



## GPA, Sporting Shooters in bioaware partnership

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Feral pigs near Queensland's Gulf of Carpentaria. Image: Shutterstock

A NEW partnership is taking action to promote greater awareness, vigilance and understanding of the different farm biosecurity risks caused by the current 'explosion' in pest animals – especially pigs.

A serious escalation in pest animal numbers, and urgent need to prevent burgeoning crop damage, may lead to deliberate shortcuts being taken on property access rules and standards for the movement of people and vehicles.

These serious concerns are being addressed in a new campaign that's taking positive action on biosecurity protections, with Grain

Producers Australia (GPA) joining with the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA National).

The 'Secure Our Farms – Hunt BioAware' partnership is sharing and promoting important resources and communications to help boost community education and understanding about biosecurity preventions and the need to follow and adhere to farm property access rules and standards.

SSAA National is releasing a new educational video to promote basic biosecurity steps that need to be followed when entering properties, such as vehicle and personal hygiene, and advice on the importance of communicating with farmers about their specific biosecurity requirements.

GPA chair **Barry Large** said the new partnership would help shine a spotlight on the vital importance of biosecurity protections, which was one of GPA's core strategic priorities, to support grower profitability and sustainability.

Mr Large said while many people did the right thing, complacency is the enemy of biosecurity and vigilance is critical to protecting farm productivity and performance.

He said the biosecurity risks from unauthorised access to farming properties were significant.

"Farmers can't conduct the basic surveillance and inspections for hitchhiker pests if people are accessing our properties without us knowing about it," he said.

"The 'Secure Our Farms – Hunt BioAware' partnership between GPA and SSAA National ensures everyone understands the risks and consequences of ignoring biosecurity; deliberately or not."

It has been estimated that a large multi-state foot-and-mouth outbreak would cost livestock producers more than \$52 billion over a ten-year period. An ACIL Allen report in 2019 on the potential incursion of African swine fever into the Australian pork sector estimated total economic losses between \$1.5 to \$2 billion under a high-spread scenario over five years.

"Someone entering a farm without the farmers' knowledge and not following the right protocols also risks spreading serious biosecurity risks, which could decimate our \$28 billion cropping sector," Mr Large said.

“If we had a combined biosecurity outbreak for crops and animals, it would also threaten our food security and increase prices for everyday Australians, and the countries we export to.”

SSAA National Wildlife Programs Leader Matthew Godson also welcomed the new partnership to help raise awareness in the community with proactive actions and sharing of vital resources.

He said hunters had an important role to play in conservation and provided a vital service to farmers to protect their livelihoods.

“We are proactive in educating the 212,000 members of our state and territory associations in ethics, safety and biodiversity protocols,” he said.

“Through our SSAA Farmer Assist program we work to connect landowners with volunteer hunters who support pest animal control efforts in farming communities and help reduce the impacts pest animals have on the environment and wider agricultural industry.

“This program educates its participants about biosecurity, animal welfare and other important considerations when entering properties.”

Mr Godson said farm biosecurity is serious business and all visitors must follow landholder instructions to mitigate any risks on or off the property, including vehicle hygiene (cars, quads, ATVs and motorbikes).

He said footwear and clothing may need some special attention depending on the current biosecurity risk situation and protocols in place at a particular property.

“Diseases, pests and weeds can enter a farm and be spread by equipment and vehicles, either directly or in plant material, soil or manure. Maintaining equipment hygiene and ensuring all vehicles that visit a property are clean and well maintained is important,” he said.

GPA chief executive, **Colin Bettles**, said the Grains Farm Biosecurity Program, managed by Plant Health Australia, and funded by grain producer levies, as part of GPA’s representative roles, provided management resources to ensure farm biosecurity risks were understood and the right protocols followed.

He said these resources provided tools to guide the safe movement of people, vehicles and equipment that can potentially carry new pests (insects, diseases or weeds) onto farms.

But these resources, such as maintaining a visitor register to assist with recording and tracking in the event of a suspected exotic pest detection or pest response, are futile, if the activity is illegal and unknown by the property managers and farm owners.

“These resources are also vitally important for helping farmers assess the level of biosecurity risk a visitor may have for their property and many people do the right thing, such as professional contractors and workers,” he said.

“But it’s impossible to measure the biosecurity risk, such as where the vehicle or person has been beforehand, and possibly even overseas in an FMD country, if the risk-creator is trespassing – be it for shooting farm animals with a video camera or pest animals with a firearm.

“These potentially devastating biosecurity threats, which would have untold social and economic consequences for the nation, may not even be deliberate, or consciously known by the carriers.

“It is a great idea to have a biosecurity sign at the front gate, with details of who to contact before entering the farm and go through the right protocols such as farm hygiene or completing a log book.

But what’s the point if they don’t want anyone to know they’re on the farm to start with?”

Being biosecure helps maintain social licence within the hunting community, as they support farmers to control wild dogs and other pest animals. GPA and SSAA National support these biosecurity standards and social license judgements being applied equally to those entering farms illegally.