20 August 2008

UPDATE

Work is continuing following last week's positive news that Japan had re-opened their markets for tomatoes and capsicums.

The MAF Biosecurity New Zealand (MAFBNZ) exports team continues to liaise with Australia. A letter was sent last week asking, among other things, that Australian officials visit here as soon as possible to facilitate a speedy and efficient resolution to the current position. Our Minister also met with his Australian counterpart last week (Friday) and emphasized the significance of resolving market access issues for our solonaceous crops that arose due to the bacterium detection in New Zealand.

MAFBNZ contacted Fijian officials this week and supplied further information regarding the inspection/verification process for potatoes destined for Fiji. As part of ongoing negotiations to regain market access for tomatoes and capsicum, Fijian authorities have also been provided with information on the role of the tomato potato psyllid (TPP) in vectoring the bacterium.

We contacted French Polynesian officials last week and asked to them to assess existing access conditions for tomatoes and capsicums in light of new information on the psyllid/bacterium relationship, and the previous performance of our export certification system.

MAFBNZ believes that its export phytosanitary inspection and certification system provides a high degree of assurance that export fruit for consumption is free of TPP. This, together with the fact that there are no records of TPP being found on New Zealand fruit by trading partners provides proof our systems are robust.

To ensure this situation remains unchanged all growers are reminded to keep on top of their TPP control programmes. Any failure with regard to performance of the phytosanitary inspection and certification system could cause a significant setback in terms of on-going access, particularly for Japan, and for negotiations with Australia.

Science Programme

US scientists have confirmed the presence of the bacterium in potatoes in Texas and in tomatoes and TPP in California.

Our science programme remains on track with results due in between early September and early October.

The key questions being investigated in the science programme are:

- Can the bacterium be transmitted from infected ripe tomato fruits to plants via TPP?
- Is the bacterium transmitted through the seeds of infected plants?
- Is the bacterium transmitted through grafting of infected and healthy plants?
- Is TPP –bacterium vectoring relationship in New Zealand similar/same to that described by US scientists?

Survey

The limited survey work, which is now complete, was designed to find the extent of distribution of bacterium in tomatoes and capsicums in New Zealand. The survey was later extended to include potatoes (both table and seed). The bacterium was found in the following regions: Northland, Auckland, Waikato, Taupo, Nelson and Mid Canterbury. This distribution corresponds with the known general distribution of TPP, however not all growers had knowledge of TPP presence on their particular site. In contrast, the bacterium was not detected in all known TPP infected regions. The southernmost detection was in table potatoes south of Christchurch. All seed potato results were negative.

The bacterium was found in plants ranging in age from seedlings to older crops immediately prior to pull out. Detection of the bacterium did not necessarily correspond with symptomatic plants. However symptoms from tomatoes, capsicums and potatoes are reported as consistent and similar to phytoplasma-like symptoms (eg. etiolation, yellowing, and witches broom). Adhoc testing of the weeds, black nightshade (*Solanum nigra*) and apple of Peru (*Nicandra physalodes*) has given negative results to date.

During our survey and investigation we have identified cape gooseberry (*Physalis peruviana*) as a new host.

Summarised results table.

Surveillance summary	

Total sites surveyed	**43**
Tamarillo sites	2
Tomato & capsicum sites	29
Potato sites	12

Number of survey sites positive	**14**

Total positive sites including the initial investigation sites	**22**
Auckland	12
Taupo	2
Waikato	1
Nelson	2
Mid Canterbury	3
Northland	2

Number of survey sites negative	**29**
Dunedin	1
Auckland	7
Waikato	2
Wellington	1
Taranaki	1
North Canterbury	2
Marlborough	1
Bay of Plenty	2
Gisborne	1

Hawke's Bay	1
Mid Canterbury	4
Rangitikei	2
Wairarapa	1
Wanganui	1
Wellington	2