

## **New plant disease in tomatoes and capsicums**

**25 July 2008**

### **Update on the new *Candidatus Liberibacter* species bacterium and its association with the tomato/potato psyllid.**

#### **Delimiting surveys**

To date, the bacterium has been confirmed in just under half of the commercial greenhouse tomato and capsicum sites that have been sampled and tested; i.e. approx 15 of 33 sites. The positive finds range from Northland through Auckland, north and south Waikato and into Nelson and Canterbury. These are also basically the same regions where the psyllid has spread to, with the exception that it is also in Gisborne and Hawkes Bay. The two crop tests undertaken there were negative.

Some crops showed visual symptoms of a disease while others showed nothing. Since being sampled most crops have continued to grow normally. It is also not understood (yet) why some crops that had been infested with psyllids proved to be negative for the bacterium.

The tomato and capsicum growers who were sampled should have been notified of their results by now.

The other surveillance programme for *Liberibacter* in tamarillos has been stopped since a positive find confirmed these as a host which made further testing unnecessary. MAFBNZ is now commencing the testing of seed potatoes for the bacterium and the results should be available over the next two weeks.

#### **Market Access**

Last Thursday 17 July MAFBNZ did reinstate export phytosanitary certification of New Zealand grown tomatoes and capsicums. However, it was a lifting in theory only as the restrictions are still in place for all of our main export markets; i.e. exports are still on hold to either the countries that have prohibited imports of our products (e.g. Australia and Fiji) or to those where MAFBNZ is still negotiating access conditions (e.g. Japan and French Polynesia).

#### **USA**

The only clear market access achieved to date is to the USA. The USA reported on 14 July that they have found the same bacterium present in some potato crops. I am also led to believe, but as yet it is unconfirmed, that the USA has also found the same bacterium in tomatoes. Interestingly the USA has not imposed any conditions on its exports. Thursday 24 July MAFBNZ confirmed that phytosanitary certification for fresh tomatoes and capsicums for consumption destined for the USA may continue and as per the existing requirements of the US ICPR.

This should have a significant bearing on market access for similarly affected New Zealand products; especially with Japan. The USA is Japan's largest supplier of imported tomatoes.

#### **Japan**

Negotiations have continued with Japan, with a lot of additional information supplied in response to Japan's queries. MAFBNZ was expecting a formal written response from Japan 24 July on its market access situation, including any new conditions on capsicums and tomatoes, but this has not yet arrived. MAFBNZ will continue to actively engage with Japanese officials to reinstate our capsicum trade.

**Australia**

MAFBNZ has had telephone discussions with senior Australian officials but that is all so far. Australia apparently understands the technical issues relating to this bacterium and its probable connection to the psyllid. It is proposing to send its scientists here to confirm the information that has been provided. Discussions with Australia will need considerable effort to regain our market access to Australia.

**Fiji**

The Fijian temporary ban on imports of New Zealand potatoes, tomatoes and capsicums remains in place. Fijian officials have visited New Zealand and gained a sound understanding of the bacterium and the psyllid as the likely vector. The visit went well and the initial response was good however, the official response has yet to be received.

**French Polynesia**

On Wednesday 23 July French Polynesia imposed new additional conditions, without supporting technical justification, for imports of tomatoes and capsicums. MAFBNZ is to advise French Polynesia that Industry does not accept those conditions.