

To: Senate Legislation Committee  
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport.

Inquiry into the Citrus Canker Outbreak.

In my evidence on the 15/6/05 I made reference to "6 trees of each variety of rootstock that were put into another part of the nursery". I think due to time constraints this avenue of questioning was not explored further and to this I will expand further for the committee, as I believe it is important in linking 2001 and 2004. When AQIS came onto Evergreen Farms in 2001 the nursery contained trees with the alleged illegally imported budwood on them and were identified as Imperial 1A. These trees were budded onto 3 different rootstocks Troyer, Carizzo and Cleo. Just after the raid in July 2001, I was instructed to remove the labels from all these trees and place 6 of each rootstock, a total of 18 trees into another area of the nursery. (I believe this was to save some trees in case AQIS found the others and destroyed them.) Much later probably a month or more I received further instructions from the citrus manager that the owner had decided to destroy all the trees by cutting the tree off below the bud. This was so the rootstocks could be re-used for new trees. As a result I cut all the trees and disposed of the tops into the dump, that is all the trees except the secreted 18 that I had forgotten about. It was much later when training the block of Imperials that I found the 18 trees again. I asked the Citrus manager what he wanted to do with them. I was told that as AQIS had found no diseases or problems with the samples they had previously collected he would like to keep them as he was in the process of establishing a research block of citrus trees. He also stated that he understood that these trees to be a variety of "Ponkin" and was interested in seeing them fruit. So the 18 trees remained where they were until ready to be planted. It was while I was on holiday in early 2002 that all of these Imperial trees (including the 18) were planted out into the field. The area they were planted in was adjacent to and east of the block previously quarantined in 2001 by AQIS. Having discovered this mistake I asked the citrus manager what he would like to do. I was told to go through the block and try to identify them but leave them in place as he was too busy to remove them straight away. I went through the block and was only able to successfully identify 13 of the trees, which I marked with pink flagging tape tied around them. This was done probably no more than 2 weeks before I left in April 2002. I am unable to be more chronologically precise as the period from Sept 2001 to when I left in Apr 2002. This is because I was very busy in the nursery with the budding and growing of 250,000 citrus trees, propagation of other crops and the search for another job. It was not until 2004 (after the Citrus canker outbreak in Emerald) that I was fortunate to meet up with the former citrus manager. We discussed various aspects of Evergreen Farms and the canker outbreak. It was during this conversation that I asked about the trees left in the block that I had identified. He told me that by the time he came around to transplant them he was unable to locate them, there were no trees with pink tape so he just left the block undisturbed. It is my belief that the trees with alleged illegally imported budwood on them that were inadvertently planted in early 2002 were still on Evergreen Farms at the time of the outbreak of Citrus canker in 2004. Furthermore from the limited information I have, I believe these trees were in the block where the canker outbreak was first detected on Evergreen Farms.

Yours Sincerely,

*Robin G. Price*  
Robin G. Price. 5/7/05

