



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
PLANT HEALTH
2020

Plant health everyday heroes

Protecting plants, protecting lives



How did you choose your job? Or did it choose you?

It chose me. I was approached by the former head of the organisation to do some project work for the Phylloxera Board, as it was then known, in early 2015. In April 2016, I won the role of CEO of the newly rebranded Vinehealth Australia. I'm very happy I made the move into biosecurity. I've worked hard to make Vinehealth a solutions provider, shifting the dynamic from biosecurity being seen as an insurance against risk to an enabler for industry success.

How long have you worked in this industry?

I've worked in the wine industry all my life. I completed a masters of viticulture in 1996 and found a job with Orlando Wines, which later became Pernod Ricard, working as a technical officer in the vineyards at Padthaway and Coonawarra. I moved through various roles at Orlando over the next 17 years – senior viticulturist, manager of research and development and communications manager. I also did four US vintages. When Pernod Ricard underwent a global restructure in 2014, I decided it was time to leave. I was ready for a new challenge. I started working with the Phylloxera Board – now Vinehealth Australia – in 2015, and now my job is focused on protecting the South Australian wine industry from foreign pests and diseases, and keeping vineyards healthy and profitable.

What does plant health mean to you?

To me, plant health means everyone working together to protect our most valuable plant assets from disaster. That means farmers, industry bodies, governments, the public and everyone in between playing a role. Protecting vineyards against pests has never been more challenging, so it's critical that we all work together. From a national

viewpoint, global trade and tourism, agricultural expansion and intensification, urbanisation and climate change are all factors increasing our biosecurity exposure.

Our vineyards are particularly vulnerable to the entry and spread of pests due to the strong connectivity within our industry. People, equipment, grapes and grape products, planting material, vehicles and machinery commonly move from vineyard to vineyard, within regions, between regions and between states.

Keeping vineyards safe is a huge job, but our wine industry is far too important to take our foot off the biosecurity pedal.

What are your greatest achievements in this role?

We have a small team at Vinehealth Australia that achieves incredible results for the wine industry. Among those achievements, I'm particularly proud of our recent work to strengthen South Australia's Plant Quarantine Standard. It involved a comprehensive 12 month review of the phylloxera conditions within the PQS and the creation of a new Phylloxera chapter including a raft of changes that were recently approved by the SA Government. I'm proud of the way we've made Vinehealth Australia a hands on, results driven, practical organisation. As part of this, our team promptly responds to biosecurity incidents – within 24 hours – to determine cause and minimise impacts on vine health and grape and wine production. And I'm very proud of our Responsible Visitation Campaign, which ran from 2017 to 2019, in which hundreds of cellar door staff and bus tour operators were educated about vine health, and how to talk to tourists about keeping vines healthy. There are so many other projects and activities that I'm proud of, that I could write pages of notes, but I'll stop there!

Inca Lee

CEO

Vinehealth Australia

What does a typical day look like for you?

Like everyone working in biosecurity, my days are incredibly busy and include meetings with government and industry officials to discuss biosecurity policy and priorities, visits to regions to talk to growers, winemakers, contractors and suppliers about biosecurity and farm-gate hygiene and lots of hands on project work to keep our many activities on track. My days also include significant amounts of writing of reports, policies, funding applications, speeches and all sorts of other documents. I give lots of presentations and speeches to raise awareness of biosecurity topics. And of course, I respond daily to many emails and phone calls from industry members who have questions about biosecurity and farm-gate hygiene.

What advice would you give anybody wanting to get into the industry?

Do it! The wine industry is a wonderful sector, full of friendly and passionate people who are focused on delivering quality. But like any agricultural sector, it's reliant on nature and that can be stressful. It's the industry for you if you're hardworking, passionate and resilient. To work in biosecurity, you need to be skilled at multitasking. It's a rapidly changing landscape, and we need people who are adaptable, quick thinking and innovative. There is so much work to be done in this space to ensure our industries are better prepared for incursions of pests and diseases and to develop better tools to manage farm-gate hygiene activities. The opportunities are endless.