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Australian horticulture receives \$5M export boost

To help open up more market opportunities domestically and internationally, Hort Innovation has launched a \$5M effort with researchers, industry and regulators to strengthen evidence of pest control measures.

The four-year national project, funded by Hort Innovation and research partners and led by CSIRO, will involve developing new approaches for preventing and handling risks across the supply chain, and setting limits relating to these risks.

These protocols will also require regular testing of the system and the maintenance of adequate records.

This approach, referred to as a 'systems approach', will be developed in line with what is already acceptable to Asian markets, but not widely used in Australia.

Hort Innovation chief executive John Lloyd said the project aims to provide growers more options to meet domestic market access requirements.

"Maintaining areas in Australia that are free from pests, such as fruit fly and codling moths, has been one important way for producers to access domestic and then international markets," he said.

"For produce grown outside of those areas, options such as cold treatment and methyl bromide fumigation make market access possible in some situations.

"This systems approach should provide another option for industries who face limited phytosanitary treatment options due to the negative impacts they can have on fruit quality or the declining numbers of chemical treatments available."

He said, currently, a range of on-farm activities are also in place such as in-field pest management, inspection and grading of produce, post-harvest treatments and cool storage are widely used to manage quarantine pests and meet market expectations.

"This project will deliver the science required to underpin the stringent pest management practices being used by Australian growers by showing we are maintaining quality while satisfying the biosecurity requirements of domestic trade."

As part of the project, CSIRO is working with the Western Australian, NSW and Victorian Governments to collect data at test sites including cherry farms in Victoria and New South Wales, apple farms in Western Australia and citrus operations in NSW.

CSIRO Senior Research Scientist Dr Rieks Van Klinken said the project aimed to support growers and help stop the spread of pests in Australia.

"This project is aiming to see how different combinations of pest measures can reassure importers and regulators that produce is pest-free," Dr Van Klinken said.

"Pests such as Queensland fruit fly are hugely damaging to Australian growers, so with this project our aim, in tandem with our other efforts against Qfly and horticultural pests, is to help open up lucrative domestic and international markets."

Once complete, the systems approach protocols will be supplied to the government regulators to support any interstate, then hopefully international, negotiations.

This collaborative project also involves input from the Western Australian Department of Primary Industries and regional Development, Agriculture Victoria, the NSW Department of Primary Industries, and various industry groups and growers.

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