

MEDIA RELEASE

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Coordinated defence against Australia's most threatening plant disease

[Wine Australia](#) and [Hort Innovation](#) have teamed up through the [Plant Biosecurity Research Initiative](#) (PBRI) to safeguard the nation against a devastating bacteria that could cripple the country's multi-billion dollar wine and horticulture sectors.

Xylella fastidiosa is an exotic bacteria that prevents a plant from feeding by impeding the movement of rising sap.

While Australia is currently free from *Xylella*, it threatens more than 350 commercial, ornamental and native plant species across the country.

The impact of *Xylella* overseas has been catastrophic, infecting more than 200 million citrus trees in Brazil, destroying 1 million olive trees in Italy and devastating the Californian grape sector – causing annual losses in excess of US\$100 million.

Dr Jo Luck, program director at the PBRI, said there was no known cure and prevention was the only safeguard against what has been deemed Australia's most threatening exotic plant disease.

"If established, the [Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences](#) (ABARES) has estimated the potential cost to Australia's grape and wine sector alone at up to \$7.9 billion. The impact on Australian horticulture would be just as devastating," she said.

"Through the PBRI, we are taking a coordinated approach, together with the nation's seven plant-focused research and development corporations, Plant Health Australia, the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, industry, state and federal biosecurity stakeholders, to stamp this threat out before it can take root."

Wine Australia and Hort Innovation are currently recruiting a *Xylella* coordinator to develop research and development priorities and projects to help protect Australia's wine and horticulture sectors.

Dr Liz Waters, Wine Australia's General Manager for Research, Development and Extension (RD&E), said the coordinator role was a vital investment in protecting all of Australia's rural communities against *Xylella*.

"*Xylella* has the potential to impact many different plant industries and the coordinator will manage cross-sectoral biosecurity preparedness, act in a liaison role for potentially affected sectors, and ensure there is national awareness and coordination of high-priority RD&E to prevent the pest arriving and establishing."

David Moore, Hort Innovation General Manager for Research and Development, said the

Xylella Coordinator would help to facilitate project management of two further projects currently under evaluation.

“The threat that this disease poses across Australia has seen a focus on collaboration across agricultural research and development corporations,” he said.

“Not only have we joined forces with Wine Australia on this project, we are also working with a number of stakeholders on two additional projects to investigate strategies for prevention and preparedness, as well as the review and adoption of the world’s best-practice diagnostic methods for the detection and identification of Xylella,” he said.

[ENDS]

About Xylella fastidiosa* Pronounced zy-l-el-a (rhymes with umbrella) fast-id-ee-oh-sah

Xylella fastidiosa lives in the water-conducting vessels (the xylem) of plants, and symptoms include leaf scorching, gradual reduction in fruit, stunting of shoots, dieback and eventual plant death. It is mainly spread by sap-sucking insects, or through the movement of infected plants or cuttings. Removal of infected plant material and control of vectors are the only control methods.

Xylella fastidiosa is the organism responsible for Pierce’s disease and is an invasive bacterial plant pathogen that leads to the death of grapevines. It has a wide range of hosts and infects a large number of other commercial and ornamental plant species including citrus, olives and Lucerne.

Short video at <http://www.agriculture.gov.au/pests-diseases-weeds/plant/xylella>

In late 2015, Australia introduced emergency biosecurity measures to reduce the risk of an incursion. These include offshore testing of nursery stock and plant material coming from regions where Xylella fastidiosa occurs and certification.

About the Plant Biosecurity Research Initiative

The Plant Biosecurity Research Initiative is a partnership between Hort Innovation, Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Agrifutures, Forest and Wood Products Australia, Grains Research Development Corporation, Sugar Research Australia, Wine Australia, the Council of Rural R&D Corporations, Plant Health Australia and the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

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