

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 27 August 2012



Potatoes South Australia Inc
GPO Box 1664
Adelaide SA 5001

POTENTIAL \$1/4 BILLION LOSS DUE TO POTATO DISEASE

The Australian Potato Industry faces catastrophic yield losses of as much as 50% if approval of market access for New Zealand potatoes by the Federal Government's DAFF Biosecurity goes ahead.

The market access request would allow the importation of fresh potatoes from New Zealand for the purpose of processing, which includes French fry and potato chip production. This will result in the potential introduction of Zebra Chip disease complex and other pest and diseases not currently found in Australia.

Robbie Davis, CEO of the peak industry body, Potatoes South Australia Inc, said it is "a disaster waiting to happen" and will have enormous repercussions throughout the potato industry value chain, particularly in South Australia.

"In South Australia, potatoes represent the largest horticulture contribution to gross food revenue and the state has the most to lose from importing New Zealand potatoes as it is the nation's largest potato producer with farm gate production worth \$206 million," she said. "South Australia also produces 80% of the nation's fresh washed potatoes."

The disease is spread by the Tomato-Potato Psyllid (a flying insect) and through live plant matter, including potatoes. Estimated loss in the New Zealand industry due to the disease is \$120 million. It has also had a devastating effect on production in USA wherever it has occurred. Infestation by the bacterium results in a downgrading of quality due to distinct discolouration in the shape of brown/black stripes and death of the plant. Most Solanaceous crops are affected by this complex.

Ms Davis said "at present very little is known and understood about the insect host (psyllid) and the bacterium. The importance of the disease and the severity of its effects are clearly reflected in the millions invested in researching the disease since its occurrence overseas. There is no cure and there are no resistant varieties."

"The proposed regulations in the DAFF Biosecurity Draft Report for the review of import conditions for fresh potatoes for processing from New Zealand are not sufficiently stringent and offer next to no protection for the Australian potato industry. The Advice and supporting Final Pest Risk Analysis lack rigour, objectivity, and basic scientific method. There is also selective presentation of data. The Pest Risk Analysis is also out of date (2009), given the short time the disease has been identified and the large volumes of research undertaken since then," said Ms Davis. "Australia must maintain its food security and biosecurity by preventing the importation of exotic pests and diseases - the importation of potentially diseased potatoes or containers potentially contaminated with the Tomato-Potato Psyllid *must* remain suspended," she added.

Potatoes South Australia will provide a submission on behalf of its stakeholders to DAFF and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator the Hon Joseph Ludwig. Potatoes South Australia is also encouraging individual stakeholders to express their concerns.

ENDS

For interviews and further information contact:
Robbie Davis 0427 084 319