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News release

GROWERS, IMPORTERS SCRAMBLE TO MEET NEW BRASSICA RULES

A snap change to government import rules for brassica seeds has caught New Zealand producers on the hop as they prepare for sowing the high value crops.

The new rules, including mandatory fungicide treatment, mean significant delays to shipments and serious production issues for some growers already working to very tight planting schedules.

Thomas Chin, general manager of the New Zealand Grain and Seed Trade Association, says the Ministry for Primary Industries gave no warning of the change and no immediate explanation.

“We have since found it was prompted by white blister rust, but we remain puzzled about the suddenness of the MPI action when the fungus strain was investigated in January and our experts report this strain has been present in New Zealand for over 100 years.”

Seed for a wide range of brassicas including broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, pak choi and other Asian vegetables is imported, multiplied and re-exported by New Zealand growers every year.

Thomas Chin says as well as these crops, seeds being imported for fresh baby leaf and micro green production are also affected by the new rules.

“It was a bit of a bombshell, to put it mildly. Our members have seed shipments in transit; they’ve signed contracts for the 2013/14 harvest and they’re on a deadline to get those crops in the ground on time.”

MPI has belatedly allowed a transition period, so that seed shipped prior to the surprise announcement will be subject to existing import standards.

But Chin says the issue could have been handled better.

“Members of the GSTA and other companies importing brassica seed for sale to commercial vegetable growers in New Zealand are at a loss as to the lack of consultation about the new rules. In the future we think MPI needs to communicate better and work together with industry on amending import health standards.”

Notes for editors:

Annually, the New Zealand seed industry produces around 115,000 tonnes of crops on 30,000 hectares. Total sales are estimated to be worth \$450 million. Around 3,200 New Zealanders are employed in the industry and \$20 million is spent on R&D every year.

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