

CORDOMA FARMS

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The Chairman
Rural & Regional Affairs and Transport
Senate Inquiry – Exotic Citrus Canker Disease

My recollection of circumstances leading up to the AQIS raid on Evergreen Farms in July 2001 is that the then citrus manager had told me in June or July 2000, some twelve months before the alarms was risen, that the owner Philip Cea had told him of the illegal importation of citrus, water melons, lychees and grapes.

Gillies told me that Cea had stated that they couldn't wait for the four (4) years quarantine period of the illegal materials, as they had to have the fruit ready for export ASAP. Cea had advised Gillies that he (Cea) would pay any small fines imposed rather miss the international market.

I believe that had AQIS been more responsive and vigilant in their surveillance procedures an earlier detection of the citrus canker disease may have occurred.

I also believe that as Evergreen Farms had employed a third generation citrus grower in Michael Benham, Tim Fischer an agronomist both of who are now employed by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries (DPI), that these two expert in their fields should have identified a major problem in its early stages. In addition, Dennis Voss another experienced citrus grower employed by Evergreen Farms failed to detect the exotic canker disease.

This would raise the question, why would these three acknowledged experts terminate their Evergreen Farms employment within a short period of time of each other?

Queensland Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries, Henry Palaszczuk, Jim Varguies (DPI), Chris Adriaanson (Queensland Biosecurity) all instructed me to continue to maintain my citrus orchards, as they were confident that they would be able to open the domestic market for Emerald growers. This did not happen, and, as a result, I now have some three (3) million dollars of citrus fruit rotting on the trees.

Of serious concern to me was the lack of co-operation between the Queensland and Federal governments, which was openly seen to develop into a blame-game as to who was financially responsible for any grower reimbursement.

In conclusion, the impact on my family's health and financial stability, my own health has deteriorated considerably causing stress related diabetes, plus the ongoing financial burden placed upon the family Cordoma Farms, has a severe adverse effect on my ongoing debt reduction ability.