

In a Capsule News

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Welcome to the May 2020 edition of In A Capsule News!

Dear Member

We hope you and your family continue to remain safe and healthy during these unprecedented times.

Poppy Growers Tasmania, as a member of DPIWE's Agricultural Coordination Group (COVID-19), is participating in weekly teleconferences with government and other major industry organisations to discuss issues impacting primary industry arising from COVID-19.

On Farm Protocols COVID-19

Agri-Growth, in cooperation with industry, is currently developing a set of protocols for on farm visits by field officers and other industry personnel.

PGT see this as particularly important in view of the fact poppy company field officers will soon be contacting growers to ascertain their intentions in respect of the 20/21 growing season.

As soon as these protocols are finalised we will forward a copy to you.

TasAlk Restructure

No doubt it would have been a very emotional week at TasAlk for both management and staff given recent media articles pointing to a strategic restructure at the Westbury facility. The articles indicate that this would involve approximately 20% of their 120 employees leaving the company over the coming weeks, but it is our understanding that the process is still underway and exact numbers are still being finalised.

We know this decision would have weighed heavily on those charged with that onerous responsibility. It is however, a commercial reality that to remain viable in a highly competitive global market, strategic business decisions are imperative.

We understand all divisions of the operation have been scrutinised and staff reductions will be across the board.

We have enormous empathy with those employees leaving the company, but fully understand the reasons underpinning the need to restructure which will ensure TasAlk remains a leading supplier of opiate based pain management medicines to the global pharmaceutical industry.

Product Supply

The Agricultural Coordination Group weekly teleconferences have provided an ideal opportunity to discuss the availability of farm input products such as MCPA, glyphosate, herbicides, fungicides and fertilizers.

PGT has been advised that there is **NO NEED FOR PANIC BUYING** of your poppy input products.

All resellers have been putting significant effort and expense into buying early, forward ordering and forecasting to suppliers to make sure the products are available.

"The broadacre plantings kicked off with gusto after widespread rain on the mainland, many growers planting as much as possible desperate for a crop after several tough years resulting in demand on broadacre herbicides and now some fungicides and insecticides. Add to this the succession of dry years and relatively low levels of inventory of these products from suppliers, freight delays relating to C-19 and manufacturing disruptions in China resulting from factory closures and then C-19 we have a challenging situation. Some products have been in short supply with resupply scheduled in the coming weeks and months so from a Tasmanian perspective whilst things are tight and with a few exceptions growers should be able to access the products they need or access a suitable alternative option."

**Poppies:
A Proud Tasmanian Industry**

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There is no need to panic buy! Strongly suggest growers plan ahead and look to secure their important crop protection products 3-4 weeks ahead of time.

There are also quite widespread price rises related to the dollar and increases in manufacturing and shipping costs which have been expected for some time. It varies by product, however some important poppy products are included".

PGT understands these price increases, depending on each particular product, are within the range of 5% to 15%.

It should also be noted that Bayer are not continuing with Eclipse (a popular poppy herbicide for wild radish control). It is expected rural suppliers may have some stock on hand, but this will soon be exhausted and not able to be replaced. There are however, alternative options (Balance and Brodal) for wild radish control. No doubt company field officers will be on top of this and be able to provide appropriate advice.

Systemic Mildew Research Update

We have also included for your information the latest report regarding the Systemic Mildew Research Project by the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture – University of Tasmania.

Contract Negotiations

We expect to commence 20/21 season contract negotiations in the next week or so. We will keep you informed as these negotiations progress.

Elections – PGT Committee of Management

We will provide nomination forms in the next edition of In a Capsule.

PGT Annual General Meeting

We are still considering what would be the best available option for a June 2020 AGM.

We will keep you advised in this regard.

Best regards,

Philip Loane
President



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A PhD student's research will help support the prosperity of Tasmania's poppy industry which has been battling a relatively new disease for six years.

Dharushana Thanabalasingam moved from Sri Lanka in 2018 to join the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture and pursue a PhD to understand a disease of opiate poppy known as systemic downy mildew.

TIA is leading the scientific response to the disease since its discovery in Tasmania in 2014 threatened the viability of the industry and shook grower confidence. TIA is also working with industry to implement recommendations for best-practice disease management.

CUPPA TIA

Miss Thanabalasingam's PhD research aims to gain a greater understanding of the relative importance of inoculum sources that spread systemic downy mildew.

"My main aim is to identify the roles played by the critical inoculum sources to spread systemic downy mildew disease in opiate poppies.

"The inoculum sources include seed, soil and air and my aim is to find out which factor plays the biggest role in spreading the disease and how best to target it," she said.

"The findings of the research will inform effective management strategies. This could include advice around the most effective times to apply fungicide, further insight about crop rotations, or possible biocontrol options."

Poppy Growers Tasmania chief executive Keith Rice said a strength of TIA's research was that it was conducted in collaboration with local farmers and poppy processors.

"The Tasmanian poppy industry has its foundations anchored in the application of sophisticated science and technology to a natural plant.

"It has faced and conquered numerous challenges since its

News

TASMANIAN COUNTRY



CLOSE LOOK: Dharushana Thanabalasingam's research project is aiming to help the poppy industry combat systemic downy mildew.

inception 55 years ago, and this research is essential to the ongoing success of this globally important industry," he said.

In February, Miss Thanabalasingam was at TIA's Forthside research farm to harvest a trial crop of poppies. The trial included two different treatments – one section was subjected to possible infection from soil, seed and air, and another which was sprayed regularly with fungicide to reduce the possibility of infection from airborne sources.

Healthy plants were grown in greenhouse conditions using potting mix with pathogen-free seeds. She brought the healthy plants to the field

trial before each sample collection, leaving them in the field for a week to assess the impact of airborne spores without the additional impact of infected seed or soil. Disease progression in the field trial was also monitored and recorded.

"I am so excited to find out the results from this trial as it is a major part of my PhD project. I am harvesting the poppies to check for differences between the two treatments over time, including variations in yield and alkaloid content.

"This trial will help to identify whether it is seed, soil or air that plays the major role in spreading the disease."

The project has included

other experiments including greenhouse trials looking at the role of environmental conditions such as soil type, soil moisture and soil temperature in how the disease is spread via seed and soil and the potential plant-growth stage for airborne disease spread.

Her project is supervised by TIA senior research fellow Dr Jason Scott as part of an Australian Research Council funded project also supported by processors Tasmanian Alkaloids and Sun Pharmaceuticals, Poppy Growers Tasmania and the State Government.

The project is expected to run until early 2021.