

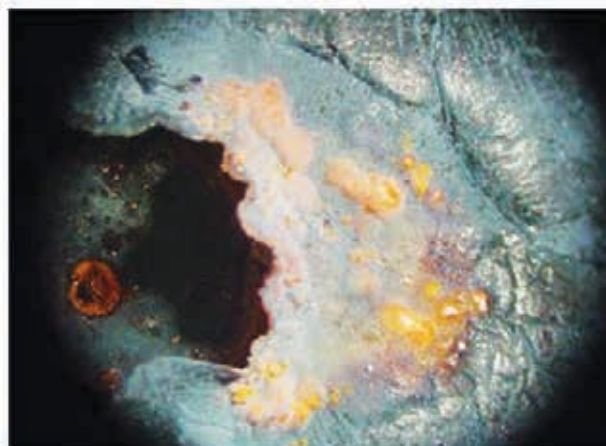
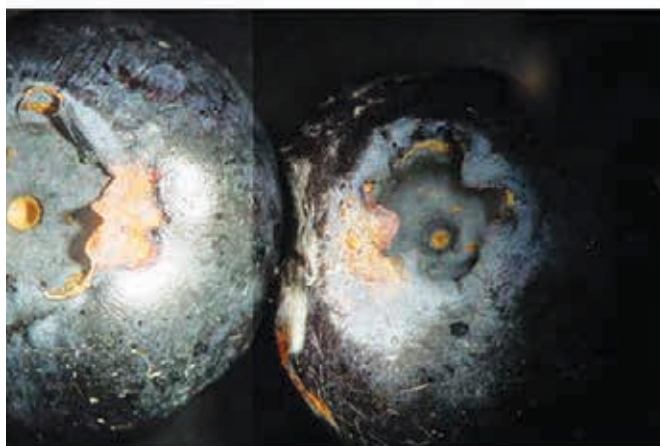
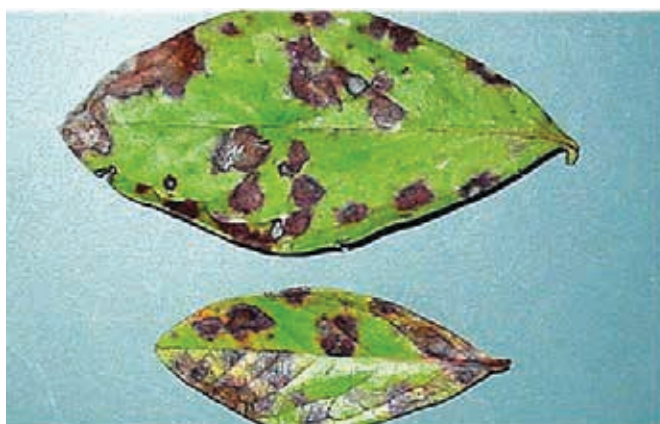
# Status update of Blueberry Rust in Tasmania

Ian Cover - Industry Development Officer and Michael Tarbath — Policy & Engagement Officer,  
Fruit Growers Tasmania Inc.

Blueberry rust (*Thekopsora minima*) is a fungal disease of blueberries which causes extensive fruit and leaf lesions, defoliation and plant death in severe instances. Once established, the disease can spread rapidly and is difficult to eradicate, especially in evergreen blueberry varieties.

Blueberry rust spreads through the local environment by airborne spores, using wind and rain as its main transmission vectors. Spore can also be carried on the clothes of people coming into contact with infected

material, transferring them to other locations with surface contact. This contact spread can enable the disease to spread long distances between farms and from one production area to another.



**Blueberry rust symptoms.** Photo credit: Biosecurity Tasmania

## Current incursion

Tasmania's current blueberry rust incursion was first detected in 2016 on a farm in North West Tasmania. Surveys of other producers quickly identified that the disease had established a presence on a number of other sites.

The Tasmanian Government rapidly introduced strict hygiene and containment procedures to stop the disease from spreading further. The containment measures include:

- Strict quarantine procedures on infected properties;
- Regular inspections of infected properties to ensure compliance with quarantine requirements;
- Working with industry to ensure good on farm hygiene at non-infected properties to reduce the risk of infection; and
- Regular state-wide surveys of all commercial blueberry production areas to identify and respond to any new detections.

During the early stages of the incursion response, Biosecurity Tasmania undertook a comprehensive scientific assessment of eradication options for the disease given the tools and knowledge available.

This assessment recommended that containment was needed, as there was no method of eradicating the disease from the State without causing unnecessary economic damage to the industry sector.

## Domestic trade impacts

Blueberry rust is not present in all states of Australia. At this time, blueberry rust is established in New South Wales and Queensland. This creates challenges for growers where the disease is present as other state governments look to protect their industries and their growers from being exposed to the disease.

Recognising the long-term impacts this incursion would have on domestic trade, the Tasmanian Government has worked with its interstate counterparts to negotiate inspection and market access arrangements for clean Tasmanian fruit to be able to move to markets in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

Reviewed annually, these arrangements require regular state-wide disease surveys, farm hygiene and registration requirements, as well as phytosanitary inspections of fruit consignments destined for these markets.

## The slow road back to disease freedom

Biosecurity Tasmania and industry continue to work towards creating a future where eradication and state-wide freedom may be possible.

To support this, Biosecurity Tasmania continues to regularly review and update containment procedures to ensure the disease remains contained whilst eradication options are developed.



**Blueberry rows at TruBlu in Tasmania.** Photo credit: Ian Cover, FGT

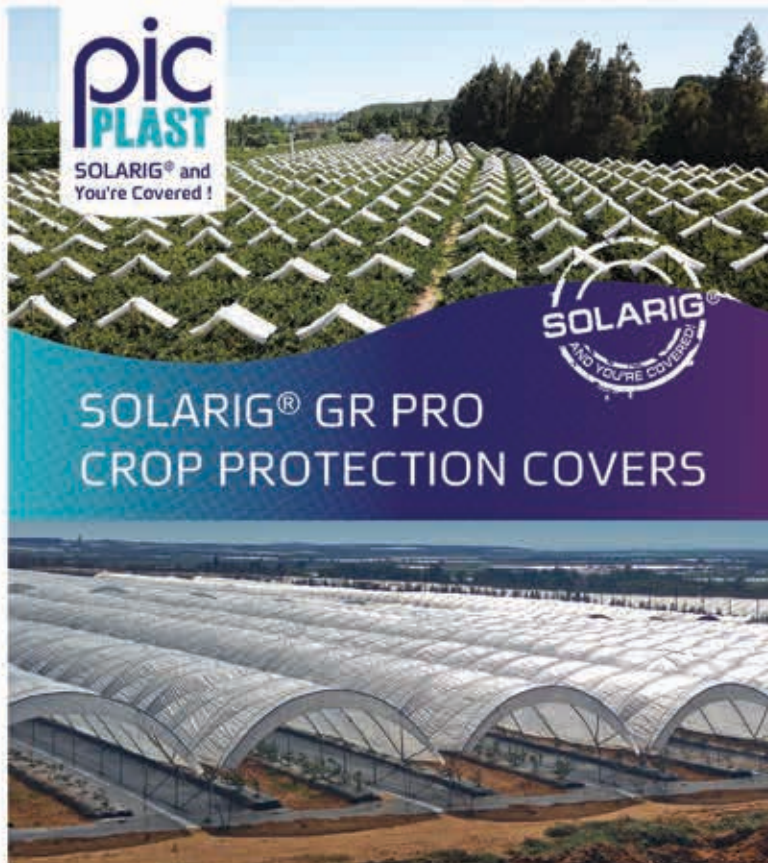
As part of this long-term approach, researchers at the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, NSW Department of Primary Industries and Biosecurity Tasmania are working closely with affected growers in Tasmania and NSW to undertake treatment efficacy trials in search of organic-compatible control options for controlling and eradicating the disease.

Producers on some Tasmanian properties are also contributing to this effort through trials of their own, with a number of affected properties experimenting with defoliation trials to disrupt the lifecycle of the disease.

In-field disease surveys have also suggested that the amount of rust lesions and spores on at least one of the remaining infected properties have steadily decreased over time due to the treatment, and the approach may become an important part of the disease control toolkit.

These containment and treatment approaches have seen the number of blueberry rust infected premises in Tasmania decrease from seven to four through these combined approaches.

**Over the 2 years to December 2020 the State recorded no new infected properties.**



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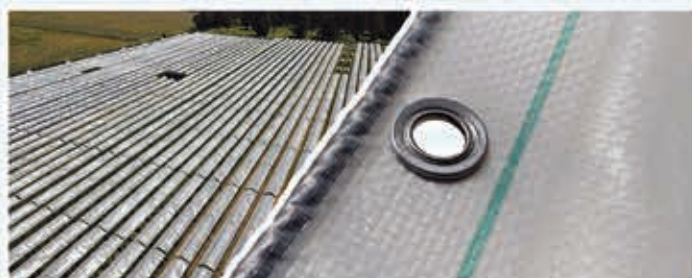
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