

STAYING AHEAD OF PESTS, DISEASES AND RISK



New Zealand's potato industry continues to operate in a strong biosecurity environment – but it is one that requires constant vigilance.

Kate Trufitt : Potatoes New Zealand chief executive

While our relative freedom from major global pests and diseases remains a competitive advantage, increasing trade, travel, climate pressures and evolving pest pathways mean the risk landscape is always shifting.

For growers, staying informed is only part of the equation. The real difference lies in early detection, on-farm practice and knowing exactly what to do when something doesn't look right.

On-farm biosecurity: Your first line of defence

Effective biosecurity starts at the farm gate.

Key practices include:

- **Controlled farm access:** Designate entry points and limit unnecessary traffic
- **Cleaning protocols:** Machinery, vehicles and equipment should be cleaned before entering production areas
- **Staff awareness:** Ensure all workers understand hygiene and reporting procedures
- **Routine crop scouting:** Regular monitoring allows early detection of issues
- **Record keeping:** Track visitors, inputs and crop health trends.

Good on-farm biosecurity reduces the risk of introducing and spreading pests and diseases and supports faster response if an issue arises.

Key pests and diseases to watch

Tomato potato psyllid and zebra chip

Tomato potato psyllid remains one of the most significant biosecurity challenges for the New Zealand potato industry. The insect spreads the bacterium *Candidatus Liberibacter solanacearum*, which causes zebra chip disease.

Affected crops can show stunting, yellowing and leaf curling, with internal browning in stems and tubers. When processed, infected tubers develop the characteristic dark stripes that give the disease its name.

While management strategies have improved, the pest remains established. Ongoing monitoring, integrated pest management and early intervention are essential to keep impacts low.

Potato tuber moth

Reports continue across regions, particularly in warmer conditions, reflecting the pest's ability to thrive under favourable climates. Regular monitoring and storage management remain critical to reducing impact.

Late blight and emerging strains

Late blight remains a high priority disease internationally. Of particular concern is the potential introduction of more aggressive strains (such as A2 mating types), which could significantly increase disease pressure and complicate management.

Continued vigilance around seed sources, crop hygiene and spray programmes is essential to mitigate risk.

High risk exotic threats

Several organisms are not present in New Zealand but pose significant risk if introduced. These include:

- Colorado potato beetle
- Potato brown rot
- Potato ring rot
- Potato spindle tuber viroid
- Leaf mining flies and other invasive insect pests.

These 'sector risk organisms' are closely monitored because of their potential to severely impact productivity, market access and export trade.

What to do if you suspect a pest or disease

Early reporting is critical to protecting the wider industry.

If you notice anything unusual:

- 1 **Don't ignore it** – unusual symptoms or pests should be treated seriously
- 2 **Document it** – take clear photos and note location and crop details
- 3 **Report it immediately**
 - Call the Biosecurity New Zealand hotline: 0800 80 99 66
 - Or use their online reporting tool.

You are legally required to report notifiable organisms under the Biosecurity Act, and early reporting significantly improves the chances of successful containment or eradication.

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) uses these reports alongside industry intelligence to trigger investigations and responses, with early detection being one of the most important factors in protecting New Zealand's primary sector.

Strengthening legislation and penalties

New Zealand continues to modernise its biosecurity system. Recent policy changes and proposals include:

- Increased penalties for failing to declare high risk goods at the border
- New infringement offences and stronger enforcement powers
- More flexible import health standards to manage risk while supporting trade
- Faster processes for approving pest management plans and responding to incursions.

Proposed amendments to the Biosecurity Act are also progressing, aiming to ensure the system remains fit for purpose under increasing pressure from trade, climate change and global movement of goods.

For growers, this reinforces that biosecurity is not static, it is evolving, and industry engagement remains critical.

Where to go for more information

Growers have access to a range of resources:

- Potatoes New Zealand biosecurity updates, pest reports and technical resources
- Pest and Disease Handbook and on-farm biosecurity guides
- MPI's reporting tools and pest identification resources
- Industry-led monitoring and research programmes

The Plant Pest Information Network also supports national surveillance by collecting and sharing pest and disease data across New Zealand.

A shared responsibility

Biosecurity is not just a border issue – it is a shared responsibility across the entire supply chain. Growers, contractors, researchers and industry bodies all play a role in protecting New Zealand's potato industry.

The message remains simple:

STAY ALERT, ACT EARLY AND REPORT ANYTHING UNUSUAL.

With strong on-farm practice and continued collaboration across the sector, the industry is well positioned to manage current risks and respond to future challenges. ●

Contact Potatoes New Zealand

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INDUSTRY EVENTS

Agronomy Summit

📅 Thursday 6 August

📍 Pukekohe Golf Club

💻 **summit.potatoesnz.co.nz**

Annual General Meeting

📅 Tuesday 25 August

📍 Ashburton Events Centre

💻 **tinyurl.com/PNZAGM2026**

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