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Sniffing out deadly disease

Australian first project will assist citrus growers in detecting and preventing serious disease through use of dogs



Pean industry body, Citrus Australia, has welcomed the Federal Government's announcement of a project that aims to help growers detect and control citrus canker.

Canker, a bacterial disease that affects all citrus varieties, is identifiable through lesions on the leaves, stems and fruit of the trees and will cause fruit to drop to the ground before it ripens.

By the time this happens, the damage is already done. West Australian and Northern Territory governments have been working diligently to identify the disease early, and this project will aim to support their surveillance work.

Chief executive of Citrus Australia, Nathan Hancock, says the project will provide much needed support to growers and trading partners.

"The dogs will provide assurance on top of ongoing work in those regions, providing growers with confidence there won't be another incursion in the short term, and giving our trading partners confidence we remain on top of this incursion.

The project will work by developing scents that selected dogs will be trained to identify. Minister for Agriculture, Bridget McKenzie, spoke of the importance of this project to the citrus industry.

"Visiting Mildura today underlines how important it is for us to protect this job producing critical sector from the threat exotic diseases like citrus canker pose," Minister McKenzie said.

"With a current incursion

in the north of Australia on its way to being eradicated it's a reminder that we need to stay vigilant because these threats are ever present," she said.

The funding for the project will come from the government's Immediate Assistance Fund and will be the first plant pathogen developed in Australia. It's in addition to the previously announced AU\$7.5m committed by the federal government to the National Citrus Canker Response programme.

It's anticipated that detector dogs will be fully trained and in action by mid-2020.