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National Vegetable Industry Centre Newsletter

Beneficials continue to clean up Lettuce Aphid

By Sandra McDougall

Growers, industry people and researchers from around the country gathered at Forthside Research and Demonstration Farm in Devonport, Tasmania on the 19th of January. Close to 50 people had come to review and discuss results from the fourth trial planting. Field day attendees deemed the lettuce marketable. Visitors came from as far away as Queensland to "see for themselves" the success of beneficial insects in managing lettuce aphid.

Lettuce aphids infest the lettuce after transplanting and their numbers increase quickly. Beneficial insects fly in from older plantings to feed on the booming lettuce aphid colony. A combination of lacewings, ladybirds and hoverflies "clean up" the lettuce aphids by harvest time. This pest / beneficial cycle has now been repeated in five plantings. Cutworm have been the only other insect pest found in the lettuce with a Bt spray applied to plantings 1 and 2, and Success® applied to plantings 1 to 4. A Mancozeb® spray that was applied appeared to kill the ladybeetles.

Lionel Hill and team at Tasmania's Department of Primary Industry are growing nine 0.1 ha plantings of head lettuce at 2-3 week intervals to demonstrate the potential of integrated pest management (IPM) practices to manage all pests in lettuce including Lettuce aphid. Each planting consists of a number of susceptible and resistant lettuce varieties grown without Confidor® drenching or Pirimor® foliar sprays. The crops have been monitored on a weekly basis and treated if necessary following IPM principles in consultation with Dr Paul Horne and Jessica Page of IPM Technologies (Victoria) and Dr Sandra McDougall of NSW Department of Primary Industries, Yanco.

Marketability of the crops has been assessed by local growers. The fourth planting was also assessed by the Tasmanian buyers for Woolworths and Coles. To date all plantings have been assessed as marketable. The lettuce that haven't made the grade failed due to size or other non-insect related reasons.

The lettuces are not completely insect free. In some lettuce one or two aphids have been found, with some higher numbers in susceptible lettuce treated with Dominex®. Most of the beneficial insects leave the lettuce when the aphids have been eaten but some were still found in the lettuce ready for harvest. It should also be noted that some lettuce aphids have been found in Confidor® treated lettuce, in both Tasmania and in New Zealand.

These demonstration plantings are going a long way to show that for the spring and summer plantings of lettuce in northern Tasmania lettuce aphid can be managed using IPM techniques. The remaining plantings will show whether this holds true for the rest of the season.

For more information contact Lionel Hill
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Lettuce aphid IPM field day

Sclerotinia permits in lettuce

In November 2004, the APVMA suspended the use of chemicals containing the active ingredient procymidone in lettuce. This includes popular products for sclerotinia control like Sumisclex®, Cyon®, Spiral® Aquaflo®, Fortress®, Rumble® and Procym®.

This action resulted in chemicals with the active iprodione, (e.g. Rovral® and Civet®), being the only registered products in some states for sclerotinia control.

To prevent the overuse of iprodione based chemicals the following new permits have been granted:

PER 8141 – Boscalid, Finlan® (14 Day WHP)
PER 8182 – Azoxystrobin, Amistar® (14 Day WHP)
PER 8207 – Tebuconazole, Folicur® (5 week WHP)
(PER = APVMA Permit number)
(WHP = withholding period)

Details of the above permits can be found on the APVMA website www.apvma.gov.au. Alternatively contact your local state department of agriculture for copies of these permits and advice on sclerotinia control.

Draft Trading Protocol for Lettuce Aphid

By Sandra McDougall
NSW Department of Primary Industries

A draft document, *Protocols for the movement of head and open fancy lettuce material following detection of Currant lettuce aphid in Victoria* is circulating in an attempt to get some agreement about how movement of lettuce might be facilitated once lettuce aphid arrives on the mainland. Growers, Industry and Victorian DPI have drafted the protocol and have been lobbying for the state regulatory authorities to agree to a course of action in the event of the aphid arriving on the mainland.

The working group has representatives from each state. The group meets to co-ordinate domestic quarantine and market access issues and usually only make decisions regarding current pest incursions.

The arrival of lettuce aphid on the mainland is generally considered inevitable. Given the potential disruption this aphid could cause to the industry, it makes sense to agree on protocols now. The unknown is where and when it will arrive.

The working group will be discussing the protocol at their next meeting. Agreement about a protocol would be relatively easy if there was broad industry agreement. At this stage agreement is not possible since the industry has no unified voice. Consultation has been made with the respective state peak vegetable bodies but these are not necessarily very representative of the lettuce growers in their state.

If you have any comments please contact your Vegetable IDO, state peak vegetable body (e.g. NSW Farmers, VGA, GrowCom etc) or AUSVEG.

Brief summary of the protocol

That lettuce grown within a 10km radius of a detection of Lettuce Aphid (LA) is allowed to move to other LA-free areas if:
All plants carry a plant health certificate certifying that:

a). seedlings were treated with Confidor®

Or

b). they are a Nasonovia resistant variety

Or

c). the crop was inspected by accredited officer and found free of LA within 7 days of harvest

Or

d). the crop was monitored by an approved trapping program and found free of LA

Or

e). 2% or more of a consignment was inspected by an accredited officer and found free of LA

Trading Protocols for Exotic Pests

When a new pest arrives in Australia the 'incursion' is managed by the Federal Government's Office for the Chief Plant Protection Officer in conjunction with industry and state regulatory people. This occurs until it is deemed that the pest is "non eradicable". When a pest has established itself somewhere in Australia, individual states then make decisions about managing the pest or preventing it moving across state borders.

There is a committee with representatives from each state regulatory branch that convene to co-ordinate management of exotic pests. The process is one that reacts to a current outbreak or incursion following an agreed process. This can result in significant delays attaining agreement about monitoring procedures or trading protocols.

Current status of Lettuce Aphid

Lettuce aphid is still only found in Tasmania and the only lettuce that moves onto the mainland from Tasmania is bagged loose leaf lettuce. This lettuce is triple washed and the entire production and processing operation has been demonstrated to be very low risk for moving aphid onto the mainland

Movement of head lettuce is a higher risk and is not occurring. When lettuce aphid is found on the mainland movement of lettuce across state borders from the state where the aphid is found will be stopped and only lifted if a trading protocol is agreed on.

Threat to mainland lettuce trade

Currently lettuce moves between the eastern states on a daily basis either as seedlings from the three major nurseries, fresh product to the central markets and product for processing. Stopping this trade could have a major impact on the lettuce industry but on the other hand we don't want to unnecessarily be spreading lettuce aphid around. The challenge is to minimise the risk of spread without massively impacting the lettuce market.

No state, with perhaps the exception of WA, can supply its' own market all year round. Fresh markets rely on movement of lettuce across state borders and there is particularly heavy reliance on Victorian lettuce over summer. Likewise the major processing companies source lettuce from all states but usually process at one location. There is a major issue if the processor is based in the state where lettuce aphid is first found or if the aphid is found in the area that they are primarily sourcing lettuce from at a particular time of year. Processors have to supply 365 days of the year and a break in supply may mean major losses of markets, especially in the export sector, with flow-on effects to the whole lettuce industry.

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