

Issue 1
February 2012



CHESTNUT *CARE*

Spotted
anything
unusual?

Welcome from the CAI President

Introducing our Chestnut Industry Biosecurity Officer

In November 2011 Chestnuts Australia Inc. (CAI) resolved to seek the appointment of an Industry Biosecurity Officer in light of the 2010 discovery of the exotic fungal disease known as chestnut blight.

This endeavour indicates just how seriously we regard the importance of increasing biosecurity awareness. TAFCO has liaised with CAI to develop a short term project which focuses specifically on biosecurity. In late December 2011 Horticulture Australia (HAL) agreed to support the project.

HAL will fund the Chestnut Industry Biosecurity Officer project using chestnut levy contributions and matched funds from the Australian Government.

Gary Baxter has been engaged to conduct the extension component of the project and TAFCO will manage it. He has had thirty years experience working with farmers in the Northeast Victoria region on a variety of horticultural and row crops.

Gary has a plant pathology background and also conducts chemical and biosecurity training. He will be nominally working one day a week on the project until July 2012.

A number of techniques including newsletters and farm visits will be used to increase awareness on measures that can be implemented on-farm to minimise the risk of spreading pests and disease in chestnuts.

He will also work closely with VIC Department of Primary Industries staff conducting the chestnut blight eradication and tree surveillance program.

**Heather Kane,
President,
Chestnut Industry Association**

Setting the Scene By Gary Baxter

As I commence this new role I should make it clear what I am contracted to do.

The description in the HAL submission described the job as "improving biosecurity awareness in a targeted geographical area".

In the short term this will involve contacting, and where practical visiting, chestnut producers in the Upper Ovens Valley region.

Newsletter material with a focus on biosecurity issues will also be produced. This material will be made available to as many chestnut producers as possible.

One thing I will confront will be a diversity of views. It is already obvious some producers are extremely concerned about biosecurity matters and have implemented practice change. Others may think there is little they can do to have an influence on 'the bigger picture'.

What I would encourage all chestnut producers to do is think beyond chestnut blight. Whilst current practices and views may revolve around this disease, biosecurity is bigger than this. There are other reasons too why chestnut producers should not be comfortable allowing unchecked movement of people and machinery onto their property.

Phytophthora spp. for example is known to be spread by soil and plant material (and people).

I can confidently say that when it comes to biosecurity, the key message is that small practice change can have an industry wide impact.

The message for all producers is that attitude is the biggest single factor that can influence this

**Gary Baxter,
Chestnut Industry
Biosecurity Officer**

Chestnut Biosecurity Officer

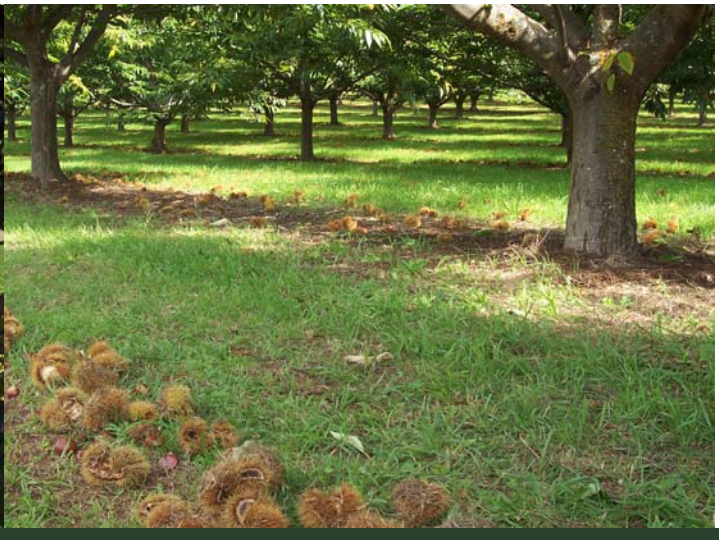
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Plant Health Australia

Written by Gary Baxter

Some industry groups have partnered with Plant Health Australia (PHA) to develop industry specific biosecurity programs.

A key component of these endeavours is that producers should always keep an eye out for anything unusual in their crops.

It is timely to mention PHA because [Chestnuts Australia](#) is one of the latest two plant industries to become full members of the organisation.

PHA now represents 32 plant industries in Australia. PHA has kindly allowed this project to use some of their material to promote biosecurity awareness.

PHA are responsible for the signs that many of you may have somewhere on your property. If you believe the sign is not appropriate at your front gate at least consider placing it where a visitor is most likely to enter your chestnut production area.

You can contact me if you need additional signs. These signs have not been developed as a response to current chestnut concerns. They are normal across many industries for a variety of biosecurity reasons.

PHA produces a range of literature that promotes biosecurity awareness.

In reality, 'my' biosecurity message for the chestnut industry will differ very little from that of PHA or in fact any other industry group that has a strong biosecurity focus. The principles of biosecurity are quite generic.

I would like to suggest that you visit the PHA website at: www.planthealthaustralia.com.au and 'click' on **Farm Biosecurity Programs** under the National Programs heading.

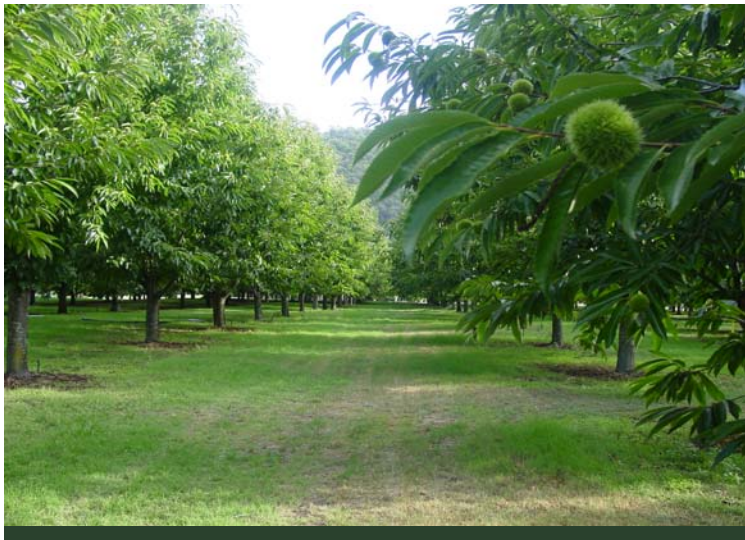
You will quickly see that the broader biosecurity message has a consistent ring to it.



This sign should be a familiar sight at the entrance to a farm or at least at the designated access to a chestnut block. Consider putting a contact phone number on your sign.



This card publicising the importance of on-farm biosecurity practices in nut industries has been produced by Plant Health Australia (and used with their permission).



'My' Chestnut Biosecurity

Message from Gary Baxter

In the current environment 'blight' has been foremost in every chestnut producer's mind. Based on the pathology of the causative fungus and the existing knowledge relating to the pathway and rate of disease spread, there are good grounds to consider eradication as a realistic aim. This optimism is the basis for the current project. In other words there is a sound platform to promote a chestnut industry biosecurity campaign.

Most growers will now be aware that personal practices can potentially impact, or in fact may have impacted on the spread of 'blight'. DPI and CAI have conducted extensive campaigns to promote this message.

For example, DPI has already highlighted that the movement of plant material can play a role in the spread of the 'blight' fungus both between and within farms. All producers of course will be well aware of this and the requirement for DPI permits in some Victorian chestnut plant material movement situations.

Other practices that relate to machinery, tools, and people may also potentially have an impact on disease spread. And bear in mind again I am not just referring to 'blight'.

My role will be to promote a series of quite simple messages. These messages will be refined as the project goes on but for the time being they include:

- You should not allow unchecked movement of outside vehicles and machinery onto your property. This may be awkward at certain times such as during harvest or in the case of visitors/contractors who feel they have 'as of right' access to your property.
- You should have a designated parking/wash down area to cater for visitor vehicles and equipment coming onto your property. In fact 'dirty' machinery should not be coming onto your property in the first place.
- If you have production blocks at geographically separated sites you should aim to have machinery dedicated to particular blocks or if this is not practical develop your own 'cleaning' procedures to cater for machinery movement.

- People should not be allowed unrestricted access to your production areas. In some cases this will be difficult to monitor and I would guess cause some awkward moments with regular visitors.
- An owner is quite within his or her rights to request that staff from utility companies or other organisations do not move around a property unaccompanied.
- Even within your own property you should implement at least some basic biosecurity practices such as disinfecting secateurs and handsaws. (Chainsaws also fall into the category that regular disinfection is advisable but the process is obviously more time consuming and more difficult to conduct thoroughly).



If you are committed to an industry biosecurity program, machinery hygiene should become a normal aspect of farm management. Remember it is not just chestnut blight that should be considered.

(Photo supplied and used with the permission of Brendan Ralph, DPI Victoria)



This practice is a 'normal' component of many industry biosecurity programs. This could be a practice implemented before visitors enter your production area.



To avoid spreading disease, aim to at least dip the blade of the secateurs/handsaw in disinfectant between pruning actions.

In a future newsletter more detail will be provided on actual disinfection procedures. It is not a perfect science but an important aspect of implementing an industry biosecurity program.



CHESTNUTcare

The Biosecurity Officer Project and this newsletter have been funded by HAL using voluntary contributions from Chestnuts Australia Inc and TAFCO and matched funds from the Australian Government

Where to from here

A closing word from Gary Baxter

There are certainly aspects of biosecurity I believe I can help with.

I am available to visit you onsite or at a nominated location of your choice.

I do not know many chestnut producers in the Upper Ovens Valley region. This makes it a little awkward making that first contact.

You too may be a little uncomfortable if someone contacts you out of the blue and wants to talk about biosecurity.

However, I am developing an 'Upper Ovens Chestnut Grower List' and aim to contact everyone on that list in due course. Please be assured that under no circumstances will I turn up at anyone's property unannounced.

I will contact chestnut producers initially in the Ovens Valley, introduce myself and explain a little about the project.

In the meantime I am happy for people to get in first and chase me if they think there is anything I can help them with in the more immediate future.

I will then gladly conduct on-site visits and discuss aspects of minimising pest and disease introductions or spread.

I am flexible to visit people on-site or at a nominated location if they choose.

I will not be venturing into any chestnut production areas; that aspect is not covered in the role of this project.

There are certainly aspects of biosecurity I believe I can help you with. I do have considerable experience with the principles of machinery and equipment 'cleaning' from a biosecurity perspective.

I also have a good working knowledge of the pros and cons of a number of disinfection agents such as chlorine, alcohol or quaternary ammonium based products.

Please feel free to contact me at TAFCO in Myrtleford on 03 5752 1800 at any time during business hours and leave your contact details with staff if I am not in the office. I will endeavour to return your call as soon as possible.

I hope you have found this first newsletter informative and hope to meet you soon.

Kind Regards

**Gary Baxter
Chestnut Industry
Biosecurity Officer**

Chestnuts Australia Inc. (formally The Chestnut Growers of Australia Ltd) is a growers group which was formed in 1991.

Our membership is drawn from all over Australia and includes representation from suppliers and large commercial growers, hobby farm enthusiasts, nurserymen and women, Agriculture Departments and other horticultural experts.

Chestnuts Australia Inc. aims to assist its members with relevant information on the growing, harvesting and marketing of chestnuts.

Our organisation is dedicated to the growth of the Chestnut Industry through:

- Grower education
- Promotion
- Research
- Sharing of information

Informational updates are provided to our members at annual and special meetings, conferences, field days and farm walks which promote opportunities for personal contact with other grower members throughout the year.

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