

Lettuce Aphid Still Rampant in New Zealand

Lettuce aphid, *Nasonovia ribis-nigri*, has now spread to all the major lettuce growing regions in New Zealand (including Gisborne).

Growers are struggling to produce acceptable lettuces and some growers are considering getting out of the industry. Many crops in Canterbury and Pukekohe are being dug-in with unacceptable numbers of lettuce aphids in the heads.

Foliar sprays are not giving adequate control of *Nasonovia*. Pre-plant drenches with systemic aphicides are giving good control, but some plants are still infested with small numbers of *Nasonovia* and onion thrips.

The use of pre-plant drenches with systemic aphicides and resistant cultivars are seen as the best control options.

In spring and early summer, brown lacewing (*Micromus tasmaniae*) reduced the *Nasonovia* population considerably, and is seen as a very important natural enemy in early summer. Now, into mid-summer, hoverfly larvae are very numerous and may also be important natural enemies.

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Lettuce aphid Photograph: Rijk Zwaan

Pre-plant Soil Drenches for Control of Aphids and Thrips

In late spring 2002, NSW Agriculture evaluated the efficacy of three insecticides applied as soil drenches prior to planting for control of sap-sucking insects (aphids and thrips).

Unregistered chemicals from Syngenta and Bayer can be used effectively as soil treatments to control aphids. They also significantly reduced thrips numbers and appeared to have an effect on leafhoppers.

The effective period of the two chemicals could not be determined due to low aphid numbers at the end of the trial. *Hippodamia* ladybird beetles kept reducing aphid numbers.

A third chemical evaluated showed no significant difference to the control.

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Sydney thrips & virus management workshop

In response to the serious thrips and virus problem that has been experienced in the Sydney region over spring and summer an information evening on thrips and virus management was held in late January. The meeting attracted 120 growers and industry representatives.

A key presentation by Tony Burfield covered the successful thrips-virus program for South Australian vegetable growers.

Representatives from NSW Agriculture highlighted the following important points:

- regularly monitor crops.
- remove thrips and virus source material (weeds and infected plants) from within and around crops.
- check spray nozzles to ensure they are not worn out.
- select pesticides from different chemical groups.

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Regional Updates

New South Wales

Growers who continued through the summer with lettuce in the Camden area had a lot of pressure from **tomato spotted wilt virus (TSWV)** transmitted by western flower thrips (WFT). Due to the smaller area of summer lettuce planted, grub damage and other disease pressure appeared to have declined since spring.

Water availability is becoming an issue for some Sydney basin growers as they start planting their autumn crops. Hydroponic lettuce growers across the Sydney region continue to experience **severe problems with WFT**, particularly the transmission of TSWV.

Autumn planting started mid-January in the Central West of NSW, and Hay growers will generally start seeding in late February.

Western Australia

Lettuce growers in WA have experienced a sustained period of medium to high prices, due to a combination of factors. After a winter punctuated with significant losses from *Sclerotinia* combined with damage from winter storms, summer crops in the Wanneroo area have been badly affected by **TSWV**. Thrips numbers were high in late spring generally, but the major factor has been a rapid spread of WFT in the district.

Tomato, capsicum and lettuce growers were caught by surprise by the rate of **spread of WFT** after years of lying seemingly dormant in the district.

Field work in the HAL export project in WA has ended and the final report is now being written. The project resulted in two successful shipments of head lettuce in bulk bins to Malaysia. The method shows great promise for Australian lettuce improving its price and quality competitiveness and regaining market share in these traditional markets.

Queensland

While most growers have begun planting lettuce seedlings in the Lockyer Valley some growers won't be planting because of **lack of water**. Recent rains were insufficient to overcome the situation.

Water is getting very **salty** in some parts of the valley and, in these areas, growers are moving to trickle irrigation.

In other crops, *Heliothis* has been very scarce but **whitefly** is starting to build up in large numbers

Victoria

Water availability dominates the Victorian lettuce industry. In Werribee South, some growers have already used their water allocation and are reduced to using bore water (which can vary in salinity levels).

In East Gippsland, *H. punctigera* has also been active but the main issue has been water. There is a complete **ban on irrigation from the Mitchell River** and so growers are reliant on bores

In Werribee South the summer generation of **native budworm** (*Helicoverpa punctigera*) has been present since the middle of January.

Corn earworm (*H. armigera*) have become active since the end of January. There has also been a significant number of **cutworms** (*Agrotis* spp.) and, to a lesser degree, **loopers** (*Chrysodeixis argenteifera*). Pest pressure has been much lower in the Cranbourne area so far.



Cutworm eggs

Cowra Spray & IPM workshop

In late November 2002, NSW Agriculture held a **lettuce field day** near Cowra. Most lettuce growers in the district attended. The field day included virus management, cultivar trials and improving spray application.

Four seed companies were involved in the cultivar trial, showcasing their latest cultivars for the spring time slot at Cowra. Under the local conditions and pressure from lettuce mosaic virus, the general feeling of growers was that cultivars 13 (**Lagunas**) and 14 (**Mirette**) from Rijk Zwaan **showed the most promise**.

The field days and workshops are part of the extension work from the lettuce IPM project VG1028. Similar field days are planned for other growing areas in most states.

Victorian Field Trials for Control of *Helicoverpa armigera*

This season, trials on pre-heating lettuce in southern Victoria are evaluating the use of **biological insecticides** such as Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) and the different formulations of nuclear polyhedrosis virus (Gemstar[®], Vivus[®] and Vivus Gold[®]).

Other trials will evaluate the use of new alternative softer insecticides (less harmful to natural enemies) from heating to harvest. These trials will help to establish integrated control strategies for *H. armigera* and aid in registration of these products.

An information sheet for corn earworm control in lettuce has also been circulated to growers in Victoria.

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