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\$16M effort to support Aussie vegetable health

Plant disease specialists from around the country are combining forces to combat some of the biggest threats to Australian vegetables through a \$16M initiative announced today.

Being delivered by Hort Innovation, and led by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries with support from government agencies and research institutions from across the nation, the five-year effort aims to reduce the effects of diseases that can impact on growers.

Hort Innovation Vegetable Fund Manager Tim Archibald said the ambitious national project would support the sustainability of some of Australia's favourite vegetables.

"Over recent years the vegetable industry has faced some crippling diseases - the Green Cucumber Mottle Mosaic Virus threatening capsicums, cucumbers, pumpkin, squash and lettuce in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland being one example," he said.

"While incidences of disease in vegetable crops are rare, and do not pose a risk to human health, when an outbreak happens it can devastate growers."

Mr Archibald said Australia is considered one of the safest food suppliers in the world with strict protocols in place along all stages of the commercial supply chain.

"Australian produce enjoys a reputation for being some of the safest produce in the world. This new research project will only serve to support and enhance that reputation."

The research will include the innovative use of Area Wide Management, a technique that encourages growers to approach pest management as a group in a geographic area, rather than on individual farms. Traditionally used to control pests, this technique will target thrip, aphid, leafhopper and whitefly transmitted viruses, as well as the management of bacterial leaf diseases.

The development of useful, rapid, innovative diagnostics for viral and bacterial pathogens will also be a priority, along with improving the vegetable industry's preparedness in managing key exotic threats, through contingency planning and increased awareness.

To help advance the country's plant pathology and entomology capacity, the project will also include an investment in three PhD students, recent post-graduates and early career scientists.

Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries science director Dr Tim Smith said this exciting and hugely collaborative project is expected to take disease management in Australia to a new level.

"Surveys will be undertaken to monitor the distribution and diversity of viruses, vectors and bacteria in vegetable crops around Australia. We will also be conducting trial work on new crop varieties, chemistries and biological control agents," he said.

Plus, we'll look at control options such as wind breaks, irrigation management, planting practices and crop rotation."

This project will be conducted in conjunction with a [\\$21M Australian plant pest surveillance technology research project](#) announced last year, and also the nation's [Plant Biosecurity Research Initiative](#). This project will also link with the Improved Soilborne Disease Diagnostic Capacity for the Australian Vegetable Industry program, led by South Australian Primary Industries and Regions SA.

Additional project partners include the Victorian Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources; The Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Resources; the Western Australia Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development; the University of Tasmania and various consultancies. Hort Innovation's investment is funded using vegetable industry levies and contributions from the Australian Government.

MEDIA CONTACT: Kelly Vorst-Parkes on 0447 304 255 or Kelly.vorst.parkes@horticulture.com.au

