



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
PLANT HEALTH
2020

Everyday plant health heroes

Protecting plants, protecting life



Anne Walters

Chief Plant Health Officer for the Northern Territory

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

It really chose me – it's funny how things tend to come back. I completed a PhD on invasive ants through the Flinders University of South Australia. When I moved up to the NT, I pursued a range of roles across different areas, including feral animal management, wildlife management (including crocodiles, wild dogs, flying foxes, possums), biodiversity conservation, climate change and renewable energy. Somehow, after all that, I ended up back in the management of invasive species through the Chief Plant Health Officer role.

How long have you worked in this industry?

Most recently, for a little over two years.

What does plant health mean to you?

For me, plant biosecurity is fundamentally about people. It provides the mechanism by which growers can sustainably grow and trade, therefore generating an income for their families, employing local people, contributing to the local economy and community, and providing the community with high quality, safe food choices.

What are your greatest achievements in this role?

Playing an instrumental role in developing and implementing a Memorandum of Understanding for northern Australia, which will increase collaborative efforts across the north, provide a framework for sharing resources, generate cost-efficiencies, encourage sharing of knowledge and information, and streamline processes.

Overseeing successful eradication programs for citrus canker and browsing ants in the Northern Territory.

Developing and supporting creative and innovative projects that will build the capacity of the north in relation to surveillance, diagnostics, resilience and recovery.

Building a cohesive and integrated team, made up of a diverse range of areas, including Water Laboratories, Plant Biosecurity, Plant Health Laboratories, Chemical Regulation, and Hemp Industry Regulation.

What does a typical day look like for you?

Lots of meetings! Communication is the foundation of good outcomes for industry, stakeholders and internal partners. I am committed to empowering others to perform to the best of their ability and to achieve their goals. To do this, it is important that I understand their perspective and work with them to achieve. This means lots of discussions!

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

Understand your risks and your opportunities. Use this information to build systems aimed at reducing your risk and exploring your potential. This includes maintaining effective records, implementing robust biosecurity practices, investing in innovative technologies and research, and developing partnerships with other members of the industry. Also, think about how you can build resilience into your business so you are prepared for any challenge that you might face.