

# Survey shows biosecurity should be taught in school

March 2 2015, by Anna Kellett

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A survey of school children has found they lack knowledge about unwanted plants and pests and the effects they could have on our environment.

The findings are surprising given the constant warnings we receive on the threat they pose to our horticulture industry.

Officials from the Minister for Primary Industries are currently dealing with an outbreak of fruit fly in Auckland. They confirmed the finding of a fifth fruit fly yesterday.

In 2014 Rajesh Ram surveyed 171 Year 9 [students](#) as part of his Master's Degree at the University of Auckland's Faculty of Education.

The survey found that 31 percent could not name an unwanted animal. While some named possums and rats as pests, others listed animals that are only found in zoos in New Zealand, such as tigers, elephants and hippos.

And 33.3 percent could not name an unwanted plant in New Zealand.

The students also lacked knowledge on what effect an unwanted plant or pest could have on the environment.

Those that did name an unwanted plant named marijuana, indicating that they perceived unwanted plants as illicit drugs. They also thought

unwanted plants caused social problems in society like addiction, family violence and depression.

The students were not able to say how an unwanted plant could specifically harm native species or the ecosystem.

Rajesh, a former employee of MAF Biosecurity New Zealand, says biosecurity is an important aspect of our society.

"It would do us good in the long run if we raised the profile and importance of it in the community," he says.

"Biosecurity is only discussed in the public domain when incursions like the fruit fly one occur. I believe this is not how it should be and more effort should be made by the authorities to bring the topic into the [public domain](#)."

Rajesh says schools and teachers need to be provided with resources that can be effectively used to teach biosecurity, and it should be included in the school curriculum. Currently, the term biosecurity is not mentioned in any of the level 5 objectives of the New Zealand curriculum.

Rajesh is now starting a PhD to see whether students have a critical understanding of social issues such as biosecurity in a local and/or national context.

He hopes to work with students to explore their conceptions of biosecurity risk.

Provided by University of Auckland

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