

Citrus growers head to the polls

Australian citrus growers will head to the polls next week to decide on the level of levy investment, as part of the National Citrus Growers' Levy 2014 Ballot.

The Ballot will commence 9am AEDT Wednesday, 29 October 2014 and will remain open for one month.

Citrus Australia CEO Judith Damiani said the current Horticulture Australia Research and Development (R&D) levy has served the industry for the past 16 years, and the Plant Health Australia biosecurity levy for almost 10 years.

"The current level of investment can no longer find innovative solutions needed to progress all the industry's R&D priorities such as market access, fruit fly, agrichemicals and biosecurity," she said.

"Many growers are keen to boost funding for R&D and biosecurity measures to better compete in the Asian century and protect their orchards from exotic pests.

"The proposed increase was determined as a result of the cost benefit analysis conducted as part of Horticulture Australia Limited's (HAL) five year citrus R&D plan to demonstrate the level of funding needed to address key industry issues."

The citrus R&D plan was independently facilitated and developed after extensive consultation with growers and industry. It will boost the HAL citrus R&D levy from \$1.97 per tonne to \$3.20 per tonne and the Plant Health Australia biosecurity citrus levy from \$0.03 per tonne to \$0.30 per tonne – a total increase of \$1.50 per tonne.

Citrus Australia Chair and Victorian citrus grower Tania Chapman said as an industry, citrus need to invest more in R&D if it wants to compete in a world market.

"Australian citrus growers are up against lower cost nations like South Africa and Chile," she said. "To remain a viable and competitive industry we need to be more strategic in our approach to R&D and invest more in programs that help grow a superior and safe product.

"To achieve this we need to lift our game. We need to help growers reinvest back in their businesses – and a small increase in levy is first step forward," she said.

Citrus Australia is facilitating the consultation and independent national ballot process using the Australian Department of Agriculture levy guidelines.

Voting will commence Wednesday 29 October. All ballot papers are required to be lodged by 5pm Australian Eastern Daylight Time on Friday 28 November.

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Media Contact: For more information and interview opportunities, please contact Citrus Australia on 03-5023 6333.