

## Response ready for real threat

Australian citrus growers have good cause to be concerned about plant diseases such as Citrus canker and Huanglongbing (HLB, or Citrus greening). Both diseases are prevalent in countries neighbouring Australia's north, and both have been shown to have significant impacts on the productivity and profitability of commercial industries around the world where they have gained a foothold. Florida in the US is a good example (see attached Background).

Australia has already had its own brush with Citrus canker in recent times, when the disease was detected in Emerald, Queensland, in 2004. While it was successfully eradicated, a testament to the biosecurity systems put in place by Australian industries and governments, the eradication effort cost over \$18 million and tested the resolve of growers and the local community.

"Emerald was a devastating wake-up call for the industry and since then a lot of progress has been made to reduce the likelihood, and impact, of a similar exotic pest incursion," said Ms Judith Damiani, CEO of Citrus Australia.

Today, Citrus Australia, in partnership with Plant Health Australia, is providing citrus growers around the country with the wherewithal to help protect their orchards, their communities and their industry. The *Orchard Biosecurity Manual for the Citrus Industry* is being launched at the 2009 Citrus Australia National Conference in Mildura, Vic.

"This *Orchard Biosecurity Manual* is designed to assist growers protect their orchards from invasive pests using simple, yet effective preventative strategies. Regularly checking planting material, making workers aware of biosecurity measures, and cleaning vehicles and equipment, are just some techniques that can easily be incorporated into day-to-day orchard operations," Ms Damiani said.

Greg Fraser, Plant Health Australia's Executive Director and CEO, is in Mildura to launch the manual.

"Through industry and government partnership, coordinated by Plant Health Australia, we now have the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed, we have the *Industry Biosecurity Plan for the Citrus Industry* and we have contingency plans. These documents outline the safeguards industry and government have put in place. This manual adds to these defences by giving growers the information they need to play their part in protecting a \$440 million industry," Mr Fraser said.

Both Mr Fraser and Ms Damiani agree that it is much easier and cheaper to reduce the risks now, than to try and live with these pests if they were to establish and spread, as is the situation in North America.

"Everyone in the citrus industry has a role to play in its protection. We need to be managing our orchards to minimise the risks and we need growers actively involved in surveillance so if something does slip through, we have the best chance for early detection, containment and/or eradication," Ms Damiani said.

A copy of the *Orchard Biosecurity Manual for the Citrus Industry* is available from the Plant Health Australia website at [www.phau.com.au/biosecurity](http://www.phau.com.au/biosecurity)

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## BACKGROUND

### Citrus Australia

Citrus Australia is the national peak body for citrus growers. A member based 'not for profit' organisation, representing and leading the industry in policy and representation, market access and development, regional transitional planning and industry development. The citrus industry in Australia is worth \$440 million and represents the interests of over 2000 citrus growers. It is the largest fresh fruit exporter, with annual export earnings of \$180 million.

### Plant Health Australia (PHA)

PHA is the lead national coordinating body for plant biosecurity in Australia. Working in partnership with industry, governments, researchers and others, PHA facilitates and manages improvements in biosecurity policy and practice across Australia's plant industries and builds capacity to respond to plant pest emergencies.

PHA is also helping growers secure their farms and their futures against potentially devastating plant pests and diseases. Partnering with Animal Health Australia, PHA has developed a website with biosecurity planning information for plant and livestock producers at [www.farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au).

### The Florida experience

Florida grows nearly two thirds of the US's \$2.7 billion (2005/06, USDA) annual citrus harvest. Detection of Citrus canker in 1995 led to an eradication campaign that was further complicated by a detection of HLB in 2005 and has cost US Federal and Florida State governments more than \$US1.4 billion. In 2006, spread of the diseases was so extensive that it was determined that eradication was no longer possible.

The impacts of these diseases in Florida has resulted in the reduction in the acreage of citrus production by one third, the elimination of the lime industry, extensive market loss and a significant increase in production costs.



Citrus canker (image courtesy of QPIF)



Fruit on the right is affected by HLB  
(image courtesy P. Barkley)