysis" John said.



Further endorsement of the CropSafe® initiative comes from across industry: it is highly regarded and valued by farmers, such as Merna Curnow of Laanecoorie.

"CropSafe offers value across all of the grains industry."

"With the level of co-operation seen, the industry is well placed to avoid extensive incursions of new pests and

diseases through early detection."

And Geoff Nalder, Swan Hill, says "The initiative is a significant step forward."

"The empowerment and utilisation of producers and agronomists working with the Victorian DPI to evaluate and act quickly on a threat is where we need to be."

The Farm Biosecurity Award was sponsored by Plant Health Australia and Animal Health Australia as part of the Australian Rural and Outback Awards.

To keep up to date with the latest biosecurity news, as well as a range of useful biosecurity tips for your property, sign up the Farm Biosecurity e-newsletter at www.farmbiosecurity.com.au.



For more information about Cropsafe or about improving biosecurity practice on your farm, contact Jim Moran, Plant Health Australia's Grains Biosecurity Officer in Victoria, on 03 5430 4479. Other state contacts are:

WA – Lisa Sherriff 0447 851801

QLD – Phillip Burrill 0427 696 500 or Kym McIntyre 0429 727 690

SA – Judy Bellati 0412 218 228

NSW – Louise Rossiter 0429 726 285

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If you see anything unusual on your property call the **Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline** on 1800 675 888 or the **Exotic Plant Pest Hotline** on 1800 084 881.)

Audio grabs are available from the news section of the Farm Biosecurity website www.farmbiosecurity.com.au