

Disease-free avo industry celebrates

IT SEEMS a little strange to celebrate something you haven't got, but that's exactly what the avocado industry did last week.

Five years of research have confirmed that New Zealand does not have Avocado Sunblotch Viroid and that news could be worth tens of millions of dollars to the avocado industry, which is why it and MAF Biosecurity New Zealand celebrated the disease's absence at a special event in Wellington last Thursday.

The New Zealand Avocado Industry Council (AIC) and MAF Biosecurity New Zealand (MAFBNZ) have spent five years finding out whether or not the avocado disease is in New Zealand.

In declaring New Zealand free from Avocado Sunblotch Viroid, Peter Thomson, director Post Border MAFBNZ, said collaborating with the industry on projects like this had proved to be a successful way to work.

He said five years ago there were no internationally recognised standards for testing for the viroid.

MAFBNZ and AIC worked together with a panel of international experts to develop the testing and sampling protocol which incorporated international best practice.

"More than 8000 samples were collected and tested. We were satisfied the protocol had been observed and the results clearly showed that Avocado Sunblotch Viroid was not present in New Zealand," said Mr Thomson.

AIC chairman John Schnackenberg said the industry was elated with the outcome.

"This breakthrough ensures we maintain access for our avocados to our crown jewel market — Australia," said Mr Schnackenberg.

The avocado industry, which earns more than \$50 million, has a vision of reaching \$250 million by the year 2015.

Mr Schnackenberg said: "The global demand for avocados and avocado oil is increasing.

"Maintaining a consistently high quality of fruit is vitally important for entry into new emerging markets in Asia."



HEALTHY: New Zealand has been cleared of having Avocado Sunblotch Viroid disease.

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