

## Regional Updates

### New South Wales

#### Hay

Prices were low to average all winter and it has been good to see an upwards trend in the tail of the season. Insect pressure was low during most of winter until the arrival of aphids late in the season. Fortunately these were controlled by some late frosts. Spring has seen a lot of thrips & jassid activity with many of the later crops also having some heliothis pressure. Downy mildew has been around late in the season.

#### Central West

Lettuce harvest has started for the spring shoulder season. To date, monitoring data has shown winged aphid flights are about half of last year's numbers and mosaic virus has not been seen. Jassid activity has been very high due to the amount of green feed around this season. Heliothis pressure has been relatively low, but may change with some warmer weather.

#### Sydney basin

There has not been any significant pest or disease pressure as yet. This is attributed to a warm spell about 6 weeks ago, followed by mainly cool to cold conditions since. Quality of local spring (eg Greenway, Musketter, Casino etc) produce has been very good. There have been a few thrips, aphids and heliothis about in the last few weeks, but these have generally been well controlled with decision based spray management. With day temperatures beginning to rise to average, heliothis numbers are beginning to increase. Summer crop plantings are expected to decrease.

### Queensland

Heliothis pressure has been on the increase across the region for the past month or so with both *H. armigera* and *H. punctigera* being caught in pheromone traps in high numbers. Water is still a concern for growers with underground levels being severely depleted. Growers seem to be using what they can for as long as they can.



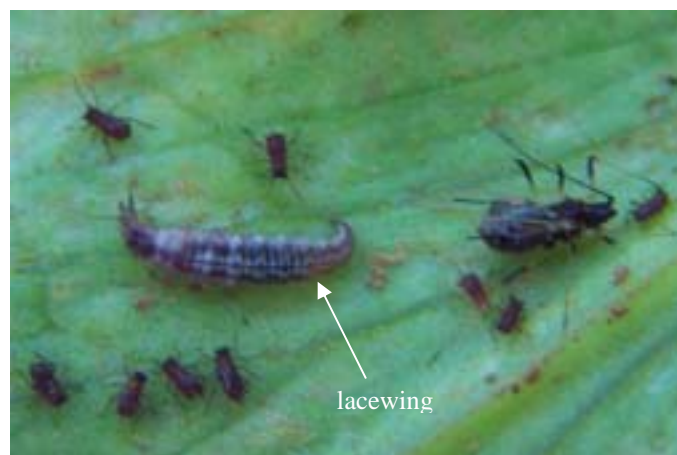
### Victoria

In the Melbourne metropolitan growing regions (Cranbourne and Werribee South) the lettuce season is in full speed. Majority of growers planted their first lettuce crop in the second half of August and at the beginning of September. Cranbourne growers have 70 to 80% of water in their dams (some growers have full) due to recent rains. However, on the other side of Port Philip bay Werribee growers did not accumulate much water. According to some growers they may face shortage of water in up coming summer months.

## New Zealand - Aphids Update

The lettuce aphid, *Nasonovia ribis-nigri*, is still causing heartache. Growers in Gisborne underestimated how quickly it could become a severe problem. The aphid is present all-year round at Gisborne and not having control measures in place, even in winter is courting with disaster. The current use of imidacloprid as a pre-transplant drench is giving adequate control. In New Zealand imidacloprid is currently under permit and actual registration may not occur until after summer field trials.

*Nasonovia* resistant lettuce varieties work, however seed costs are expensive and the varieties have a limited season. Resistance management for imidacloprid is the next big issue to tackle. Planting resistant varieties (spring or summer) and using natural enemies (particularly lacewings and syrphids in the spring) as ways of getting sufficient control to allow for an imidacloprid-free period somewhere in the year. Foliar insecticides work well on *Nasonovia* but after the plants have started to heart up they are of no use at all.



**Brown lacewing larva stalking aphids**

## Managing WFT & TSWV in Lettuce

### Managing WFT & TSWV in Lettuce

Lettuce growers have a new weapon in the fight against Western Thrips (WFT) and Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus (TSWV).

A new CDROM will help growers identify and manage one of Australia's most costly diseases, TSWV which is spread by WFT and other thrips. TSWV and WFT have caused millions of dollars in vegetable crop losses in recent years. The CDROM outlines how to identify thrips, what TSWV and thrips damage looks like and chemical and non-chemical control methods.

The CDROM was developed by the National strategy for the management of WFT and TSWV with support from HAL and the vegetable levy. If growers haven't already received it they can collect their free copy of the CDROM from the Vegetable IDO in their state.



The Youngs have taken advantage of available funding to help finance the fabrication of their new lettuce harvester. With \$80 000 of their own money and matching funding from Agriculture Advancing Australia (AAA), Mr Young was able to build the harvester. AAA is a farm innovation program designed to help producers in agriculture become more competitive, sustainable and profitable. This is the second and final year of the program that has funded almost 100 business people in across rural Australia and provided a total of \$10.2 million.



### Prototype Lettuce Harvester

The Youngs produce sweet corn and seedless watermelon during summer and lettuce during winter. Having previously built harvest aids for his sweet corn and watermelon operation, Mr Young was confident he could do the same for his lettuce operation. Mr Young only grows lettuce for processing but believes the new machine would also be suitable for harvesting fresh market lettuce. Mr Young said he had travelled interstate to see another prototype harvester that was successfully harvesting fresh market crops.

A field day was held on the Youngs property to allow other people in the lettuce industry to see their new machine in action. The field day was organised by Victoria DPI Veg Cheque facilitator Sally-Ann Henderson. Ms Henderson thought the field day was a great opportunity for people in the lettuce industry to see how solutions are coming from within their own industry. Other speakers at the field day included Dennis Phillips from WA Agriculture who presented work on exporting lettuce, Tony Napier from NSW Agriculture discussed the latest in IPM and Oscar Villata from Victoria DPI reported on *Sclerotinia* control.

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## Taking The Pain Out Of Harvesting

Andrew and Eleanor Young, vegetable farmers at Wemen, 30km south of Robinvale, have recently built a new machine to help mechanise their lettuce harvest. Staff working on Young's farm are no longer required to cut the lettuce by hand as the machine performs this operation as it passes over the crop. Picking the lettuce was previously a backbreaking operation with people constantly bending over and cutting the lettuce by hand. Now staff stand comfortably on the harvester as it moves along the crop and trim and pack the lettuce directly from the conveyor belts at waist height. Mr Young believes the major benefit of the harvester is to mechanise the operation and take out the back pain - A necessity if you want to keep your labour force. Mr Young said "As yet no efficiencies have been made in timesaving but with further modifications I hope that improvements will be made".

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