

Update on Victoria's Blueberry Rust Situation

AGRICULTURE VICTORIA

Industry Notice: 18 August 2021

Industry management of Blueberry Rust (*Thekopsora minima*) in Victoria

BACKGROUND

In April 2021, Blueberry rust was detected across multiple locations across the southern part of Victoria. After completion of a delimiting surveillance program across the Victorian production sites, eradication of the disease was not considered to be technically feasible.

As a result of these detections, Blueberry rust area freedom could not continue to be supported. The decision to remove area freedom came into effect on 30 July 2021.

WHAT IS BLUEBERRY RUST?

Blueberry rust is a fungal disease that can affect both the fruit-growing and nursery industries. If left unmanaged infections can cause defoliation resulting in a loss of plant vigor and a reduction in yield.

More information on blueberry rust can be found on <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/plant-diseases/fruit-and-nut-diseases/blueberry-rust-disease-of-plants>

WHY ERADICATION OF BLUEBERRY RUST WAS CONSIDERED TECHNICALLY INFEASIBLE?

Blueberry rust, like any other plant fungus, is very difficult to eradicate. Fungal spores can remain dormant in the environment until climatic conditions are ripe for symptoms to express themselves.

Blueberry rust is also easily transported by wind and on host plant materials, clothing and equipment. The rust spores released from an infected plant can travel several kilometers in the wind.

The biology of the rust fungus and the fact that blueberry rust was detected across multiple locations in Victoria made it not technically infeasible to eradicate the disease from Victoria.

BLUEBERRY RUST SENSITIVE MARKETS IN AUSTRALIA

Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia are blueberry rust sensitive markets and regulate the importation of material from affected states including Victoria.

ONGOING MANAGEMENT OF BLUEBERRY RUST

Blueberry rust is a pest that requires active management. There are various control methods available including fungicides and good standard biosecurity practice including property hygiene. For example, businesses should remove any leaf litter so that disease doesn't build up.

Please contact the Victorian Berry Industry Development Officer (ido@vicstrawberry.com.au) for more information about on-farm management for blueberry rust.

MARKET ACCESS MISSIONS

Agriculture Victoria is working closely with the industry and interstate quarantine authorities to explore options for managing the disease and strengthening market access options for host fruits, host plants of *Vaccinium* spp. and other nursery plants.

HOST MATERIAL

Host material includes fruit, plants, plant products and cut flowers from the following genera:

- *Vaccinium* spp. (Includes blueberry, cranberry)
- *Rhododendron* spp. (Rhododendrons, including azalea)
- *Gaylussacia* spp. (Huckleberry)
- *Tsuga* spp. (Hemlocks, hemlock spruce)
- *Gaultheria* spp. (syn. *Pernettya* spp.) (Snowberry)
- *Hugeria* spp.
- *Leucothoe* spp. (Includes dog-laurel or fetterbush)
- *Lyonia* spp. (Includes male-blueberry and fetterbush)
- *Menziesia* spp.
- *Oxycoccus* spp. (Small cranberry)
- *Pieris* spp. (Andromedas or fetterbush)

Agricultural equipment and used packages or containers, that have been in contact with or have been used in the cultivation, harvesting, handling, packing or processing of any host plant or plant product are required to meet entry conditions.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Producers wanting to consign organic plants and fruit to South Australia, Tasmania or Western Australia should contact the receiving interstate agency directly to confirm requirements.

For further information on requirements, please contact:

- South Australia
 - Email: pirsa.planthealthmarketaccess@sa.gov.au
 - Phone: (08) 8207 7814

- Tasmania
 - Email: biosecurity.marketaccess@dpiwve.tas.gov.au
 - Phone: 1800 084 881 or (03) 6165 3777
- Western Australia
 - Email: gwa.import@dpiwv.wa.gov.au
 - Phone: (08) 9334 1841

ACCESSIBILITY

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