

101 BACK TO BASICS: STRENGTHENING POTATO BIOSECURITY - PEOPLE, VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT

By Shakira Johnson, AUSVEG

In the face of evolving biosecurity challenges, it's time to refresh your on-farm biosecurity practices. Strong biosecurity protects your business and the future of potato production. Understanding the pathways of potential threats is crucial.

In the last issue, we introduced you to the basics of biosecurity, highlighting the various pathways through which pests, diseases and weeds can threaten your production. Identifying these risks is the first step toward developing an effective plan. For your plan to work well, it must be tailored to your farm and should include, but is not limited to, staff training, surveillance, and record-keeping practices.

You don't have to tackle everything at once! Consider biosecurity as a process that involves taking one step at a time. We will guide you through some simple actions you can take right now, as well as some larger steps you can plan for the future.

Beginning with these easy tasks can make a significant difference! You'll be protecting your crops while simultaneously preparing for those bigger steps ahead.

Let's begin by focusing on people, vehicles, and equipment: high-risk pathways.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Remember, anyone or anything moving onto or around your farm can be a vector. Consider the potential risks: even routine visits, like a water meter reader, pose a risk if proper hygiene isn't followed. Proactive biosecurity measures, including thorough wash-down and disinfection, are your first line of defence.

- **People, vehicles, and equipment are major pathways for pests and diseases:** They can introduce pests and diseases onto your farm.
- **'Come Clean, Go Clean':** For footwear, clothing, and vehicles to prevent the pests, diseases and weeds.
- **Control access to production areas:** Limit entry points and use designated farm vehicles to minimise contamination.
- **Establish hygiene and wash-down facilities:** Footbaths, boot-cleaning stations, and wash-down areas are essential for staff, visitors, and equipment.
- **Assess your farm's risks and develop a biosecurity plan:** Use the Potato Growers' Biosecurity Manual checklist for proactive defence.



PEOPLE: STAFF AND VISITORS

Farm visitors, including contractors and agronomists, are critical to farming operations, yet they pose a biosecurity risk. Harmful pests and diseases can hitchhike on clothing, shoes, hands and vehicles/equipment. Untrained or unaware staff and visitors can inadvertently spread pests, diseases and weeds, compromising your biosecurity practices.

Informing your staff, regular visitors, and anyone else entering your property about your biosecurity requirements will help you manage the risks associated with maintaining your farm's biosecurity.

VEHICLES: ACCESS AND HYGIENE

Vehicles and equipment often collect soil and plant material in grilles, tyre treads, and wheel rims.

Bacteria, fungi, viruses, nematodes, insects and even insect eggs can remain alive without host plants for long periods in soil. They can be spread by vehicles and equipment with



To help reduce the risk of spreading disease, all visitors should clean and disinfect their boots before coming on site

soil on them, especially when they are uncleaned or driving across your production areas.

Contaminated soil and other materials can be spread into your paddocks.

Maintain the hygiene of vehicles and equipment and ensure all vehicles coming onto your property are clean beforehand to reduce the spread of contamination into your production areas.

Alternatively, all visitors and staff vehicles remain outside of growing sites and only designated farm vehicles are used in production areas.

WHAT ACTION CAN YOU TAKE TO MITIGATE THE RISKS OF PEOPLE, VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT?

Quick and simple biosecurity steps you can take today:

- **Limit entry points:** Establish a single access point for people and vehicles, especially in production areas.
- **Control access:** Use one main access point and designated parking area; use dedicated on-farm vehicles for transport around the property.
- **Install farm biosecurity signs:** Install signs at entry points to direct movement, parking, and reporting. Contact AUSVEG to find out more or print your own online (farmbiosecurity.com.au, ausveg.com.au)
- **Maintain a visitor register:** Document visitor details, including origin and movement, for both safety and biosecurity tracking. Templates are available from farmbiosecurity.com.au and ausveg.com.au.
- **Ensure clear communication:** Ensure all staff, visitors, and truck drivers are aware of your farm



Put up a farm biosecurity gate sign at the entrance to the property. Contact AUSVEG for details or print your own online

biosecurity standards through clear signage and communication. Use multilingual signage and posters to reinforce hygiene and monitoring procedures.

- **Implement "Come clean, Go clean" practices:**
 - People: Wash hands and clean footwear, removing soil disinfection (disinfectant won't work if dirt present).
 - Vehicles/equipment: Visually inspect and reject entry if soil or plant material is visible.

Visitor records are crucial for understanding how networks move through regions and can support a more efficient response process in the event of an incursion. This data helps trace potential outbreaks.

Level up your biosecurity with these actions for the future:

- **Conduct staff inductions:** Cover biosecurity, effective hygiene practices, regional risks and pathways for pests and diseases, crop monitoring for signs and symptoms, and reporting procedures.
- **Provide hygiene stations:** Supply footbaths and a boot-cleaning stations; Consider disposable booties or gumboots for visitors while on-farm.
- **Consider contractual biosecurity arrangements:** Formalise expectations with contractors by including your biosecurity standards in contracts.
- **Regularly clean and disinfect:** Clean all equipment and vehicles, including tractors, harvesters, trucks, and even personal vehicles.
- **Dedicated equipment for high-risk areas:** Use dedicated equipment (tools, clothing, footwear) when working in infected areas or handling diseased potato plants. Avoid transferring this equipment to clean fields or storage areas and maintain separate sets for each area.

- **Install a dedicated wash-down area:** Use a machinery register to track equipment use and monitor the area for pests and disease symptoms. Clean machinery from the top down and dismantle where necessary to get into internal spaces. Do not let water run off into production areas.
- **Use broad spectrum disinfectant:** Following wash down, use a disinfectant to further reduce the risk of introducing less visible threats like bacteria, spores and viruses onto your property.
- **Event biosecurity:** For farm events, clearly communicate entry requirements and conduct post-event surveillance for new pests and diseases.

When considering the movement of people, vehicles, and equipment on your potato farm, it's important to identify potential biosecurity risks. Every interaction, each piece

of machinery, and even every pair of boots can serve as pathways for introducing unwanted pests and diseases.

Now that you have a solid understanding of these critical pathways, it's time to take the next step. Refer to your Potato Growers' Biosecurity Manual and use the checklist to evaluate your current practices. Develop a customised action plan to mitigate these risks, ensuring the health and productivity of your potato crops. Proactive biosecurity is your best defence.

To get started on your plan, assess your own farm biosecurity practices against the biosecurity checklist in the Potato Growers' Biosecurity Manual.

For more information or advice on preparing your own Farm Biosecurity Plan, speak to a trusted consultant or agronomist or contact AUSVEG Farm Biosecurity Coordinator, Shakira Johnson at Shakira.johnson@ausveg.com.au

If your agronomist has visited 10 other properties before arriving on yours, what might their boots and tyres be bringing to your farm?



Agricultural equipment must be thoroughly cleaned before moving it between different properties. Image: P. Sergai

POTATO GROWERS' BIOSECURITY MANUAL



Access the guide and protect your farm by scanning the QR code or visit bit.ly/ausveg-biosecurity