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Australia has recently undertaken free trade agreement negotiations with nations as diverse as China, Korea, the ASEAN region and 14 nations around the Pacific Rim that are part of the Trans Pacific Partnership agreement. As a consequence, Australian agriculture has new market opportunities available, but can also expect to face rapidly growing competition in domestic markets from imported agricultural products. This, in combination with ever-increasing inbound tourism (including via regional airports), a warmer climate, agricultural intensification and a reduction in public-sector agricultural services (such as research and development, and surveillance) seems likely to create an environment in which Australian biosecurity systems will be subject to new and escalating pressures. At the same time, the premiumisation of many Australian agricultural commodities in international markets creates a situation under which the cost of a biosecurity breach will be much greater.

Is Australia's biosecurity system adequate for these challenges? Are changes needed to make the system sufficiently robust to withstand the challenges associated with this new agricultural trade environment? Understanding the complexity and many different layers of impacts that the finalised free trade agreements will have on biosecurity was the aim of the papers included in this edition of the *Farm Policy Journal*.

The first paper comes from Dr Carol Richards (Queensland University of Technology) and Associate Professor Vaughan Higgins (Charles Sturt University), and looks at opportunities and challenges of Australian policies in a changing

biosecurity environment. This paper starts by detailing the background of free trade agreements (FTAs) and how Australia has lost some of the transparency inherent in the process of WTO-style negotiations. It explains the underlying principle of the current approach to biosecurity in Australia, which is termed the 'shared responsibility' approach, which clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the Australian, state or territory governments, and industry. This has been fortified by the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (IAB). This shared responsibility framework allows effective post-border surveillance by stakeholders, along with a wider engagement which is crucial in generating innovative and non-uniform solutions, and permits reduced reliance on centralised surveillance systems. Such a framework can be challenged, particularly by FTA partners exerting pressure for import access, which can lead to producers and industry mobilising a powerful opposition to government, negatively impacting trust levels. Trust is critical between producers, industry and the government for this framework to be successful.

The next paper has been written by Kathleen Plowman and Dr Ian Langstaff from Animal Health Australia. This paper begins by noting that Australia's biosecurity system and animal health status are two of Australia's greatest assets. As a supporter of increased trade, it is also cognisant of the greater level of risk involved and concerns around the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA) and the ability of governments and livestock industries to deal with a medium- or large-scale emergency animal disease incident. The paper highlights growing concern about what appears to be short-term approaches taken to government investment in infrastructure and resources relevant to biosecurity. The paper argues that the framework of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (IGAB) acts as a critical step in creating a shared responsibility, bringing together partnerships and investment.

The third paper provides another industry perspective from Tania Chapman, of the Voice of Horticulture. The paper clearly acknowledges

that the signing of FTAs enables horticultural producers access to new export market opportunities. However this comes at a cost with Australia's own trade barriers being relaxed, which allows horticultural products to be imported into Australia (bringing biosecurity risks), along with forecast increases in tourism. The horticulture sector in Australia is concerned about declining funding in biosecurity and supports investment into research, development and extension (RD&E) strategies for biosecurity, national coordination, broad extension, and communication of what the shared responsibility model means to grassroots horticultural communities.

The contribution from David Adamson of the Queensland University of Technology analyses the subject of food safety in relation to trade agreements. He raises some interesting points, explaining that each trade agreement comes with a lot of detail, not only for agriculture but for all the industries involved (eg the TPP has up to 30 chapters). Australia has longed for a level playing field, and many people think a trade agreements can assist this. Within the detail of such agreements comes the compliance which results in the harmonisation of business rules. The author considers that some of these rules could result in a shift away from Australia's high level of food safety compliance. The author questions whether, given that Australia's high regulatory compliance allows Australian agriculture access to current markets, there is a need to be wary about putting this at risk (opening Pandora's box). In his paper he models the impacts of failing to provide safe food, and this has many implications (including economic) in Australia's case as our agriculture production is geared towards exports.

The concluding paper is an opinion piece from Tony Mahar of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF). It starts by explaining that Australian agriculture has invested a lot of time, resources and money; through governments, industry, and farmers in securing export markets and trade agreements; with biosecurity playing a critical factor. Biosecurity standards are fundamental to global market access and any changes to Australia's biosecurity regime need to be underpinned by strong science and evidence to

maintain these high standards. However, one of the key challenges is the role of multiple jurisdictions within our government structure, which was highlighted by the equine influenza outbreak. It demonstrated the disproportionate degree of responsibility for managing and funding the control of such an incident. A key point from this piece is that biosecurity is not just an agricultural issue but a national matter that everyone is responsible for.

If Australia wants to maintain one of its key points of difference in global markets due to its impeccable biosecurity standards, then a strong and ongoing commitment to biosecurity is paramount. It is only a matter of time before Australia encounters a biosecurity breach, testing the shared responsibility approach. The questions that the agriculture sector needs to keep asking are: Has Australia got the right framework in place to manage the plethora of risks to our economy, our agricultural industries, the environment, and the community? Is enough being done offshore, at the border and on-farm to stop pest and diseases entering, establishing or spreading? Is the nation relying too much on geographic isolation? What are the different biosecurity threats that free-trade may initiate? Will the economic benefits of free-trade compensate for the biosecurity risks?

Australia is faced with a no-brainer conclusion, which is that investment in biosecurity standards and resources is crucial for maintaining the nation's current level of biosecurity. One key aspect of such an investment is the education of farmers (on the front-line) and the broader community about the key biosecurity risks within their industries and local environments, and the need to provide them with access to a suite of resources (Exotic Plant Pest Hotline or *MyPestGuide grapes* app) to support them.

To paraphrase a saying, the price of biosecurity freedom is eternal vigilance.

