

# There's GOOD news and there's BAD

## Psa-hit grower says he'll fight

### BAD

By Elaine Fisher

This season was to have been the "break-even" year on Braden Hungerford's Te Puke green and gold kiwifruit orchard.

Instead it's the year that has stripped millions from its value and left the young orchardist with stunted vines and no income.

But he's not giving in to the bacterial disease Psa that blew on to his vines in November last year.

"I'm trying everything I can and I'll keep fighting it so that, if we don't win, I can at least say I did all I could," he told Minister of Agriculture David Carter who visited his orchard on Friday.

John Burke, general manager of Kiwifruit Vine Health, the organisation established to handle the disease *Pseudomonas syringae* pv *actinidiae* (Psa), told Mr Carter that loss of confidence in the industry had halved its value.

"On November 1 last year (before Psa was found in New Zealand), the industry as a whole was worth more than \$4 billion. Since then, (on paper) it has approximately halved in value," he said.

The figures related to the estimated combined values of Zespri, post-harvest companies and orchards, he said.

The loss in value had occurred despite the fact Psa V, the most virulent form of the bacterial disease, so far affected only slightly more than 4 per cent of the orchards in New Zealand and that the majority of growers harvested crops this season.

Last season, Zespri payments to Te Puke alone were worth \$377.9 million and kiwifruit returns are a major part of 11 other regional economies throughout the country.

However, Mr Burke said until solutions for treating Psa were found and confidence in the industry returned, its overall value was likely to remain depressed.

He said KVH had set itself a goal of finding answers to controlling Psa by 2013.

Mr Hungerford said he had no other option but to keep operating his orchard.

"There's no back door to exit through. This orchard sustains up to six families if you count the permanent and casual staff. It's family land and I don't want to lose it," he said of the 26ha orchard developed to grow Zespri Green and Gold fruit.

"It's now day 262 since Psa was detected. We were one of the early ones to get it and I think it blew in on a bad storm which flattened trees in the area. If you look at a map of how it's spread, it goes out in a plume following the wind direction."

Mr Hungerford was also one of the first growers to cut back his vines in the hope of stopping the disease's spread, but it reappeared in new growth.

Now he's managing the stumps



**HARD GOING:** Braden Hungerford (second left facing camera) explains to David Carter just how seriously the vine disease Psa has affected his orchard.



**OVERVIEW:** David Carter leaves in the helicopter that helped him survey the amount of vines removed in the Te Puke region.

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and their new shoots in the hope of being able to graft another variety such as the new sweet green kiwifruit, once answers to controlling Psa are found.

An orchard without a crop still requires mowing and fertiliser plus Psa protective sprays so while there's no income, there are still outgoings.

Mr Hungerford said the disease had knocked confidence out of growers. "We were 10 foot tall and bullet proof. We had an apex product (Zespri Gold) and a good business."

All that changed with the discovery of the disease, which has caused widespread losses of green and gold vines in Italy.

It is not only growers who have suffered the emotional impact of the implications of the disease. "It's hard to keep my staff, who do an excellent job, motivated when everything we've tried so far seems to fail."

Growing kiwifruit in New Zealand would be more costly in future and being an average grower would no longer be good enough, Mr Hungerford said.

Mr Carter had visited the Latina region in Italy in June and said what he saw there was sobering. He went to Te Puke last year shortly after Psa-V, the same

strain of the disease as is in Italy, was discovered, but last week was the first time he had been back for awhile.

Mr Carter flew in a helicopter over the Te Puke "hot zone" to see the extent of orchards that had vines cut back and landed to visit two of the worst affected.

He was joined on the orchard by John Loughlin, Zespri chairman, Peter Ombler, president of New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers, John Burke, general manager of Kiwifruit Vine Health, David Hayes of MAF, Zespri grower and government relations general manager Simon Limmer and Zespri quality and innovation general manager David Tanner. Growers Murray Holmes, Ken Reekie, Steve Low and John Cook joined Mr Hungerford in telling the minister of the effects of the disease on growers, their staff and the entire Te Puke community. Even growers whose orchards were currently believed free of the disease were limiting their spending which was impacting on the economy of the local community.

Mr Low said despite the seriousness of the situation, growers weren't giving up and were doing all they could to stay positive and retain confidence that solutions would be found.



**OLD-MAORI CURE:** Braden Hungerford demonstrates the application of a traditional Maori Psa-infected vines on his orchard watched by David Carter and Simon Limmer.

An ancient Maori medicine is among the more unusual formulas being trialled in the battle against the kiwifruit vine disease Psa.

Te Puke grower Braden Hungerford, who has made a section of his badly infected orchard available for trial work, said growers from Te Kaha had asked permission to try a

traditional remedy on two vines. "I have no idea what is in the formula but apparently it has been used with success in treating human illnesses so I'm happy for it to be trialled here," he said.

The ancient Maori medicine is contained in a large syringe injected into the trunk of a vine, with a measured dose delivered

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### TOTAL ZESPRI KIWIFRUIT AND SERVICE PAYMENTS FOR 2010 SEASON

- Katikati \$85.9 million.
- Opotiki \$67.4 million.
- Tauranga \$114.8 million.
- Te Puke \$377.9 million.
- Waihi \$10.1 million.
- Whakatane \$34.4 million.
- Nelson \$18.6 million.
- Auckland \$29.8 million
- Northland \$34.6 million.
- Poverty Bay \$16.5 million.
- Hawke's Bay \$8.5 million.
- Waikato \$22.8 million.