SA GROWER

Tomato pest found in WA

POTATOES SA

BY ROBBIE DAVIS, CEO

TOMATO potato psyllid (*Bactericera cockerelli*) has been detected in commercial crops and backyard gardens in WA in the past month.

The pest was found in a commercial property north of Perth, and nine other locations across the Perth metropolitan area. Affected crops include potato, tomato, eggplant, capsicum, chilli, tamarillo and sweet potato.

The Department of Agriculture and Food WA quarantined the affected properties and put biosecurity restrictions in place on the movement of vegetable and plant material and equipment, and machinery off these properties, while surveillance of commercial crops and backyard gardens is also occurring in the Perth area.

SA has also implemented restrictions on the movement of produce susceptible to the pest, including potatoes, tomatoes, capsicums, eggplants and sweet potatoes, as well as associated planting media, machinery and equipment from WA.

With the exception of Norfolk Island, an external Australian territory, this is the first time the psyllid has been detected on the Australian mainland.

The psyllid is a significant production pest in the United States, Central America, New Zealand and Norfolk Island.

It can spread through the movement of plant produce and through natural pathways, such as flight and wind.

Adults resemble small winged cicadas and are about three millimetres long with a 'brownish' body and white or 'yellowish' markings on the thorax and a broad white band on the abdomen.

Wings are transparent and held vertically on the body.

Nymphs are 2mm long, oval shaped, flattened and scale-like in appearance.

Young nymphs are yellow with red eyes and three pairs of short legs, while older nymphs are greenish and fringed with hairs and have visible wing buds.

Psyllid eggs are less than 1mm long and are attached to the plant by a short vertical thread. They are usually laid on the lower surface of leaves or along the leaf stalk.

Eggs are white when first laid then turn yellow to orange after a few hours.

TPP signs include:

- Insects jumping from the foliage when disturbed
- Severe wilting of plants from psyllids feeding
- Yellowing of leaf margins and upward curling of the leaves caused by the injection of salivary toxins
- A sugar-rich sticky liquid called honeydew, which coats plant leaves and stems, and can lead to the development of sooty mould
- Ants on plants may be symptomatic of the presence of sucking plants
- Stem death symptoms similar to other potato and tomato disorders.

The TPP is also a vector for zebra chip disease, but its bacterium *Candidatus Liberibacter solanacearum* has not been found in testing in WA to-date.

If you suspect any arriving produce is affected by TPP or you think this particular psyllid may be on your crops, report any finding immediately to the Exotic Plant Pest hotline.

- Need to know more? EPP hotline 1800 084 881

Growers with suspected tomato potato psyllid sightings should not spray or disturb suspect plants until crops have been surveyed. Photo - Pia Scanlon, DAFWA