

Cherry Export Working Group

November 2013

The CEWG is represented by Tim Jones, Jon Gaudion, Trevor Hall, Michael Batinick, Scott Copeland, Tim Reid, Hugh Molloy(Chairman) and myself.

Our work over the last 8 months has been largely around getting an understanding of the market access situation for cherries. It is very complex. The different market requirements and the different pest issues from our growing regions mean no two situations are the same.

Right from the start it is very important for growers to understand that it is not an easy fix. That importing countries make the rules and they may have other unrelated issues that effect the negotiation of access for cherries into their market.

Market access is very much a political issue and needs industry working closely with Government to achieve a beneficial, practical and workable protocol.

There is a lot of time an effort needed with no guarantee of success.

What I have learned is we as an industry are not organized enough to present our Government representatives with a united, clear industry direction to enable them to know exactly what is seen as a successful negotiation.

We are working closer with DAFF to present this plan of what the industry wants.

Our focus has been mainly the Chinese protocol. 12 months ago industry agreed to a protocol that is largely unworkable for mainland growers on the understanding that a fruit fly workshop would be held this year to renegotiate a more favourable outcome. That workshop is scheduled for late November. It looks likely that a trial cold disinfestations method of 14 days at 3 degrees will be approved for on shore and in transit treatment against Queensland Fruit Fly.

Also up for negotiation is acceptance of an east west protocol on Mediterranean Fruit Fly which accepts that the eastern states areas free of Med Fly. China currently don't recognise this.

The missing piece in the China story is a workable air freight protocol. This is the only avenue that will facilitate any meaningful trade for our industry and Country. This needs to be impressed on our Government, they need a clear understanding of this. Currently I don't believe that is the case.

It is clear that Methyl Bromide is not going to be accepted by the Chinese.

Irradiation is also unlikely to be accepted and has a low consumer acceptance.

Both of these seem largely unnecessary due to the fact that most of us do nothing to control fruit fly in cherries because it doesn't appear to be a practical problem for growers. We don't see it or find it infesting our crop.

We have studied the international standards of world accepted practices designed to help control pests. The missing piece in our protocol negotiations is the gap between Pest Free Areas and Established areas. Currently a lot of areas categorised as Established are really Areas of Low pest Prevalence. These are not designated or recognised. For them to be recognised we need evidence to support this theory. Things like temperature data, trapping records etc.

For Areas where QFF is of Low Pest Prevalence we believe we can design a system that will eliminate any chance of infestation. The international standard this falls under is called a Pest Free Place of Production.

Recently China accepted a systems based approach from The Canadian Cherry Industry to control Western Fruit Fly that infests their cherries. The system included such things as registered orchards, good horticultural practices, chemical control program and a brown sugar flotation test performed in the packing shed to identify any infested fruit. This was achieved from regions that are known to be infested with fruit fly but accepted because they demonstrated that they can easily control the pest of concern. The result was a very successful trial period of trade for the Canadian cherry industry into China.

This has given us great hope and we feel strongly this is the way forward for our industry.

A lot of time has been devoted to Queensland fruit Fly and understanding it with a view to controlling it.

Tim Jones and I have been working closely with Victorian DEPI to help us achieve a positive outcome for Victorian and Australian Cherry Growers. They have been very helpful and willing to work together with industry. But more government help is required from State and Federal if we are going to be successful.

Thailand negotiations are ongoing and this market is equally frustrating.

Unfortunately harvest is pressing and most activities from the CEWG will need to be on hold for a few months.

Patience and understanding is required but I also feel very strongly that to be successful in this space requires commitment from the growers to sort through the issues and overcome the hurdles.

We are the ones with the most to lose or gain, so we must be the ones to get involved, sort out the issues and drive it forward.

By Michael Rouget