

18 April 2023

Science-backed \$9.5M approach to bolster Aussie produce reputation

Australia's reputation for delivering high-quality produce is set to get even better following a \$9.5M injection into pest and disease risk management measures for safe trade.

While Aussie produce is renowned for having stringent biosecurity practices along all stages of the production and supply chains, State and Territories have differing phytosanitary, or pest and disease management, requirements for inter-state trade.

This investment, being delivered through Hort Innovation in partnership with all Australian States and Territory Governments and led by the CSIRO, Australia's national science agency, will work closely with Australia's domestic biosecurity regulators to strengthen our science-backed approach to managing phytosanitary risks, making it easier for growers to conduct safe cross-border trade.

Hort Innovation chief executive officer Brett Fifield said the program would also facilitate international market access by demonstrating to our trading partners Australia's commitment to, and confidence in our biosecurity system.

"Domestic and international trade is essential to the horticulture industry," he said. "By working with some of the country's top scientists, the process for reaching market access agreements will be made easier. Improved risk science tools can support biosecurity measures that may be more cost effective and less time prohibitive for growers without compromising our already great reputation for delivering quality, safe produce."

As part of the four-year effort, researchers will work closely with State and Federal Governments to develop and refine a fit-for-purpose 'toolkit' that can be used to improve state-level decision-making about biosecurity risks and how these are best managed. The tools will also underpin analyses to support international market access negotiations.

This toolkit will provide Australian growers and exporters who are already effectively managing their production chains to minimise pests and diseases, a way to demonstrate that their fruit, vegetables and nuts present a low biosecurity risk. The project will build on Australian industries already excellent practices in this, facilitate better use of data in management of plant biosecurity risks, and will include new and emerging technologies such as optical grading and automated pest surveillance.

CSIRO project lead Dr Rieks van Klinken said strong scientific tools will help Australia's horticulture sector by underpinning new and existing market access opportunities and supporting our robust biosecurity system. This work contributes to the CSIRO Trusted Agrifood Exports mission's goal to improve market access for Australian growers.

"Our researchers are improving the tools available to industry to streamline phytosanitary risk management by demonstrating and quantifying the contribution of commercial supply chain and production practices to risk reduction," Dr van Klinken said.

"The tools will make it easier for biosecurity regulators to incorporate commercial practices into biosecurity system processes and ultimately will enable industry to deliver high-quality, low pest-risk consignments into treatment facilities or directly into domestic and international markets."

Australian Fresh Produce Alliance chief executive officer Claire McClelland said that trade and market access are a key priority for the horticulture sector.

“Improving pest management and developing risk-based approaches will support domestic and international trade, which is essential for the future growth of the sector. Harmonised interstate trade regulations will improve the commercial operating environment for all fresh produce growers and suppliers.”

Apple and Pear Australia Limited chief executive officer Phil Turnbull said that this program would enable industry to better understand and measure the impacts of in-field pest management and packhouse practices to manage phytosanitary risks in apple exports.

“Together with the CSIRO, the Australian apple industry will invest in world-leading science that will create export pathways not currently available to Australian growers.”

The project is supported by CSIRO, Federal and all State Governments with additional funding contributions from CSIRO, the apple and pear levy, Apple and Pear Australia Limited, and Fruit Growers Tasmania. This project is being delivered through Hort Innovation’s Hort Frontiers strategic partnership initiative. Hort Frontiers facilitates collaborative, transformation research and development to support horticulture to 2030, and beyond.

Media contact: Lauren Jones | 0427 140 765 | lauren.jones@horticulture.com.au