

Victoria: Berry Biosecurity Field Day

Angela Atkinson, Berry Industry Development Officer, Victoria & South Australia

On Thursday 14 September a Biosecurity Field Day was held at Fresh Berry Co in Coldstream in the Yarra Valley. The day was a joint effort by Berries Australia, VSICA Research and the Boosting Diagnostics project delivered by AUSVEG. Attendance at the day was good, despite it being the only sunny day in a week of wet weather!

The focus of the day was biosecurity preparedness and pest and disease management, with presentations on biosecurity planning, exotic pest diagnostics, pest and disease control and Varroa mite. The day was a combination of presentations and demonstrations, followed by a BBQ lunch and, surprisingly, a train ride!

The morning started with Dr Tony Gendall (La Trobe University) speaking about his work controlling Botrytis in strawberry using the novel BioClay™ technology. This work is part of a large project by the ARC research hub for sustainable crop protection, which is aiming to develop RNA-based biopesticides as alternatives to chemical fungicides and pesticides.

Dr Dylan McFarlane (VSICA Research) gave a presentation on the importance of on-farm biosecurity practices for the management of charcoal rot in strawberries.

Dylan's work has shown a strong correlation between the increased adoption of biosecurity practices on farm and a decrease in severity and incidence of charcoal rot. This work is applicable to other soil borne diseases in any crop, and shows that every practice put in place to reduce the spread of disease helps to reduce the impact on crops.

Dr Scott Mattner (VSICA Research) spoke about his work with biofumigant crops as another tool to manage soil borne disease in strawberry.

Scott's presentation included a demonstration of how important it is to properly break up the biofumigant crop to release the biofumigant chemicals, with Scott grinding up biofumigant species to different extents and measuring the amount of biofumigant released.



Scott Mattner demonstrating biofumigation

Photo credit: Angela Atkinson

Managing fruit waste is an important part of Queensland fruit fly prevention, and Bronwyn Koll, Yarra Valley regional Queensland Fruit Fly (QFF) coordinator, demonstrated a trial system for using fermentation to kill larvae that may be present in fruit waste.

This work was done in conjunction with Box Hill Institute Biosecurity Centre of Excellence. Bron showed the system that has been trialled, and spoke about the potential and requirements for scaling up to handle large quantities for waste fruit on farm. You can read more about this project on PAGE 24 of the Spring 2022 edition of this journal.



Bronwyn Koll and her fermentation tanks. Photo credit: Angela Atkinson



Fermenting berries. Photo credit: Angela Atkinson



Shakira Johnson with the iMapPESTS sentinel. Photo credit: Angela Atkinson

Following morning tea, and an opportunity to look at the demonstrations, we had two talks from researchers at AgriBio as part of the Boosting Diagnostics project. Dr Alex Piper spoke about Spotted Wing *Drosophila*, a high priority exotic pest of berries, and Elisse Nogarotto (via video) spoke about her improving diagnostics for *Xanthomonas fragariae*, or Angular leaf spot, which is an exotic pest of strawberries.

Dr Mike Hodda (CSIRO) gave a comprehensive presentation about the different nematodes present in soil and how they can affect berry crops. He and Dr Daniel Huston (CSIRO) set up microscopes to show everyone what the pests look like.

Adam Upton (Upton Agronomy) gave a timely presentation on the management of Blueberry Rust, given that it has recently been declared endemic in Victoria, and also now in Tasmania and Western Australia. Adam spoke about the various cultural and chemical methods available to control rust.

In the light of the ongoing incursion in NSW of *Varroa destructor*, Greg Huggins from the Emerald Regional Beekeepers gave an update on the eradication response and the risks to industry of Varroa.

Greg has been working with the response teams overseeing the movement of hives for the Almond industry and other crop pollination events in northern Victoria. At the time of writing, the NSW DPI is still confident the mite can be eradicated. You can read more about the Varroa mite eradication plan on PAGE 14.

The final presentation was by Shakira Johnson (iMapPESTS) who brought along an iMapPESTS mobile surveillance sentinel to show growers. These units incorporate smart trapping devices to monitor pests and diseases and have been trialed in a number of agriculture areas around Australia. Airborne insects and spores are trapped by the devices and can be identified using diagnostic techniques. The sentinels can potentially help with detection of exotic pests, as well as monitoring for prevalence of endemic pests to help with pest and disease preparedness. iMapPESTS is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry as part of its Rural R&D for Profit program, along with contributions from many other organisations.



Hopping on board for a train ride! Photo credit: Angela Atkinson

Over lunch attendees were treated to an unexpected model train ride around the dam and wetlands on the property! Feedback for the day was overwhelmingly positive, particularly from those who had a train ride, something I can take no credit for. Thanks again to Michael Pettinella and his team at Fresh Berry Co for hosting the field day, including his brother Tony for bringing out the train!



berries
AUSTRALIA



BOOSTING
DIAGNOSTICS
PLANT BIOSECURITY



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