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Apple & Pear Australia

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Apple and pear industry closely watching politicians

The Australian apple and pear industry will be closely watching the campaign launches of the major political parties, to determine politicians' attitudes to importing apples into Australia.

Apple growing occurs in the marginal seats of La Trobe and McEwen (Victoria), Macquarie (New South Wales), Bass (Tasmania) and Hasluck (Western Australia) as well as in other electorates with less than five per cent swing required to unseat the incumbent member.

Darral Ashton, chairman of Apple and Pear Australia Ltd, which is the grower organisation for the Australian apple and pear industry, said there are many issues of concern to the industry which need to be addressed by the political parties.

"The Australian apple and pear industry produces clean 'green' fruit. However, with imports, we open the country to the possibility of introducing devastating pest and diseases unless there are strict measures taken to ensure they are excluded.

"For example, we want to know if the parties support using Australian inspectors to conduct on-site inspections in China before apples from that country are exported to Australia.

"We also want to know what the reaction of the government will be to the WTO decision regarding importing apples from New Zealand, particularly if the rumours about the WTO decision are correct.

"According to the rumours, there will be no restrictions on apple imports from New Zealand. If this is correct, Australia would be overly exposed to the devastating bacterial disease fire blight, which would virtually wipe out the Australian pear industry, which is worth \$200 million a year.

"In addition, we want assurance that consumers will be protected and have full knowledge of their purchases. Protection would mean all imported fruit and vegetable shipments are tested for chemical residues. This would ensure they comply with Australia's Maximum Residue Levels," Mr Ashton said.

"Full knowledge of purchases would mean all imported fruit and vegetables are labelled with country of origin, and this requirement has a strong legislative backing."

Mr Ashton said that the main apple and pear growing areas are in electorates that are at the lower end of the socio-economic scale.

"Any action that reduces the viability of apple and pear growers will have a significant negative impact on some (quite marginal) communities.

"By protecting the apple and pear industry from new imported pests and diseases, the government would be protecting the Australian environment and its diversity, it would be protecting an industry worth about \$600 million a year and protecting regional communities," said Mr Ashton.

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