

Friday, October 17, 2008

POTATO CYST NEMATODE DETECTED IN GIPPSLAND

The quarantine pest potato cyst nematode (PCN) has been detected on a property near Thorpdale in Victoria's Gippsland region.

The discovery was made during routine crop surveys required to meet standards for seed potato certification.

Department of Primary Industries (DPI) scientists identified PCN in soil samples taken from the affected property this week. Additional samples have been sent to an interstate laboratory for further confirmation.

DPI Principal Plant Standards Policy Officer David Beardsell said that DPI is meeting with potato industry authorities and growers today to discuss the consequences of the detection and the best way forward in managing the issue, including the establishment of a control area around the detection site.

“A team has been set up by DPI to manage the response to the detection which is likely to include an intensive soil surveillance program, to establish the PCN status of other properties in the district. This will be in addition to the ongoing soil testing required by certified seed growers,” Dr Beardsell said.

“Trade restrictions apply to areas where PCN is detected, so unfortunately this detection has serious implications for the potato industry and the local Thorpdale community.

“It will affect market access for both seed and ware (fresh) potatoes grown in the area around the detection site. Thorpdale also supplies up to 30 per cent of Australia's high-health certified seed potatoes, so there could also be repercussions for seed supply around the country next season.

“However, DPI will be engaging in negotiations with other states to minimise the impact on local growers and merchants and ensure continued access for Thorpdale seed potatoes.”

Dr Beardsell said no potato plant material or equipment used in potato production may be moved interstate from an area of 20km radius around the detection site, in accordance with interstate requirements.

“DPI and industry will work together to ensure these measures are effectively implemented.

“Joint efforts by DPI and industry to effectively manage this case of PCN will minimise both the risk of spreading this disease further and the trade implications.

“DPI and industry have effectively managed previous cases of PCN in the Gippsland area.

“For example, at Koo Wee Rup in 2003, the effective management of the case resulted in potatoes from the area being granted access to the interstate markets under a strict hygiene protocol and minimised the risk of spreading PCN to other potato production districts in Victoria and interstate.”

Dr Beardsell said how the disease made it to the property was not known.

“PCN can be transferred on machinery or product but we also know it can remain dormant in soil for up to 20 years. In this case it is not known how the disease entered the Thorpdale property,” he said.

PCN is a microscopic, worm-like organism which feeds on the roots of potatoes and can reduce crop yields.

PCN is found in potato-growing areas around the world. The first detection of PCN in Australia was in Western Australia in 1983; it was first found in Victoria at Wandin in 1991.

PCN is not a human health issue.

For information about the movement of potato plant material, machinery and other equipment, please contact DPI Plant Standards on (03) 8371 3500 or plant.standards@dpi.vic.gov.au