

Citrus Fruit

Sitrus



PHYTOSANITARY SECURITY: Are we covered?

As the full account of how citrus canker was introduced to Australia becomes known, the possibilities of similar introductions to South Africa and the massive losses incurred make for scary reading. The full account is transcribed in the newspaper report below. With South Africans travelling the globe on a daily basis to every citrus producing country in the world, the risk of similar irresponsible actions increases all the time. It is the responsibility of all of us to guard against such occurrences in South Africa - you are the "eyes on the ground". If you hear pub talk about somebody with an amazing new variety smuggled in from overseas, or if you notice an unusual variety, please contact the CGA immediately (justchad@iafrica.com or 031 7652514 or 083 654 9591). We can assure you that your call will be treated in confidence, and we will investigate any call made. Of equal importance is to keep a look out for any signs of disease in your orchards. Contact CRI should you have any concerns (Hennie Le Roux at 013 759 8000 or 082 4471537). CRI recently published symptoms of citrus canker - visit their web site www.cri.co.za should you wish to learn more.

The CRI manages the Citrus Improvement Programme (CIP), which was established to ensure that orchards start with disease free, true to type propagation material. Any imported material is put through stringent tests and quarantined to establish its disease free status. It is then taken through the Citrus Foundation Block. There is a legal way of bringing material into the country. Should you wish to know more, please contact the convenor of the CIP, prof. Vaughan Hattingh on 082 4167274 or 021 882 8553.

The CGA and CRI are working closely with the National Department of Agriculture (NDA) in setting up early warning systems and reaction plans should the Southern African citrus industry be threatened in any way through disease or pest outbreaks.

JUSTIN CHADWICK

CEO - Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa

\$50M (R250 MILLION) CITRUS DISEASE BUNGLE

by Jamie Walker from The COURIER-MAIL
March 18, 2005

An orchard at the centre of Queensland's \$50 million citrus canker outbreak was infested with the plant disease at least 18 months before its discovery - at a time when the property was already under quarantine surveillance. This apparent miss by the quarantine service will cause renewed concern about biosecurity in Australia. It also added weight to a call yesterday by state Primary Industries Minister Henry Palaszczuk for the Federal Government, to hold a judicial-style inquiry into how the outbreak occurred in central Queensland.

A recently completed "trace back" investigation by the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries established that an Asian strain of citrus canker was present on the foreign-owned Evergreen Farms orchard in early 2003, if not before then. This overlapped with the period of access the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service had to the Emerald property under a controversial deed of arrangement with owner, Pacific Century Production (Pty) Ltd - a company controlled by millionaire Filipino businessman Philip Cea.

In July 2001, Mr Cea was accused by his then production manager, Wayne Gillies, of illegally importing on to Evergreen Farms plant cuttings and seed from the US and Asia. Although a genotype of another introduced disease, citrus tristeza virus, was detected by AQIS, no contraband material was found on the property. Mr Cea denied any wrongdoing and the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions gave advice that there were no grounds for action against Mr Cea or his company. But, under the October 2001 deed of arrangement between AQIS and Pacific Century Production - entered into after Mr Cea mounted a court

challenge to quarantine orders over his property - plant inspectors were to be given access to the orchard at three-monthly intervals for another 18 months, taking the surveillance period to March 2003. Citrus canker was ultimately detected on Evergreen Farms in June last year, forcing the destruction of all 240 000 citrus trees on the property.

Interstate movement of Queensland citrus was banned for two weeks and a quarantine imposed on surrounding orchards in Emerald, which remains in force. Industry group Queensland Citrus Growers Inc said yesterday losses totalled more than \$50 million. However, acting Australian chief plant protection officer Lois Ranson last night defended AQIS's original investigation into Evergreen Farms, saying quarantine inspectors would have been on the look out for citrus canker during the lengthy surveillance prompted by Mr Gillies' smuggling allegations.

"If it was there at that time, then the highly trained experts who went to the property were unable to detect it, possibly because it was at a level that was undetectable," Ms Ranson said.

The finding that citrus canker was present on Evergreen Farms at least 18 months before its belated discovery last June confirms that the property was the likely seat of the outbreak. The trace-back investigation also established that a second Emerald property, 2PH, had been hit by the same strain of canker identified on Evergreen Farms. The infestation on 2PH was found this week to have spread to a third site within its boundaries, setting back plans by owner John Pressler to begin replanting after destroying 100 000 trees.

DPI plant health general manager Chris Adriaansen said all declared plant material brought to the orchard had been traced back to its source, and was found to have been free from contamination.

"At this time it is impossible to pinpoint with any degree of accuracy what the precise cause was," he said.

Mr Palaszczuk said he had considered setting up a state-based inquiry to establish the cause of the outbreak, but this would need federal jurisdiction because quarantine issues were involved. The inquiry should be a "judicial" one - "full and open". He was backed yesterday by Queensland Citrus Growers executive manager Chris Simpson, who wrote to federal Agriculture Minister Warren Truss last month suggesting such an inquiry 'should be independent . . . and have powers to access all information possessed by governments . . . to carry out further investigations of its own, and to call witnesses to appear before it.' "It may also require protection from any possible legal barriers which might be put in the way by anyone who may be under the microscope."

A spokesman for Mr Truss said last night he was committed to conducting a review of the federal-state response to the canker outbreak, as well as its cause. Asked what form this review would take, he said: "Nothing specific has been outlined in that regard." Mr Gillies said he stood by allegations that Mr Cea had, between September and November 2000, illegally imported grape cuttings from California, citrus and lychee cuttings from China, papaw seeds from the Philippines and watermelon seeds from China. He said he would be willing to give evidence to an inquiry, provided it was independent and was supported by "all the stakeholders". Mr Gillies recently dropped a legal action against Mr Cea over his dismissal from Evergreen Farms after the case was settled out of court on the day it was due to go to trial. Mr Cea and his children Michelle King and Darwin Garcia King, who manage his Queensland holdings, could not be contacted last night. It is believed all three are overseas.



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