

Education and awareness

Conkey, Penrose and Donovan explore the importance of awareness communication campaigns to educate and inform before, during and after an emergency

Introduction

A critical area of preparedness for pest and disease emergencies is the need to educate key stakeholders and raise their awareness about roles and responsibilities in the event of an outbreak.

The introduction of exotic pests and diseases (that are not yet found in Australia) pose a major and continued threat to agricultural industries and pose serious long-term ramifications for trade and market access. A major pest or disease incursion could threaten the livelihoods of not only individual producers and rural communities, but also the national interest.

While quarantine is a vital and effective first line of defence, pests and diseases can be introduced in a number of ways, including via natural means. The more aware producers are to exotic pest and diseases and the quicker they report them, the quicker combat agencies can react to contain and eradicate outbreaks.

Awareness campaigns

A series of biosecurity awareness campaigns are conducted by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS), Animal Health Australia (AHA), Plant Health Australia (PHA), industry, and State/Territory Governments.

These campaigns mostly target the major producers and promote simple biosecurity measures that can be adopted to minimise the introduction and spread of potential pests and diseases. Due to significant overlap, much of the work in this area is now being undertaken cooperatively between governments and industry groups.



Animal

AHA's Protect Australian Livestock Campaign is an ongoing awareness campaign designed to promote an understanding and awareness of an emergency disease watch hotline available to producers. It is the most comprehensive producer awareness campaign in the country.

An objective is to encourage producers who notice any unusual signs or symptoms in their livestock to contact the **Emergency Disease Watch Hotline—1800 675 888**.

Early detection is universally recognised as one of the most important elements in terms of a nation's capacity to minimise and control the impact of an emergency animal disease.

The campaign centres on a 12-month multi-faceted communication campaign focusing on media relations and collateral material as core components. The media relations campaign has been successful in tailoring the biosecurity initiatives of

the livestock industries and governments to local areas.

This ensures that stories are covered by local media and producers are able to pick up the central message through a local and relevant issue. The collateral material has been produced using an eye-catching graphic of a 'spotty animal' with the simple tag lines, "Spot the Risk" and "Look. Check. Ask a Vet."

A deliberate strategy of the campaign is to use existing channels for the distribution of the collateral material, recognised as the most effective method of distribution as it does not duplicate the efforts of information dissemination to livestock producers.

The collateral materials could be included in a conference satchel, a magazine mail out or on a field day stand. This is also beneficial to producers who already receive information from many different sources.

This year the campaign distributed 50,000 fridge magnets with the spotty animal graphic, the simple tag lines and the 1800 number.

Any groups in direct contact with livestock producers have been pivotal in the successful dissemination of this material, including livestock industry organisations and governments.

For example, a magnet was inserted in the *Lotfeeding* magazine, which is distributed to all members of the Australian Lot Feeders Association and one was inserted in an information pack at the Victorian Farmers' Federation Annual Conference.

“Horse dentists take front-role in biosecurity” is one example of a national story that was localised to eight regional areas around Australia. This story was then tailored to seven horse dentists around Australia and distributed to their local media.

It is of national interest that biosecurity procedures have been written into the Equine Dental Association of Australia’s “Code of Conduct” and are being taught as part of the Certificate in Equine Dentistry as they are potentially one of the most dangerous vectors for disease in the horse industry.

Sound biosecurity practices or commonsense animal husbandry and hygiene initiatives are a central theme of the Protect Australian Livestock Campaign and an integral part of the wider emergency animal disease preparedness for Australia.

The livestock industries and Australian, State and Territory governments have each developed and promoted to producers a biosecurity plan which details the practices producers can implement on farm to reduce the risk of disease introduction and spread.

AHA will continue to work closely with the livestock industries and governments to reinforce the messages central to the Protect Australian Livestock Campaign—the importance of early detection and availability of the emergency disease watch hotline if producers suspect unusual signs in their livestock.

Plant

PHA’s national plant health awareness campaign targets commercial plant producers with the message “*Look. Be Alert. Call an Expert*”. This call to action urges producers to develop and maintain their vigilance and to take action if they spot anything unusual in their crops, thereby helping to protect Australia’s \$13 billion plant industries.

The campaign focuses on the importance of plant health with an emphasis on the roles and responsibilities of commercial plant producers.

The campaign also aims to make commercial plant producers aware that plant health is an important issue to them individually, to their industry and the national economy at large, and there are steps they can take to reduce the risk of exotic pests and diseases. Industry and government participation is central to the implementation of the campaign.

A number of promotional materials, including postcards, posters, advertisements and web banners have been developed in conjunction with industry members of PHA. Featuring images of distinctive, brightly spotted bugs and crops, these materials provide producers with information on the importance of plant health within their industry, and information on the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline.

Encouraging early detection and reporting is a vital step in ensuring

the costs of any harmful pest incursions are minimised.

These materials are distributed through industry bodies, at relevant events, conferences, and field days. The PHA is also working with its members and stakeholders to identify and promote key biosecurity issues and practices using key industry and government spokespeople.

Media releases and feature articles associated with the campaign have focused on a range of plant health and biosecurity issues such as washing down farm machinery, erecting biosecurity warning signs, and issues to consider when returning from overseas travels or when importing farm machinery from overseas.

Commercial plant producers should call the **Exotic Plant Pest Hotline** on **1800 084 881** if they spot anything unusual on their crops.

Non-english speaking backgrounds

The Australian Government has commenced a biosecurity education and awareness campaign targeting people of non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) involved in agriculture. This is part of its broader pest and disease emergency preparedness activities and builds on existing education and awareness initiatives to take the biosecurity message to a wider audience.

The look and feel of the AHA and PHA campaigns through the use of spotty images to highlight animal and plant pest and diseases is being used to ensure a consistent national biosecurity message.

Many of the people from the NESB target audience are peri-urban dwellers, engage in swill feeding and through a lack of understanding and awareness potentially pose a high-risk of introducing pests and diseases into Australia.

This is the first time this group has specifically been targeted by



the Australian Government on biosecurity and the campaign will focus on animal, plant and quarantine issues.

Sydney firm Multicultural Marketing and Management (MMM) was appointed to develop and implement the campaign supported by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) through its website (www.fecca.org.au/AFFA/Faffa.html), magazine and other channels that will be used to promote key messages.

The approach is heavily weighted towards face-to-face communications through formal and informal networks developed through briefings involving NESB representatives and an advisory group of key stakeholders including the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), AHA, PHA and the heads of ethnic grower groups.

Resources have been produced in 10 languages including brochures, information sheets, websites, displays and posters. An audio-cassette was also produced along with a video and radio series.

The objectives for the campaign are to:

- generate cultural change to improve the biosecurity of individual farms; and
- educate all stakeholders about roles, responsibilities and procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency animal or plant disease outbreak.

Key messages of the campaign include:

- look for and immediately report anything unusual;
- check the origin of material coming on and off farm to assess the risk of disease and pests;
- create a "buffer zone" with neighbouring farms;



- do not feed food waste to production animals particularly swill to pigs;
- if dealing with suspect animals, clean and disinfect yourself afterwards;
- use seed or propagation material that has been certified "free from pests";
- do not bring in plant material of a favourite plant or variety from overseas; and
- tough fines of up to \$60,000 or imprisonment can apply to quarantine breaches.

The campaign is also designed to get producers to phone various hotlines and report anything unusual in their animals or plants so that where necessary immediate action can be taken to contain or eradicate a pest or disease.

Hobby farmers

In order to continue spreading the biosecurity education and awareness message to broader groups, the Australian Government is soon to commence a campaign targeting hobby farmers. Also known as lifestylers or weekend warriors, hobby farmers are one of the fastest growing trends in agriculture and, like the NESB audience, this group has not been specifically targeted previously.

The initial phase of the campaign is to build a better understanding of who the hobby farmers are, where they live, and what their key motivators are. This picture will assist in communicating with this diverse group.

Further information on these campaigns is available at:

AHA web site: www.aahc.au/palc

PHA web site: www.planthealthaustralia.com.au/nphac

DAFF website: www.daff.gov.au/neshb

Authors

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