

*Practical information, resources and opportunities for  
north-west Tasmanian farmers and agricultural service providers.*

## **Welcome to the November edition of *Our Natural Advantage*, Cradle Coast NRM's monthly climate-smart farming snapshot.**

The theme of this edition is:

### **Mop-Top & Potato diseases**

With potato planting finally kicking-off across the region, we are reflecting on the importance of the humble spud to our agricultural sector and some of the challenges growers encounter.

The cultivated potato plant (*Solanum tuberosum*) is a perennial member of the nightshade family, and was domesticated by humans as a food crop in Peru and Bolivia between 7,000-10,000 years ago. There are now around 5,000 different varieties of potatoes worldwide.

Following the conquest of the Inca empire during the 16th century, the Spanish introduced the humble potato to Europe. Europeans then introduced potatoes to Australia in the late 18th century. Initially grown as a staple for Tasmania's growing population, commercial cropping saw this grow to an export industry of over 100,000 tonnes per year by 1900. The potato industry is currently valued at around \$165 million per year accounting for 8% of Tasmania's agricultural productivity, with half of the potato harvest coming from the northwest.



**Natural Capital Funding Opportunity - Now Open!**

Potatoes are susceptible to a wide range of plant diseases, a notable example being the Irish potato famine (1845-1852) caused by late blight resulting in over 1 million people starving. Over one hundred different diseases of potatoes have been reported from bacterial, fungal, viral and nematode pathogens. There are also at least a dozen abiotic disorders of potatoes caused by adverse environmental conditions such as nutrient deficiencies, heat stress and mechanical damage.

Potato Mop Top Virus (PMTV) was detected in a number of Tasmanian fields in July this year, not long after its detection in Canterbury, New Zealand during 2018. PMTV has also been reported in Canada, China, Pakistan, Japan, the United States, some south American countries and parts of Europe.

For a plant disease to be successful, a few factors need to align. There must be a susceptible host plant, a virulent pathogen, and a conducive environment. Unfortunately, these conditions are met in Tasmanian potato paddocks.



*Potato with Mop-Top Virus. Credit: Biosecurity Tasmania.*

Being a virus and an obligate cellular parasite, PMTV requires living host cells to reside and replicate in. Unfortunately, the presence of powdery scab caused by the fungal pathogen *Spongospora subterranea* in Tasmanian fields increases the spread and persistence of PMTV. The incidence and severity of powdery scab disease in turn is increased by the use of nitrate fertilisers, which are used in potato cropping. Powdery scab spreads through the soil via motile zoospores; asexual spores with a flagellum (or tail) for locomotion, allowing these spores to swim towards the root exudates of potato plants. PMTV effectively uses these motile spores as a taxi service, allowing the virus to rapidly spread through the soil water fraction and infect more plants. PMTV particles can also remain dormant and viable encased within the fungus for 20 years. In the absence of potato plants, PMTV can also survive on common alternative host plants such as tomatoes, blackberry nightshade, ground cherry and other solanaceous plants.

With PMTV now established in Tasmania, the focus turns to management actions to reduce the risk of spreading the pathogen further. Actions such as limiting access to production sites to essential personnel, cleaning boots, staying on established tracks, pressure cleaning of all machinery used in paddocks and eliminating off-site movement of soil can all help reduce the spread of PMTV into new areas. Some work suggests brassica crops grown in rotation with potatoes can reduce levels of powdery scab zoospores in the soil, thereby reducing the ability of the virus to infect new plants. Other countries where PMTV is present maintain highly productive potato industries, through a combination of management strategies including vector management, crop sanitation, crop rotation, use of certified seed potatoes and resistance-breeding.



*Potato with Mop-Top Virus. Credit: Biosecurity Tasmania.*

## Funding Opportunity - Closing Soon!

Cradle Coast NRM is inviting north-west Tasmanian farmers to apply for the Our Natural Advantage – Natural Capital Incentive Program.

The program supports farmers to assess natural capital opportunities and risks on their property, with opportunities for on-farm visits and a Natural Capital Assessments. Eligible farmers can also access **funding for practical actions** which protect and enhance farm vegetation, provide multiple on-going co-benefits to support farm profitability, capture and store greenhouse gas emissions, enhance biodiversity and adapt to climate change.

What support is available:

- **Farm Natural Capital Assessment** including farm maps and basic desktop review of opportunities and risks
- **Farm visit** to discuss natural capital assessment and potential improvement activities.
- **Funding for on-ground works** – contributions between \$5,000 and \$20,000 available for eligible projects (excluding GST)

Funding support is available for:

- Establishing native mixed species farm shelterbelts
- Fencing and planting creek and riverside buffers and wetlands
- Protecting and enhancing existing on farm native vegetation through fencing, in-fill planting and weed control

## Expressions of interest close 16 November 2025.

Farms must be in the Cradle Coast region with the funded activity completed within 24 months. Landholders are expected to contribute to the project through in-kind or cash co-contribution, or a combination of both.

Projects will be assessed competitively against set criteria. Please read the Natural Capital Incentive Program Guidelines, available at [www.cradlecoast.com/ncip](http://www.cradlecoast.com/ncip).

For more information and to view and download the program Guidelines and Expression of Interest Form, visit the Natural Capital Incentive program webpage by clicking the button below.

**Natural Capital Incentive Program**

Alternatively, visit [www.cradlecoast.com/ncip](http://www.cradlecoast.com/ncip) or contact the Land Program Team on 6433 8400 or at [landprogram@cradlecoast.com](mailto:landprogram@cradlecoast.com).



## Resources

**Potato Mop-Top Virus information sheet** by NRE Tasmania: a simple two-page fact sheet on the virus and Biosecurity Tasmania's response. [View the info sheet here.](#)

**Potato Mop-Top Virus webpage** by NRE Tasmania: Access up to date information and learn more about identifying and reporting the disease. [Visit the website here.](#)

**Biosecurity Checklist for Potato Growers** by Aus Veg: use this handy checklist to ensure your farm is up-to-date with the best biosecurity practices, specifically tailored to potato growers. [Download the sheet here.](#)

## Events and Opportunities

### 2025 Honey and Hive Festival

Hosted by: Tasmanian Beekeepers Association

Location: Heybridge Recreation Ground (River Avenue, Heybridge)

Date: 8 November, 10:00am to 3:00pm.

Entry fee: \$3 for members and \$5 for non-members. Children enter free.

### Forthside Field Day

Hosted by: Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture

Location: Forth

Date: 9 December

[Get your tickets here.](#)

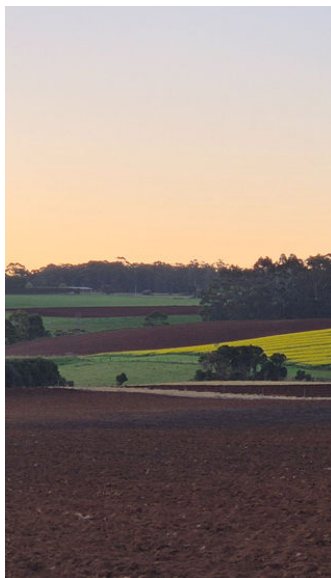
### Agtech in Action Sundowner: Ecorobotix ARA Precision Sprayer & Gatton Ag Tech Showcase Wrap Up

Hosted by: VegNET

Location: Forth

Date: 6 November, 4:00pm to 6:00pm

[Register here.](#)



Missed a previous edition? Browse other topics from *Our Natural Advantage* below.

[View past editions](#)

If you would like to share a relevant resource, event or opportunity, please email [landprogram@cradlecoast.com](mailto:landprogram@cradlecoast.com) by 21 November to be considered for the next edition.

Edition 7

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