

Cleanliness a virtue over at the Hills'

Thomas Hill has a simple philosophy when it comes to on-farm biosecurity: everything enters and leaves the property clean.

"We don't want to take weeds or diseases onto any other property and we don't want them to arrive on ours," Mr Hill says.

As a partner and manager at his family-owned farm at Colbinabbin, Victoria, he oversees 1500 hectares of crops and 200 hectares of pasture for Merino ewes in a prime lamb venture, as well as doing his share of driving headers in a contract harvesting business run from the farm.

Mr Hill's dedication to implementing best-practice biosecurity standards at 'Colbinabbin Hills' have seen him named as a finalist in tomorrow's Biosecurity Farmer of the Year Award (animal category).

The Hills' operation employs a wide range of biosecurity measures, including air compressors and high pressure cleaners, staff training, record keeping and research.

Vigilance is a top priority, with a surveillance visit from an agronomist every two weeks and regular (passive) surveillance from Mr Hill and the family.

"One difficulty was keeping up cleaning the machinery when we were flat out at harvest," Mr Hill said. "It would be easy to let standards slip but we don't want to be responsible for spreading anything."

"We have all sorts of weeds on our place and other lease farms, the most challenging one being wild radish, which makes it so important we keep on top of our biosecurity."

He is also impressed with the efforts of neighbours in the area: "If the whole district does it, it looks good for the industry. People can drive past and see clean fence lines and not paddocks full of burrs as they drive by."

"A little bit of time spent doing the little things, although inconvenient, will pay dividends later – but these aren't always obvious at the time."

Duncan Rowland, Manager of Biosecurity Planning and Implementation at Animal Health Australia, said that judges were impressed with Mr Hill's integration of biosecurity across a varied and mixed enterprise.

farmbiosecurity

“It is especially commendable that this was done in the absence of specific or immediate concerns,” Mr Rowland said. “It really shows Thomas’s recognition of the need for biosecurity to ensure future profitability and protection of the family’s assets.”

Hosted by Kondinin Group and ABC Rural, and sponsored by Plant Health Australia and Animal Health Australia, the Biosecurity Farmer of the Year award recognises the efforts of producers dedicated to keeping their operations free of diseases, pests and weeds.

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.

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For more information, or to arrange an interview, contact Martin Blaszczyk, AHA, on (02) 6203 3988. (Images of Tom Hill 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.

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 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 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.

