

For immediate release

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Greenlife industry calls on new government to take urgent plant biosecurity action

On the inaugural International Day of Plant Health, Greenlife Industry Australia calls on the incoming Federal Government, once elected, to fully fund and resource the new *National Plant Biosecurity Strategy* to better protect our plant industries and therefore our nation's food security.

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) estimates that plant pests and diseases cause food crop losses of up to 40 percent, and the damage they cause to agriculture exacerbates the existing issue of growing world hunger and threatens rural livelihoods¹.

"The International Day of Plant Health provides us with a timely reminder that protecting plants from pests and diseases is far more cost effective than dealing with plant health emergencies," says John McDonald, Greenlife Industry Australia's (GIA) National Biosecurity Manager, "Prevention is always better than a cure."

"Without the nursery industry's pre-farm gate supply of seeds, plugs, tube stock, cuttings and tissue culture, our nations' fruit, vegetable and nut production, and potentially food security, would be threatened," says John. The wholesale value of all horticultural products produced in Australia in the year ending June 2021 was \$15.633 billion, with the nursery sector accounting for \$2.929 billion (18.7%) of that total value².

"However, low levels of resourcing in our national and state plant biosecurity agencies are costing the plant industry, which includes our production nurseries, tens of millions of dollars annually and threatening the nation's food security," says Joanna Cave, GIA's Chief Executive Officer.

A fully funded and resourced *National Plant Biosecurity Strategy* would enable the early detection of emergency plant pests such as the Fall armyworm from entering and establishing in Australia, which was detected for the first time in Australia's north in early 2020.

The United Nations has identified the Fall armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*) as one of the most destructive transboundary plant pests and diseases. The Fall armyworm is known to eat and destroy more than 350 plant species, including maize, cotton, rice, sorghum, sugarcane, wheat and many vegetable, fruit and ornamental crops and has caused significant economic losses overseas. Destruction of crops can happen almost overnight without control measures when larval (caterpillars) population levels are high.

"As the COVID-19 pandemic subsides and our borders reopen and international travel and business resumes, now more than ever is the time for vigilance and action to ensure that our national plant health is protected," concludes Joanna.

References

1. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2022, 'FAO welcomes decision to mark International Day of Plant Health annually on May 12', 29 March 2022, viewed 10 May 2022, <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/fao-welcomes-decision-to-mark-international-day-of-plant-health/en>

2. Hort Innovation 2022, *2020/12 Australian Horticulture Statistics Handbook*, 10 February 2022, pages 50-51

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***Leading the Greening of Australia** - The Australian greenlife industry is a community contributing to Australia and all Australians through the uniqueness and diversity of its product and its people. The industry encompasses the ornamental market and supplies starter plants for fruit and vegetable production and stock for landscaping, forestry and revegetation. The importance of the industry cannot be understated as it significantly underpins the food, fibre and foliage plant production in Australia, contributes significantly to the economy and provides aesthetic and scientific solutions to climate change.*