



## INDUSTRY RISK STATUS REPORT

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Thursday 24 June 2010

### Avocado growers on alert

The nation's Avocado growers have been asked to keep a close lookout for a foreign strain of thrips, which could cause significant production losses if they were to arrive in Australia.

*Scirtothrips perseae* was discovered damaging avocado fruit and leaves in the US state of California in 1996, and is native to Mexico and Guatemala.

For Antony Allen, the Chief Executive Officer of Avocados Australia, keeping pests like the Avocado thrips out is a high priority.

"The introduction of a pest like this would be a disaster to the Australian industry."

"The feeding by adults and larvae causes serious distortion to young leaves, as well as extensive 'corky' damage to the surface of young avocado fruit," he said.



The industry is on the front foot in managing the risks posed by exotic pests.

In southern California, the thrips build to high densities on immature avocado foliage and fruit in late winter and spring.

The cumulative feeding damage by larvae and adults can induce premature tree defoliation.

The brown scarring and damaged fruit is either unmarketable or gets downgraded in packing sheds.

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It is expected that an outbreak of Avocado thrips would have a substantial impact on affected growers through production losses and reduced fruit quality. There is no guarantee either that the thrips could be eradicated once established.

To have to mount a response to Avocado thrips would cost industry and the community a great deal. Ongoing control costs would be significant. The best approach to dealing with the threat will be to:

- take every precaution when introducing new plant material onto orchards,
- maintaining a lookout for the thrips and any of the telltale signs of its presence on trees, and
- reporting immediately any suspicions to the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

Biological control of Avocado thrips has been attempted. However, the rate of breeding of this pest usually outstrips that of any predators and traditional biological control is not considered a viable option in commercial orchards.



Avocados Australia is on the front foot in managing the risks posed by exotic pests like Avocado thrips. Since 2007 there has been a national Avocado Industry Biosecurity Plan in place. This plan is currently being reviewed and updated with Plant Health Australia, and an *Avocado Orchard Biosecurity Manual* is set to be released next year.

“Maintenance of our plant health status is vital for retaining existing trade, negotiating access to new overseas markets and ensuring the future profitability and sustainability of the Australian avocado industry”, Mr Allen said.

Rodney Turner, General Manager Programs for Plant Health Australia says Avocado thrips were presumably introduced inadvertently into California, most likely on young seedlings, and they now infest about 95 per cent of the farms in that US state.



"However, Avocado thrips have not, as yet, been dispersed more widely, despite a worldwide trade in avocado fruit," Mr Turner said.

"For its numbers to build up, the thrips appear to be fully dependent on the young growing tissues of the Avocado tree."

Spotting Avocado thrips is difficult enough. Due to its small body size (scarcely 2 mm long) and the undistinguished yellow colour, satisfactory recognition of an adult as a member of the genus *Scirtothrips* really needs expert examination under a microscope. This is another reason why rapid referral to an expert is recommended.

*For more information on biosecurity and a range of tools to help you secure your farm and secure your future, visit [www.farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au).*

*If you spot anything unusual in your Avocado orchard call the Emergency Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.*

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## Photos:

Image 1 - Mark S. Hoddle, University of California - Riverside, Bugwood.org

Image 2 - Jack Kelly Clark, University of California - Statewide IPM Program, Bugwood.org

## Sources:

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