

Grower case study — CT17008 Protecting Australia’s citrus genetic material

Grower	Jonathan Chislett, General Manager Chislett Farms Nursery
Location	Kenley, Victoria
Nursery	Wholesale container nursery supplying public and private citrus varieties (trees and rootstock), as well as pistachio, avocado and poplar wind break trees
Orchard	30 ha mandarins, 50 ha navel oranges, 25 ha avocados, 8 ha pistachios

What was the research about

Between 2018 and 2021, the Australian Citrus Propagation Association (Auscitrus) lead the delivery *CT17008 Protecting Australia’s citrus genetic material*. The project continued the work of previous levy investments to support the long-term National Citrus Repository Program. The repository program maintained clean and true to type “foundation tree” clones of 124 public citrus varieties at two facilities in NSW that were regularly screened for graft transmissible diseases. As a result of the repository program, the citrus industry had access to clean and true to type genetic material for propagation and planting.

Jonathan Chislett, whose family runs a propagation nursery and commercial citrus orchards, gives his perspective of the program.

What is your background in the citrus industry?

“We’ve growing citrus at Kenley here for quite a few years. My grandfather started the farm back in the late 50s and successive members of the family have joined the business and kept it going. About 30 years ago my father started growing his own nursery trees that sort of blossomed into what it is today. Now that's my part of the business running the container nursery and we're selling citrus trees to farmers all over the country.”



Chislett Farms Nursery. Image care of Chislett Farms.

What has been your involvement with the Auscitrus repository funded through CT17008?

“We try to get all of our source material, whether it be seed or budwood, through the Auscitrus scheme because we think that's the best way to do it.

With the seed we get about 99% through Auscitrus, and its only the odd occasion where we can't get a particular variety that we might look to import it. On the budwood side, it varies from season to season but the vast majority are supplied by Auscitrus. If there's a line of budwood that we can't source through the Auscitrus program, then we prefer to have it tested prior to use.

Most growers we deal with would rather the material come from Auscitrus so they know they know they're getting the right variety, and they know it’s the highest health status material that's available.”

What are the benefits of having that facility for yourselves as a nursery and orchard?

“It's a handy source of just about all of the citrus varieties that you need so it's like one stop for everything. Certainly, from the seed side of it, no one else that I'm aware of produces citrus seed for sale, so you can get all your seed through AusCitrus, which is good.

Because AusCitrus run the virus testing programme you're confident that you're getting the highest health status material that's going to be available, which is really important for a nursery selling to other growers. You want to be confident in your product. You don't want to be selling a problem to someone because it takes quite a

few years for the problem to reveal itself. Then you could easily waste 10 or 15 years on a diseased plant. So we want to try and supply the highest quality trees we can to other growers. We choose to use material that we know has gone through the testing process rather than taking wood from just any old trees. We're trying to make sure that we start off on the right foot to get the right result down the track.

You can't reduce the risk to zero, but that's not what the programs about. It's about doing the best you can to provide the highest health status material that you can to minimise that risk. As the testing and the knowledge and the technology becomes better, then the scheme gets better. So it's not saying something is sterile but saying it's the cleanest material available.”

Any final thoughts on CT17008 and the AusCitrus Repository?

“We we think it's a great facility to have access to. Its quite easy to get all our buds and we know they're the best you can get and it's the best seed you can get.”



New orchard development at Goodnight Farms. Image care of Chislett Farms.

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Hort Innovation is the grower-owned, not-for-profit research and development corporation for Australian horticulture. For more information visit www.horticulture.com.au.

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