



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
PLANT HEALTH
2020

Everyday plant health heroes Protecting plants, protecting life



Jim Moran

Victorian Grains Biosecurity Officer, Grains Farm Biosecurity Program

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

A bit of both. Around ten years ago, during another restructure, I found myself between roles with, what is now Agriculture Victoria. A combined position came up for a Biosecurity Officer with Agriculture Victoria and Plant Health Australia for the grains industry. It also had some plant quarantine and compliance functions thrown in. This job description was certainly exciting and like nothing else I had been involved in. I applied for and received the position and have developed it into a dynamic, interesting and functional role that makes a positive contribution towards achieving excellent biosecurity actions and outcomes.

How long have you worked in this industry?

I have been employed in agriculture since graduating from Agricultural Science way back in 1991. I have had many job titles, functions and responsibilities in that time, mainly within the Victorian Government. This is my tenth year as the grain's industry biosecurity officer in Victoria.

What does plant health mean to you?

For me, plant health is a robust term encompassing a spectrum of structures, functions and responses within many industries, governments and businesses. It is a term describing both the present and an ambition for the future for all these entities. Plant health has implications on and for everybody. Ensuring plant health is a vital role, whether through prevention, protection, detection or response to a threat.

What are your greatest achievements in this role?

In Victoria, distribution of awareness raising booklets, biosecurity gate signs and on farm surveillance have been a massive success. The 'sentinel silo' surveillance program has many traps in various locations looking for Khapra beetle. The evidence of absence is important for our area freedom claims to customers. In addition, locating Khapra beetle traps within honey bee swarm catch boxes at many sea ports gives added assurance that we have not got this exotic pest.

Other achievements include incorporating biosecurity planning in whole farm planning courses, presentations galore at GRDC Updates and grower forums, as well as attending numerous responses for plant health emergencies.

What does a typical day look like for you?

There is no typical day. I have a rolling surveillance program that involves visiting grain farms, sea ports, piggeries, dairies and stockfeed suppliers. These samples need to be analysed and suspects sent for further testing at AgriBio. If it's field day season, I'll be at a display stand somewhere or giving a presentation. I get many public queries around grains biosecurity issues, plant quarantine and interstate movement restrictions as well as mailing out hundreds of biosecurity gate signs. Other activities include property audits, issuing compliance Permits and Certificates, investigating breaches of the Plant Biosecurity Act and media work.

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

It depends which part of the plant health spectrum you want to be involved. Some areas require more scientific knowledge and rigour, while other functions are around awareness raising, training and promoting good practice. Find the type of function you would be most effective and comfortable and look around. Your starting point will most likely be a long way from where you finish up.