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GRDC invests extra $3.5M in biosecurity for grain growers in Australia

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A variety of proactive steps are being taken to protect Australian grain growers against the threat of exotic plant pests, including realistic biosecurity simulation exercises, the development of a national biosecurity guide and the appointment of a biosecurity coordinator.

A $3.5 million Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and Plant Health Australia (PHA) to strengthen the Grains Industry Biosecurity Plan 2023â??28.

The additional investment will support the implementation of the national biosecurity plan, which was announced in August last year to strengthen biosecurity protections and help safeguard Australiaâ??s $32 billion grains industry.

The extra $3.5M from GRDC adds to the substantive investment Australian growers make to biosecurity through the PHA/Biosecurity Activity Levy (approx $2M/year), the Exotic Plant Pest Response Levy (approx $1M/year) and a range of GRDC investments to address biotic threats (totalling $56.8M in 2023â??24).
The Grains Industry Biosecurity Plan has been developed to give industry, governments and stakeholders the expert framework and focus needed to prevent, prepare for, and respond to grain-specific biosecurity incursions.

Developed in collaboration with industry leaders and biosecurity experts, the plan identifies more than 1300 different exotic plant pests and disease threats that could impact the Australian grains industry. It also details a number of programs and proactive measures required to protect growers, industry and the economy.

GRDC Managing Director Nigel Hart said the MOU would provide another $3.5M to allow critical measures to the implemented.

â??GRDC on behalf of Australian grain growers is investing in this work with our main partners Plant Health Australia. We aim to support the industry to develop improved biosecurity practices, so we are prepared and proactively guarding against the very real threat exotic pests and diseases pose to agriculture" added Hart.

A strong partnership framework underpins this agreement, ensuring that both the GRDC and PHA are ready to fight some of the most devastating exotic pests in the world.

The biosecurity plan will be reviewed and updated regularly over the coming years with a particular focus on three main areas:

1. Pest risk scanning to ensure we capture and learn from the latest international literature on our key pest threats.
2. Ongoing coordination of the development and management of preparedness information resources.
3. Reviewing the planâ??s progress to improve understanding of pest risk profiles and entry pathways, and to target surveillance efforts to areas of greatest risk. The plan also details development of an enhanced partnership approach between key players

The industry is in full agreement with this plan, and partners are collaborating to ensure that we have the systems in place to be responsive and act promptly â?? two critical factors that determine whether we can effectively control or devastate the industry.

Sarah Corcoran, PHA Chief Executive Officer, emphasised that while grain growers and the broader agricultural sector were the main beneficiaries of a strong and proactive biosecurity plan, benefits extended to governments, industry, researchers and the wider Australian community.

â??The grains industry is a vital contributor to both Australiaâ??s national economy and many regional economies. As biosecurity threats grow more complex in our changing world, it is crucial that we unite our efforts with a shared purpose and clear, measurable outcomes. e intend to build on previous initiatives to identify pressing current and emerging exotic pests of greatest concern to the grains industry, with a practical guide outlining key areas for surveillance, education, and mitigation efforts. This will enable both industry and government to make informed decisions in response to growing biosecurity challenges facing Australia" explained Corcoran.