

All eyes on Far North Queensland in world war against Panama TR4

A RAPID biosecurity response and robust surveillance program has contained Panama disease tropical race 4 (Panama TR4) to five properties in Far North Queensland. While this result seems remarkable when compared to some international examples, the battle is far from over in a war which the world's banana industries are struggling to win.

Panama TR4 was first detected in the Tully Valley in 2015, prompting an emergency response to save the region's prolific banana industry. Growers mounted their own defence through the swift implementation of on-farm biosecurity measures. The Queensland Government launched an attack on the disease through early detection, community education and regulation. While the detection rate of five infested farms in six years by international standards is a great result, these five farms are engaged in an enduring battle to identify and destroy diseased plants and stop it from spreading.

Australia's first encounter with Panama TR4 was in 1997 when it was detected in the Northern Territory and rapidly decimated the local banana industry. Internationally, it's wreaked havoc in banana growing regions across Africa, Asia, and South America.

According to an article in the 2019 United Nations' Food Outlook report*, there's a direct correlation between escalation of the disease and farms which aren't adequately quarantined. Modelling the available international

of spread in the Wet Tropics when compared to international situations, Queensland is a world leader in Panama TR4 containment.

Panama TR4 Program Leader, Rhiannon Evans thanked the vigilance

gives credit to the entire community for playing their part in protecting the region's farms.

"Banana growers may be on the frontline of this battle, but the key to our ongoing success is everyone doing their bit to protect our community from this disease."

Far North Queensland may be doing well to contain and slow the spread of the disease, but the war is far from over. With 95% of Australia's bananas grown in the region, the local economy continues to rely on a collective commitment to protecting the banana industry from Panama TR4.

What can you do to help protect our banana farms?

Never enter a banana farm without permission. If you need to visit a farm, follow the rules, come clean and leave clean.

Go to panamatr4protect.com.au or call Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 for further information.

* Altendorf S. Banana Fusarium Wilt Tropical Race 4: A mounting threat to global banana markets? FAO Food Outlook November 2019, Commodity Focus, pages 13-20.

http://www.fao.org/3/ca6911en/CA6911EN_TR4EN.pdf



Destruction zone within a property infested with Panama TR4

data on Panama TR4, the article predicted production area losses of 17% over ten years in some countries by 2028. In countries which have strong biosecurity capability, the outlook is much more positive.

Reflecting on the current rate

of Tully's banana growers, whose daily battle against the disease has afforded the broader Far North Queensland industry precious time to prepare.

"It's impossible to predict what could have happened if we didn't act as soon as we did," said Ms Evans who also



Panama TR4 Program Manager Operations Donna Campagnolo leading a delegation of Colombians on a study tour of Far North Queensland following their 2019 detection.



Grower Stephen Lowe with Panama TR4 Program compliance officer Paul Garland.



A next generation of biosecurity warrior is emerging in Far North Queensland.

