

Citrus growers vote to increase levy

Australian citrus growers' decision to increase their national levy investment after 16 years will allow more investment in research and development and make the industry more competitive in the Asian century.

The results of the industry's national levy poll reveal the majority of voters support an increase in both the Horticulture Innovation Australia (HIA) citrus R&D levy and the Plant Health Australia biosecurity citrus levy.

The proposed increase will boost the R&D levy from \$1.97 per tonne to \$3.20 per tonne and the biosecurity citrus levy from \$0.03 per tonne to \$0.30 per tonne – a total increase of \$1.50 per tonne.

Citrus Australia's Chief Executive Officer Judith Damiani said the poll results signal an important new chapter for the Australian citrus industry.

"For almost two decades the citrus industry has been operating on the same level of investment. Inflation alone has meant the program investment has gone backwards," she said.

"Once the increase has been implemented, the additional funds will help the citrus industry to access more export markets; better manage pests like fruit fly and protect orchards from exotic pests.

Citrus Australia will now be required to complete a submission to the Federal Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce to seek his consideration of an increase to the R&D and biosecurity levies.

Ms Damiani said the Minister is unlikely to consider the request until later in 2015 after the Senate review into agricultural levies is complete.

"I look forward to working through the implementation process with the Minister as soon as possible. Critical research and biosecurity programs are at risk through extended delays," Ms Damiani said.

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