Pestpoint® - the online war on pests

The Plant Biosecurity CRC’s Pestpoint® software – which harnesses the power of social media to help identify crop pests quickly and easily - has won a 2017 Award for Excellence in Innovation at Collaborate | Innovate 2017 – the Cooperative Research Centres Association annual conference.

“Distance, and a shortage of experts, means many farmers in remote areas or developing countries find it difficult to quickly identify plant pests and diseases,” said Dr Gary Kong, plant pathologist and leader of the Pestpoint® project.

“People using mobile devices and inexpensive digital microscopes can use Pestpoint® to draw on the collective expertise of local, regional, national or international networks to provide a much faster pest identification, enabling immediate steps to be taken to reduce the impact.”

“Time is of the essence when you’re looking at possible crop damage or, worse still, a potentially serious pest invasion.”

While rapid and remote identification of plant pests and diseases is a key function of the system, Pestpoint® is more than just that.

People using Pestpoint® create their own private group and use their smartphone or mobile device to collect and record signs of crop pests within the Pestpoint® app. They can share images or video so fellow members or taxonomic experts can assist with identification. Pestpoint® documents this process and saves pest records in a searchable database that can be exported as reports.

“It’s a low cost, low-tech resource that empowers farmers to act quickly to get on top of the problem, no matter where they are in the world,” said Dr Kong.

“Importantly, it also provides a secure web space so online communities can create a private network where members can identify crop pests and diseases at a level of privacy and security that suits their requirements,” he said. “All pest data is owned and managed by the group.”

“Pestpoint® has certainly met a need that we had identified, in terms of making the world a smaller place and really giving people access to better plant diagnostics,” said Susan Maas, R&D Program Manager with the Cotton Research and Development Corporation. “I look forward to where this might go in the future - you can see so much potential, it’s really exciting.”

Pestpoint® is now in pre-commercial use in Australia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos PDR and Indonesia, and will soon be implemented in the Pacific, including New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

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