

## Role of the Victorian Dried Fruits Board in control of spiny weed seeds

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### Summary

**The Victorian Dried Fruits Board is responsible for maintenance of product standards in packing houses and on drying greens. All properties producing dried fruit are inspected at least once per year, and follow-up visits made to properties with weed problems on drying greens. Various methods are recommended to control the transfer of weed seeds.**

### Discussion

The establishment of marketing arrangements for dried fruits followed enormous increases in production, and the collapse of prices in the 1920s.

The Commonwealth Dried Fruits Control Board, and the Victorian and South Australian Dried Fruits Boards were established in 1925, with the West Australian and New South Wales Boards being formed in 1926 and 1927 respectively. The Commonwealth Dried Fruits Control Board was later succeeded by the Australian Dried Fruits Corporation who, to this day, promote and control the sale of fruit on export markets.

The Victorian Dried Fruits Board has no marketing powers, but is responsible for the maintenance of product standards, which includes the registration of packing houses, the classification of dried fruits at the time of delivery, the inspection of fruit following processing, product inspection at retail level, and the inspection of all areas designated as drying grounds.

Prevention of physical and chemical contamination of dried fruits is a continuing discipline endorsed by the industry. Chemical contaminants are the subject of an ongoing testing program, and with the restriction or total banning of organochlorine chemicals, this type of contamination of dried fruits has been overcome. The Victorian Dried Fruits Board is committed to striving for the total eradication of weeds producing spiny seeds from every drying ground, and to this end has undertaken a program of inspection, educa-

tion, information and assistance to growers. Each year information leaflets are sent to every grower reminding them of the problem and the remedial action available.

The Dried Fruits Regulations require all growers to maintain drying areas "in a manner approved by the Board", and free of any foreign matter which could possibly contaminate dried fruits.

The inspection program currently being followed is a three level procedure, which covers all dried fruits producing properties in Victoria, including Sunraysia, Robinvale and Swan Hill areas. There are approximately 2,000 properties inspected.

During the initial inspection, which takes place during September and October, every property is visited. At this time a Notice of Inspection is issued which details the defects, if any, which are found on each property. Properties which are identified as having a contamination problem are noted for a further inspection, and growers are advised of the best method of control for their particular problem.

The second level inspection takes place in November/December on those properties previously mentioned. During this inspection a "Notice of Re-Inspection" is issued which details specific action to be taken by growers where contamination defects have not been rectified.

A third and final inspection is carried out prior to harvest, and, if no remedial action has been carried out, the grower is advised of his name being included on a list to be supplied to packers to ensure close scrutiny of his fruit at the time of delivery.

At each inspection, staff advise growers of the best method of control or eradication for particular defects, the importance of property hygiene, and the availability of equipment designed to assist with defect control.

The Board maintains two weedicide spray units and four burr-collection rollers, which are available on request at no charge to

growers, to assist in the eradication of the weed seed problem.

The Victorian Dried Fruits Board does not have the legislative power to apply a financial penalty for weed seed contamination. However the dried fruits industry introduced such a penalty some years ago to act as a deterrent to growers, and to offset the significant costs that packers incur in having to isolate and hand pick contaminated fruit.

The Board is well aware that to effectively control, and ultimately eradicate weed seed contamination, transfer of seeds must be eliminated. This problem is perhaps the most daunting of all because of the multitude of ways by which the seeds can be transferred from one place to another.

Of particular concern is transfer by vehicle tyres, by irrigation (and storm) water, and finally by animals. Before total control can be considered, the co-operation of many organisations such as State and Local Government authorities, packing companies, companies which offer farm delivery services, together with a commitment from every grower would need to be guaranteed.

The Board has researched the feasibility of a "prickle-guard" for attachment onto vehicles, which would dislodge the offending seed onto the property that it is initially picked up from. Further research is to be carried out.

Under current legislation the Board is empowered to inspect designated "drying grounds" only. Consideration should be given to amendments to the Act and Regulations to provide powers for the inspection and control of properties as a whole rather than only the drying ground area.

The majority of growers are conscious of the need for sound hygiene practices, and have made, or are making serious attempts to eradicate problem weeds from their drying areas.

### Questions and discussion

**Q.** Don Plowman. There is a weed reasonably widely distributed around NSW and has been noted in Victoria and SA, called Khaki weed. Is the Board concerned about this weed?

**A.** The Board is not aware of the weed at this stage, however if it has a spiked seed then they would treat it the same as other spiked weeds.