



Before pickers arrive, talk to them about the farm-gate hygiene 🗨️ 0

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NEWS, VITICULTURE

Fruit and vegetables are picked all year round in South Australia, from grapes to apples to citrus to strawberries and capsicums. There are plenty of opportunities for seasonal workers to travel between farms and regions, picking produce and earning money.

But people can unknowingly spread pests, diseases and weed seeds on their shoes, clothing, equipment and vehicles as they move from farm to farm, and region to region. While sharing workers can be great, sharing pests, diseases and weeds can be devastating.

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There are simple things growers can do to prevent the spread of harmful pests, diseases and weeds between states, regions and properties.

Communication: before pickers arrive, communicate with them about the farm-gate hygiene requirements at your property.

Signs: biosecurity signs should be the first thing people see when they enter your property. These signs should direct people to the farm office and ask them not to enter production areas.

Cars: parking areas for visitors including staff should be away from your vines, trees or plants. Ask workers to stay on hard packed roads and paths as much as possible to limit access to soil, which can harbor pests, diseases and weed seeds.

Entry points: multiple, unsecured entry points make it difficult to control visitor access. Limit the number of access points to your property and lock unused gates.

Visitor register: in your farm office, you should have a log book or register that details every visitor to the farm and any other farming areas they have been to in recent weeks. Workers who have recently been on farms interstate or overseas are particularly high risk.

Shoes and clothes: clothes, hats and footwear should be free of soil and plant material before workers enter your property. And clothing and shoes should be clean when they leave, too. Consider supplying your own farm boots for workers to wear on your property only.

Equipment: likewise, any equipment brought to your farm should be clean of any soil or plant material before it's used on your farm. And ensure any equipment moved across state borders complies with State Quarantine requirements.

Produce: Ensure seasonal workers know they cannot bring fresh produce into South Australia, which is a fruit fly free zone.

Vinehealth Australia CEO Inca Pearce said a key starting point for all growers is to consider all of the ways people could be responsible for bringing a pest, disease or weed onto their property, and dealing with each of those potential risks one by one.

"Many people don't know how easy it is to spread pests, diseases and weeds," Inca said.

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“Hold induction sessions for seasonal workers to make sure they know about your on-farm biosecurity requirements. Tell them to keep an eye out for anything unusual and make sure that all your staff know to report anything they are concerned about.”

“On-farm biosecurity is an investment you can’t afford to ignore. Just consider the costs of a new pest, disease or weed incursion.”

Manager Plant and Food Standards at PIRSA Biosecurity SA Geoff Raven said in addition to entry protocols, another key on-farm biosecurity practice is training staff to regularly check on vine and plant health.

“Minimising the risk of pests entering your property is the key to on-farm biosecurity, but if you do detect anything suspicious, early reporting is a vital tool in reducing disease spread,” he said.

“Training staff to immediately report anything to the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline (1800 084 881) is good on-farm biosecurity and will minimise the impact of any new pest or disease.”

Biosecurity issues are shared across South Australia’s mix of primary industries.

“Therefore, it is essential that all stakeholders collaborate closely to protect our Pest Free Area status, our growers’ incomes and the jobs created by primary industries, at all costs,” said Steve Burdette, Chair, Citrus Australia South Australian Region (CASAR).

Photograph: Ben MacMahon

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