

Smashing avocado disease threats

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Credit: University of Queensland

Researchers are working with the Australian avocado industry to safeguard one of the nation's favourite fruits from the threat of existing and emerging disease.

University of Queensland's Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation (QAAFI) researcher Dr. Liz Dann is working on an [industry](#) avocado [biosecurity](#) project funded through Hort Innovation.

"The aim is to improve yields, fruit quality and build capacity to deal with biosecurity issues," Dr. Dann said.

"I am constantly reviewing the [disease](#) management practices, and trialling new products or approaches for reducing the impact of the many diseases which affect avocados."

While Dr. Dann's focus is managing existing diseases, her colleague, Dr. Andrew Geering is concentrating on developing diagnostic tests to protect the industry against new threats.

"Sometimes the biosecurity threats are well understood but others seem to pop out of the blue," Dr. Geering said.

"A good example of a pest that was not previously on anyone's radar is the fungal disease Laurel wilt, which is spread by the tiny redbay ambrosia beetle.

"It's decimating the avocado industry in Florida.

"As soon as the beetle bores into the trunk of an avocado tree and introduces the fungus, the whole tree collapses within a month," Dr. Geering said.

"There is no resistance.

"We don't have the beetle in Australia yet – but it is vital we have good [diagnostic tests](#) for a wide range of pests and pathogens."

Dr. Dann said all diseases are manageable.

"We just need the tools and the capacity to maintain current biosecurity processes, and to meet emerging challenges."

Hort Innovation chief executive John Lloyd said the project is timely, with domestic consumption of avocados in Australia tripling over the

past 20 years from 30,000 tonnes to 90,000 tonnes.

"There is no arguing avocados are everywhere, on café menus, on television, in pop culture, there is even an [avocado](#) emoji," he said.

"What this research aims to do is protect a fruit that Australians are highly affectionate about."

Australia produces around 66,000 tonnes of avocados annually, with a wholesale value of \$534 million.

Provided by University of Queensland

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