

Issue 2
March 2012



CHESTNUT *CARE*

Spotted
anything
unusual?

At the risk of repeating myself I will mention a few things that many of you will be aware of already. I will do this because the Biosecurity Project 'mail out' list has just become substantially larger through co-operation from the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Victoria.

For those of you who do not know I have been appointed to a part-time and short term position to "improve biosecurity awareness" within the chestnut industry.

This appointment is related to the 2010 discovery of the exotic fungal disease known as chestnut blight. Chestnuts Australia Inc. (CAI) initiated the Project which is an indication of just how seriously 'industry' regards the importance of increasing biosecurity awareness.

TAFCO Rural Supplies in Myrtleford liaised with CAI to develop the project. In late December 2011 Horticulture Australia (HAL) agreed to support the project. HAL are funding the Chestnut Industry Biosecurity Officer project using chestnut levy contributions and matched funds from the Australian Government.

I have been engaged to conduct the extension component of the project and TAFCO will manage it. I will be nominally working one day a week on the project until July 2012. A number of techniques including newsletters (such as this one) and farm visits will be used to increase awareness on measures that can be implemented to minimise the risk of spreading pests and disease in chestnuts. I have been working closely with DPI (VIC) Biosecurity staff.



The biosecurity message is now everywhere. At the CAI February 4 Field Day Martin Mebalds (on the left chatting to CAI member, David McIntyre) and Brendon Ralph (in the right foreground talking to farmers) gave a practical demonstration on equipment hygiene. They stressed the importance of practice change to minimise disease spread or disease introduction.

Due to privacy issues, an earlier biosecurity newsletter could only be sent to CAI members and 'chestnut growers' that we were aware of through the TAFCO network. DPI has conducted chestnut surveys on a large scale and of course they have details on almost all commercial and small scale producers.

You are likely to receive one or two more of these newsletters during the life of the project. If you do not want to receive them please notify Brendon Ralph (DPI VIC) on 0357311207 or via email at brendan.ralph@dpi.vic.gov.au

Having said all of that I should make it clear (again) what I am actually 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. I do not know many chestnut producers in the Upper Ovens Valley region. This means it can be awkward making that first contact.

Growers too may be a little uncomfortable if someone contacts them out of the blue and wants to talk about biosecurity. However, in the meantime I am happy for people to 'get in first' and chase me if they think there is anything that I can help them with. I will then gladly conduct on-site visits and discuss aspects of minimising pest and disease introductions or spread. I am contactable through TAFCO in Myrtleford.

Under no circumstances will I turn up at anyone's property unannounced. I will contact chestnut producers initially in the Ovens Valley and introduce myself and explain a little about the project. I can visit people on-site or at a nominated location. I will not be venturing into any chestnut production areas; that is not the role of this project.

Gary Baxter,
Chestnut Industry
Biosecurity Officer

Chestnut Biosecurity Officer

Gary Baxter— 03 5752 1800
e: gary@tafco.com.au
TAFCO RuralSupplies
215 Great Alpine Road
Myrtleford Vic 3737

CONTACT THE CAI COMMITTEE

President
Heather Kane - 02 6238 2280

John Morton - 0428 996 484
Luciano Cester - 0422 034 487
Adam Gatford - 0430 721 127
Sam Perna - 0427 212 680
Chris Dikkenberg 0458 220 122



Horticulture Australia



Harvest Issues

The little things can make a big difference

As you approach or commence harvest you are entering a time of the year where there is significant people, tool and machinery movement.

If you take it as a given that chestnut blight spores can spread via farm operations associated with harvest, then you potentially have an issue to be concerned about. The decision you, as a grower will need to make is how far do you go?

I cannot conjure up any new technology on this issue. Basic biosecurity practices can realistically be the only message. And yes, of course some of you will say I have heard it all before; footbaths, hand washes and equipment cleaning, what difference will it make?

Individuals will have their own take on how far they will go but remember: **Small practice change can potentially have an industry wide influence**

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

However, the science is solid; the little things can make a difference. There are many, many instances across a diversity of industries and situations (in Australia and around the world) where basic biosecurity practices have been introduced and they do have an industry wide affect or a site affect.



Visitors should be greeted by a sign that warns the ground rules for entry to the property have changed. This sign publicises the importance of on-farm biosecurity practices in nut industries. If you want additional signs please call me.

People

If you are an owner or manager of a chestnut block 'people' should be a significant source of concern to you. Harvest, in a commercial situation is a busy time.

When you think about people coming onto your property there may be a number of issues:

***You may not know where they worked yesterday
They may not share your concerns about biosecurity
There could be language issues that make it difficult to get a message across. They may have worked on your place for years and even have a favourite tree to park under***

Bearing in mind the potential for visitors to unintentionally introduce a range of plant disease issues, you should no longer be comfortable allowing unchecked movement of people onto your property. You should introduce practice change. As difficult as it may be to manage, you must call the shots. Casual workers should be briefed on your concerns and the way that you want to handle harvest. It is not always practical and certainly not always easy to police, but clean clothes, clean boots and clean hands are essential.



A footbath is the most basic of biosecurity measures. Disinfectants are not penetrative, in other words you must remove soil and plant material from them. People presenting for work in inappropriate open sided or material based footwear are problematic. They may believe they are exempt from footbaths. Perhaps you need to run a second 'shallow' footbath for these situations so at least the soles of the footwear can be cleaned. Just remember that some of the disinfectants utilised are technically classified as Hazardous Substances. Be careful that you measure the rates accurately. Remember too, you must replenish or replace the 'contaminated' liquid regularly as it will become ineffective.



Harvest Issues

Written by Gary Baxter

People

Have you ever watched people as they approach a footbath? Some will step over it or walk around it. Some people genuinely believe it does not apply to them because they have only been to 'clean' locations.

Others too are concerned that the contents of the footbath will damage their footwear. In some respects the best footbath situations are when the visitor has no option other than to go through it. This may take some ingenuity on your part but the use of gates or barriers may help 'force' visitors to comply.



Hand washes are simple too. Once again if you use a disinfectant material the types and rates are important.

Tools, Vehicles and other Equipment

Vehicles represent risk to your chestnut operation. Harvest is likely to be a time when there is significantly more traffic to and from your property.

You should have a designated parking area for people involved in the harvest operation. This should be at a specific location on your property or at the property boundary.

Make no mistake vehicles can be the vector of pest, disease and weed propagules. (Propagules are the spores, seeds, eggs or other biological mechanism that enable pests and diseases to spread).

People who are involved with chestnut harvest potentially represent risk if they use their own gloves, rakes, buckets, bags and any other equipment that has 'previous history'.

Again, it is a difficult message to promote but all of these items are a potential source of pest or disease propagules. Disinfecting some of these tools of trade can be quite problematic. I would venture to say that canvas bags and material based gloves should not be introduced onto your property.

It is also not good practice for rakes, buckets and other tools to be introduced onto your chestnut property but at least they are potentially easier to disinfect.

However, if you intend to disinfect tools (or equipment) coming onto your property it must be done properly. Any disinfection of tools (or equipment) must commence with complete removal of soil and/or plant material because disinfectants will not penetrate organic material well.

Machinery and dedicated chestnut harvesting, processing and storage equipment can all potentially have a role in the spread of pest and disease propagules. Static storage and processing equipment can be disinfected but obviously the process is time consuming and potentially difficult.



In an ideal world people (and vehicles) should have physical barriers such as gates and fences to restrict unchecked entry. Some long term visitors to your property may not be happy with changed conditions but reasonable people should understand why it is important.



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

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.

FOR FURTHER INFO CONTACT:

Tanya Edwards
Communications Officer
Chestnuts Australia Inc.
P.O Box 472
Myrtleford VIC 3737

Phone: 03 5751 1466

Office Hours:
Monday and Wednesday 1.00pm—5.00pm
Friday 9.00am—1.00pm

Email: admin@chestnutsaustralia.com.au

www.chestnutsaustralia.com.au

Where to from here

A closing word from Gary Baxter

Your livelihood could be at stake. Don't allow visitors, tools or equipment to cross your boundary without some basic scrutiny.

I would like to again encourage those of you who are serious about biosecurity to visit the Plant Health Australia website at: www.planthealthaustralia.com.au and 'click' on [Farm Biosecurity Programs](#) under the National Programs heading.

You will quickly see that 'the biosecurity message' has a consistent ring to it regardless of the industry.

I would also again encourage chestnut producers to think beyond chestnut blight.

Whilst current practices and views are largely focussing on this disease, biosecurity is bigger than this. *Phytophthora* spp. for example is known to be easily spread by soil and plant material (and people).

I have not elaborated on disinfectants in detail in this newsletter. This is something I believe I can help you with if you require more information. 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 disinfestations agents such as chlorine, alcohol or quaternary ammonium based products (including rates).

In the meantime, something else worth looking at is a recently released DPI publication. It is a user-friendly industry update titled Chestnut Blight – farm hygiene.

If you have not seen it contact DPI or contact me to arrange a copy to be forwarded to you.

DPI chestnut blight surveillance staff are currently out and about conducting their autumn survey in designated areas.

Please call me at TAFCO in Myrtleford on 03 5752 1800 during business hours and leave your contact details with staff if I am not in the office.

Chestnut Blight - growers need to know about permits?

Autumn surveys to commence March 2012: As part of the response plan this survey will include all 10 infected premises and all chestnut trees within a 1km zone of these. Full hygiene protocol will be used by the trained and experienced staff.

Note that surveys will not proceed in wet weather as this presents a biosecurity risk. It is expected to take 4 weeks to complete.

Permits: There have been a steady number of calls regarding permits to move chestnuts. The current situation is this; the only properties who require a permit are infected ones.

All other properties who have been surveyed in the spring round and found to be clear do not require a permit.

This does not apply to plant material. Anyone wanting to move plant material should contact DPI Ovens.

For further information call
Brendan Ralph, DPI 03 5731 1207

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