

Keep it Clean for Field Vegetables

Work procedures

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It is important to have controls and to follow work procedures on the farm which minimises the risk that a person will carry problems into a crop. Work procedures that clearly define practices and the order of tasks can improve efficiency, save money and improve pest and disease management

Work procedures

Work procedures need to cover every task that is involved in working within crops or in the field (e.g. cultivation) as well as when moving between crops and other structures such as a seedling nursery. The valuable thing about a work procedure is that by writing one, it helps you think about what you are doing or asking someone else to do, why you are doing it and what risks are involved.

There are a lot of different tasks that need to be completed around the farm. A work procedure needs to be developed to cover each and every job. Although it can seem like a lot of work initially, work procedures save time and money and reduce the risk of problems. Often you will not need more than a couple of lines or dot points to describe what has to happen and in what order.

A general farm work procedure might identify that the roadways and buffer zones or irrigation lines must be kept clean and free of plants and plant material and check and control points are implemented for entering the 'clean' zone or going into a crop.



Tasks to be covered with work procedures could include:

- Monitoring for insect pests and diseases
- Irrigation monitoring
- Conducting soil tests such as pH and electrical conductivity
- Ground preparation
- Planting
- Irrigation setup
- Fertilising and side-dressing
- Controlling weeds
- Spray application
- Rouging diseased plants
- Harvesting
- Washing and packing produce
- Moving around the farm -
- Movement onto the farm of people and vehicles that have been on other farms, e.g. crop consultants
- Transporting crop waste
- Post-harvest cultivation
- Taking delivery of materials
- Maintaining buffer areas
- Mowing grass
- Pruning or vine training
- Moving product to the packing shed
- Cleaning and disinfecting tools and machinery
- Field worker hygiene

A work procedure should identify the order in which crops are worked, how crops are to be managed and what the target growing conditions are. It should also provide details to describe how tasks are done (e.g. how to conduct a pest check) and what to do if a problem is found (e.g. how to report

a pest in the field). A work procedure can be as simple as stating that fields must be worked in the listed work order and that the list must be checked each day before work starts. This list might be written on a large whiteboard in the packing shed, for example. In this way, the order can be changed when needed (such as when a disease outbreak is found in one field) and is easily viewed by all staff or contractors.

An effective work order procedure involves working in the cleanest crop first then the next cleanest and so on. By doing this, the chance of spreading a problem is reduced. A work order list needs to be kept up to date according to what insect pests and diseases have been found in each crop. When there have been no observations of pests or diseases in any crop, the order needs to be from the youngest crop to the oldest.

Simple work order plan:

- Work in cleanest crop first
- Work in youngest crop first
- Do all the 'dirty' tasks last in the day
- Never work in a crop when foliage is wet and foliar diseases are present

It is important to make sure that all crops or fields are prioritised for all jobs including monitoring and spraying tasks as well as general plant management activities.

If an area of a crop or field has an outbreak of a pest or disease, the contaminated area should be the last area to be worked on in that crop.

If an infestation of insect pests or diseased plants is found in a crop during a work activity, it has to be reported and the work order list needs to be reviewed.

“Activities are scheduled in crops with fewest pests before working in more infested crops”

When a job is completed in an infested or diseased crop (or part of a crop) the work procedure needs to ensure that all tools and machinery are cleaned and/or disinfected and clothes are changed (or overalls and boot covers are replaced) before a

person goes into the next crop. In some situations, footbaths can be useful for reducing spread of soil-borne diseases between different crop blocks and from outsiders coming on site.

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