

The Market Access Column

Dealing with “pest” interceptions on exported consignments

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My previous articles in this column have dealt with accessing new markets. But as exporters know, even existing markets can be problematic. Many of you will have experienced the frustrations of having exported consignments fumigated on arrival in an overseas market due to a pest being found on the consignment. This article provides some background on pest interceptions, and outlines some of the options available to exporters in these circumstances.

Why the delay?

Consignments are often detained at ports of entry because pests or other organisms are intercepted during on-arrival inspection. Before the importing country can determine whether action (such as fumigation) needs to be taken, identification must be carried out to determine whether the organism is one that is regulated by the importing country. Identification can sometimes take several days to complete. This is because some groups of insects require special processing to reveal diagnostic features, and diseases may need to be cultured in the laboratory. In other cases, the specimen may be immature or damaged, making identification impossible. In addition, there are some insect groups that can only be identified by a small number of specialists, who may be in another part of the importing country or overseas.

For these reasons, (depending on the country) the importer is often given the option to fumigate the consignment instead of waiting for the pest to be fully identified. In these circumstances the decision to fumigate is a purely commercial one, made by weighing up the costs associated with waiting (and

sometimes paying) for pest identification and the possible subsequent fumigation, against the costs of opting for immediate fumigation.

What can be done to avoid fumigation?

If the importer is prepared to wait for identification, the specimen could be found to be either non-actionable and the consignment is released without fumigation, or actionable and requires fumigation (or reshipment or destruction). Importers/exporters can insist that the importing country provides a complete (species level) pest identification. The importing country may resist such pressure, however they have an obligation to make decisions that are based on sound science. Accurate identification may require the specimen to be sent to a specialist, or may require time-consuming processing before it can be properly identified (the importer may have to pay for this, however).

When a pest has been identified to species level it may be possible to provide technical information to argue that the “pest” is not actually a pest. Beneficial organisms, or others that don’t feed on plants, do not qualify as quarantine pests. Most countries do not take action on organisms that are not quarantine pests (Australia is a notable exception, taking action on most organisms that do not already occur in Australia).

Information can sometimes be provided to show that the pest already occurs in the importing country. Due to miscommunication or the use of out-of-date resources, a country may not have easy access to this information and may sometimes make an incorrect decision.

The likelihood of successfully securing the timely release of a specific consignment is not high. This is often

because of delays in obtaining information regarding the status of consignments, the pests of concern, or providing additional technical information to assist the importing country with decision making. It is therefore very important that responses are coordinated and are carried out quickly.

What can be done about on-going problems?

Interceptions often occur in clusters as an importing country suddenly becomes concerned about a particular pest, or about the incidence of a range of pests on a particular commodity. These problems can continue for months or years, resulting in lost opportunities and considerable direct costs.

Information can be obtained from the importing country on the history of interceptions and these can be analysed to determine the cause. A project can then be put in place to identify solutions such as implementing pre-export measures, identifying and resolving unjustified decisions, or providing tools to the importing country that will assist them to make better pest identifications in the future.

Who can help?

Exporters can contact MAF for assistance. Also, Market Access Solutionz provides a service to assist exporters or industry organisations to ascertain the cause of pest interceptions and initiate actions to resolve the problem for either current consignments or as longer-term projects. As always, we work closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry on these projects. Further information and our pest interception guideline can be found at our website www.solutionz.co.nz

Procedure for resolving pest interceptions

