



The loss of millions of Xylella-affected olive trees in Italy's Apulia region has caused annual production losses of €5.5 billion

INVISIBLE INVADER

The Xylella Action Group is working to prepare New Zealand for Xylella fastidiosa, a looming threat edging closer to our shores. Over the last few months, grower campaigns have been building awareness – an often-over-used objective but, certainly in Xylella's case, a genuinely important one.

Alex Bisson : HortNZ risk policy advisor and Anna Broxham : HESL Biosecurity Manager

Growers have a critical role in protecting our industry from Xylella – particularly through late summer and autumn. Do you and your team know the symptoms, and are you safely moving plant material?

Under the Government Industry Agreement for Biosecurity (GIA), the Xylella Action Group (XAG) brings together industry and government to coordinate New Zealand's preparedness for Xylella.

An incursion of Xylella in New Zealand could undermine key crops like grapes (wine), citrus,

blueberries and stonefruit with severe economic, environmental and trade consequences.

New Zealand's native flora (e.g. kauri, pōhutukawa, taupata, koromiko, akeake) may also be at high risk.

In Europe, Xylella has caused devastating impacts – especially in Italy's Apulia region, with the loss of millions of olive trees – estimated at an annual production loss of €5.5 billion (approx. NZD\$11.2 billion), threatening over 300,000 jobs.



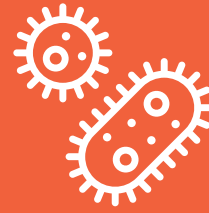
Xylella is not in New Zealand but has devastated crops overseas



KNOW THE SYMPTOMS

- ⚠️ **Stay vigilant for symptoms** and report them early.
- Leaf scorch, wilting
 - Cane and twig die-back
 - Stunted growth
 - Reduced fruit size
 - Lateral branches grow horizontally or drop, producing compact-looking trees
- ⚠️ **Symptoms can mimic drought or nutrient deficiencies**, as well as frost and herbicide damage, or infection of other plant diseases already present in New Zealand.

If you find any suspicious symptoms, photograph your plant and call the **Biosecurity New Zealand pest and disease hotline 0800 80 99 66**.



KEY FACTS XYLELLA

- *Xylella fastidiosa* is a bacterial disease threatening New Zealand crops and native flora, with **no cure available once infected**.
- The pathogen is **not in New Zealand**, but our native **Meadow Spittlebug** is believed to be a **suitable vector for transmission**.
- Many host plants **remain asymptomatic**, **risking undetected spread** through infected nursery stock.
- It's possible that **growers will be the first** to detect an incursion.
- The Xylella Action Group coordinates **government-industry preparedness** under the GIA.

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The Meadow Spittlebug is believed to be a suitable vector for transmission. Photo supplied by Bioeconomy Science Institute

THE PATHOGEN HAS
700+
REPORTED HOST PLANTS
AND MORE CONTINUE TO BE
DISCOVERED REGULARLY

PRACTISE ON-FARM AND ON-ORCHARD BIOSECURITY

Transmission pathways include the movement of infected plant material and whole plants for trade and planting.

- ✓ **Source plant material carefully.** For trusted pest-free suppliers, consider sourcing from Plant Pass certified plant producers. Plant Pass is New Zealand's industry-led certification scheme for plant health and biosecurity. Check the Plant Pass Register on www.plantpass.org.nz.
- ✓ **Comply with regulations** for importing plant material – confirm all import requirements have been met.
- ✓ **Good biosecurity hygiene:** monitor your crops regularly, clean equipment, control weed hosts and manage vector hotspots.

Undetected spread

Many host plant species may have a delayed onset of disease symptom development or remain asymptomatic while still harbouring the bacterium, acting as reservoir hosts – significantly increasing the risk of undetected spread.

Despite strong import controls, an invisible invasion means it is possible that a *Xylella* incursion from infected insect vectors, nursery stock or other imported plant material will be detected first by experienced growers finding unusual signs on host plants.

The infected plant normally will not die immediately but over time as the bacterium cuts off the plant's water supply. After initial infection, infected plants will have no economic value and there is no cure for the disease.

Xylella is primarily spread through xylem-feeding insects – most notably spittlebugs and sharpshooter leafhopper vectors. New Zealand's native spittlebug species – like Meadow Spittlebug (*Philaenus spumarius*) – is abundantly present and widely spread. These add to the risk as they are potentially suitable native vectors.

The pathogen has more than 700 reported host plants and more continue to be discovered regularly.

The distribution of host plants in New Zealand is not well understood. However, New Zealand native plants in international botanic gardens have tested positive for the presence of *Xylella*, indicated that these species can host the bacteria.



The Xylella Action Group is coordinating a Xylella awareness campaign across affected product groups, including Summerfruit NZ and Citrus NZ

Getting ready for Xylella

Xylella is thought to be originally native to the Americas. However, the bacterium has spread dramatically, now affecting most of North, Central and South America, and invading into Europe, primarily in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal.

It has also been detected throughout Asia (Israel, Iran, China, Taiwan), making it only a matter of time before it expands farther, causing a major biosecurity concern for countries still free of the disease.

Xylella has been classified as a top-tier biosecurity threat by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). Working together with MPI, XAG industry partners include Citrus NZ, Summerfruit NZ, NZ Winegrowers and NZ Plant Producers Inc.

XAG is actively developing New Zealand's readiness, creating response plans, simulating response scenarios, supporting targeted research and collaborating with partners such as Better Border Biosecurity (B3). A core focus for 2026 is a targeted Xylella awareness campaign for both commercial growers and the public.

XAG supports developing and adopting international guidance for diagnostic protocols and techniques to strengthen response plans. This ensures New Zealand is building the capacity to detect Xylella early and initiate a biosecurity response quickly – ranging from containment to eradication. ●



Ministers Chris Bishop and Andrew Hoggard recently toured the site of the new Plant Health and Environment Laboratory in Auckland

BIOSECURITY FACILITY CONSTRUCTION UNDERWAY

Construction of the new Plant Health and Environment Laboratory (PHEL) at the Mt Albert Research Centre in Auckland is well underway. The new facility will replace the Ministry for Primary Industries' existing PHEL and Post Entry Quarantine (PEQ) infrastructure in Tāmaki.

Touring the site recently, Infrastructure Minister Chris Bishop says, "Once complete, this facility will be one of the most advanced biosecurity centres in Australasia." The facility will include internationally accredited laboratories, PEQ greenhouses and technical expertise to support high-value crop imports.

Biosecurity Minister Andrew Hoggard says, "Strengthening New Zealand's defences against biosecurity threats and the potentially devastating impacts for our primary industries and environment is more important than ever as the risk of new pests and diseases increases with climate change and an increasingly complex trade environment."

Construction is scheduled to finish in 2028, and the facility is expected to be ready for service in January 2029.



www.mpi.govt.nz