

MEDIA RELEASE

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Research initiative ramps up investments to secure plant biosecurity

More than \$27 million has been invested into research, development and extension projects through the [Plant Biosecurity Research Initiative](#) and partners since its inception just 18 months ago.

The initiative was developed to encourage collaboration and investment in plant biosecurity research, with a focus on managing threats to Australia's plant industries and their environment.

The national value of plant industries at risk is valued at almost \$30 billion per annum across the horticulture, wine, broadacre and forestry industries.

The PBRI program director Dr Jo Luck said pest, disease and weed threats to Australia's plant production systems could have a catastrophic effect on Australian farm businesses, employees and the surrounding regional communities.

"Established to support cross-sectoral RD&E, the PBRI has formed new collaborations across seven plant industry research and development corporations (RDCs), Plant Health Australia (PHA) and the Department for Agriculture and Water Resources," she said.

"We have seven major projects underway delivered through co-investment from state-based primary industry agencies, CSIRO and Australian universities. A further five projects valued at over \$21 million is currently under consideration."

Dr Luck said this is an enormous feat in such a short period of time – a clear demonstration of the commitment of the RDCs, and the value that the PBRI was bringing to industry.

The current projects include:

- A leadership project assessing strategic ways to coordinate RD&E across sectors to leverage investments, promote collaboration and avoid research duplication.
- A national cross-industry surveillance project to monitor and report on the presence of airborne pests and diseases affecting horticulture, grains, cotton, sugar, wine and forest plantations.
- *Two* new projects to protect horticulture and wine industries from Xylella, an exotic bacterium that threatens more than 350 commercial, ornamental and native plant species in Australia. They are the appointment of a Xylella coordinator and a state-of-the-art diagnostic project to have ready the most accurate and sensitive method of detecting this disease.

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- An investment into improving plant industries' access to new genetics through faster and more accurate biosecurity screening using Next Generation Sequencing.
- A review of the biosecurity plan and manual for the viticulture industry including wine and table grapes.
- An R&D symposium showcasing current plant biosecurity research supported by the PBRI member organisations.

A further \$21.7 million of RD&E is being considered in the following areas

- *Two* novel detection methods for brown marmorated stink bug, which is not established in Australia, but poses a high biosecurity risk due to their tendency to hitchhike in sea cargo.
- Understanding the potential of native insects to transmit *Xylella* if it was introduced into Australia.
- Boosting national diagnostic capacity for plant production industries.
- Business continuity for farmers affected by emergency plant pest incursions.

PHA Executive Director and CEO, Greg Fraser, said the level of commitment into current and future investment for the PBRI was representative of the importance that industry placed on the initiative.

"It is clear that PBRI is here for the long run, investing in strategic and long-term RD&E projects that will help to protect Australia's valuable plant industries into the future," he said.

A two-day [Plant Biosecurity Research Symposium](#) on 15-16 August 2019 will showcase research supported by the PBRI member organisations and delivered by research teams in Australia and New Zealand.

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