

**PMAC weekly update 18th February to 25th February**

1. **Government agencies**: WTO Notifications; Customs advice on Preparing for Brexit
2. **New Zealand News:**  Minister travels to UAE and Egypt; Fruit fly trap checks stepped up; Food Standards Australia New Zealand report on strawberry tampering; Seed business sale approved by commissions; Kiwifruit sector front-foots campaign to find pickers; Apple crop of excellent quality expected; Potatoes New Zealand continues work after potato mop-top virus find; New Zespri Chairman; Farmers must comply with society’s expectations; New species of fruit fly found in Auckland;
3. **International news:** GAIN reports; Tariffs: Gove wants protection on "sensitive" products; UK to sign post-Brexit trade continuity accord with Israel; EFSA to share data on open-access platform; No-Deal Brexit could cost grocery sector billions; Supermarkets will have to take a look at their margins; Germany remains a very price-sensitive market; Delay concerns over piece-level inspection; Successful brand structure and promotion are key to market success"; Why is premium fruit becoming cheaper and cheaper in China?; Why have fruit imports increased over the years?; China & US start new round of trade talks in Washington; Report raises new glyphosate fears; Thermolabel registers temperature of fruit and veg; Picvert goes for the label ‘Cultivated without Pesticides’; Paper replacement for polyethene mulches; "No genetic engineering means people die"; Global organic acreage grows by 20%; Swedish vertical farming company Plantagon International bankrupt; Gut bacteria adapting to New Zealanders' love of fruit and veg; ‘Blueberries can help lower blood pressure’

***Editors comments***

*The big news of the last week has been the Fruit Fly incursions in Auckland. At the time of writing we still have 2 male QFF on Northshore and 2 male Facialis in Otara. This week will give us a better idea of how widespread populations of both species are. MPI has done a good job of keeping the media associated with the incursions as adequate but not over the top. The best place to keep up with the latest news is at* [*Queensland fruit fly*](https://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/protection-and-response/responding/alerts/queensland-fruit-fly/)

*In the international section I find the Chinese and sustainability sections interesting. This week there are two articles speculating about the price/ demand for imported fruit in China. The articles in themselves say very little but over the last month there has been a steady stream of similar articles. It is obvious that the Chinese know they are the market ever exporter wants to enter. The market is now becoming very sophisticated and there is more and more fruit entering the market. I predict we will only see competition increase into China and exporters will need to have good relationships and be prepared to build brand if they are going to make money.*

*Two articles in particular are worth a read. ““Picvert goes for the label ‘Cultivated without Pesticides” – gives an idea of marketing to the environmentally aware without going organic and “No genetic engineering means people die” - a thought provoking commentary on GE and climate change*.

1. **Agency news**



* 1. **WTO Notifications**

Please find attached the most recent WTO notifications from countries that are considering changes to their plant import requirements for specific products. If you have any concerns about the notifications being presented please contact [Plant.exports@mpi.govt.nz](mailto:Plant.exports@mpi.govt.nz) so that they can potentially make a submission to the notifying country. Changes notified over the last week include:

* Australia – Change to MRL’s
* Canada import of Corylus species and MRL’s
* Thailand Maximum levels for contaminants and toxins in food"

The embedded files for the last week (which has links through to the original notifications)is available here 



* 1. **Customs advice on Preparing for Brexit**

Customs advises New Zealand businesses exporting goods to the United Kingdom to prepare for the UK to leave the European Union on 29 March this year, with no-deal in place.  
   
The Customs website ([www.customs.govt.nz/](https://govt.us11.list-manage.com/track/click?u=5bcebe8ff41247a98e67420c5&id=e8e240c8d4&e=e76458644d)[brexit](https://govt.us11.list-manage.com/track/click?u=5bcebe8ff41247a98e67420c5&id=6f6f7f9668&e=e76458644d)) contains useful information on what New Zealand businesses can do to prepare for a no-deal Brexit, as well as information on what Customs is doing to prepare for Brexit. If you're a New Zealand business and concerned about the impact of Brexit on your exports to the UK or EU: phone Customs toll-free on 0508 BREXIT (0508 273 948) or email [brexit@customs.govt.nz](mailto:brexit@customs.govt.nz). [Read more](https://govt.us11.list-manage.com/track/click?u=5bcebe8ff41247a98e67420c5&id=a57a65f2d9&e=e76458644d)



1. **New Zealand News**



* 1. **Minister travels to UAE**

Agriculture Minister Damien O’Connor travelled to the United Arab Emirates last week. “In Dubai he went to Gulfood, the world’s largest food and beverage trade exhibition, to support New Zealand suppliers.” [Full article available here](https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/minister-travels-uae-and-egypt)

* 1. **Fruit fly trap checks stepped up**

Hundreds of fruit fly traps will be checked daily and monitoring of the greater Auckland region will be stepped up following the discovery of a second Queensland fruit fly, Biosecurity Minister Damien O’Connor said. “I have asked Biosecurity New Zealand to check the hundreds of traps within the North Shore area of Auckland by the weekend instead of the internationally accepted practice of once a fortnight, then to expedite a check of all 2000 Queensland fruit fly traps across Auckland. [Full article available here](https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/fruit-fly-trap-checks-stepped)

** Commentary**

* 1. **Food Standards Australia New Zealand report on strawberry tampering**

The government’s response to tampering with Australian strawberries this past year was timely, but areas to improve have been identified in a Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) report.

These include centralizing incident coordination to include relevant government agencies such as police, and improving the consistency and messaging associated with such an event. The report made seven recommendations and raised the idea of industry, government and law enforcement doing mock exercises to develop relationships and processes.

The report said all parties should review food incident response protocols and ensure formal links between regulators, health departments and police are in place for incidents involving intentional contamination and a body for the horticulture industry is required to support crisis preparedness and response in the sector. An investigation found a complex supply chain with a need for strengthened traceability and contingency planning in the strawberry industry and other high-risk horticulture sectors. Supply chain vulnerabilities are the many touch points from field to pack house, transport, retail and consumer, the seasonal nature of work and labour hiring practices leading to difficulties in monitoring workers and co-mingling as produce from more than one farm or supplier is combined.

“The power and use of social media was acknowledged as having a significant impact in this incident, both negatively potentially exacerbating ongoing tampering incidents and positively gathering consumer support for the strawberry industry,” according to the report. [Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9073252/food-standards-australia-new-zealand-report-on-strawberry-tampering/)



* 1. **Seed business sale approved by commissions**

Approval by the Commerce Commission has been given to Denmark-based DLF seeds to purchase PGG Wrightson’s seed and grain business. This was due to the commission being satisfied that the acquisition would not be likely to substantially lessen competition in any of its markets. The Australian Competition and Consumer commission also gave clearance for the sale. The agreement remains conditional on approval under the New Zealand Overseas Investment Act, change of control consents from certain joint venture partners as well as the completion of required regulatory filings in Uruguay. Last year Michael Midgley, chief executive of New Zealand Shareholders Association criticised the sale, saying it would be detrimental to PGW. [Full article available here](https://www.odt.co.nz/rural-life/horticulture/seed-business-sale-approved-commissions)

* 1. **Kiwifruit sector front-foots campaign to find pickers**

The kiwifruit industry is pulling out all the stops to make sure the 2019 harvest, which starts mid-March, isn’t short of workers. New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated (NZKGI) Chief Executive Officer Nikki Johnson says the amount of green and gold kiwifruit on the vines is forecast to be even higher than last year’s harvest, meaning around 18,000 workers will be needed. “Last year, the harvest was at least 1,200 workers short at the peak – we don’t want a repeat of that.”

To promote seasonal jobs in kiwifruit, Johnson says NZKGI is running a broad labour recruitment campaign, targeting local students, unemployed kiwis, retirees and backpackers, to show them what the industry can offer and address any misconceptions about the work. “While we want to employ local kiwis as a first priority, we’re casting the net far and wide to attract as many seasonal workers as possible,” she says

Johnson says that a lot of incorrect information exists about working with kiwifruit making it harder to recruit people who would otherwise get a lot out of seasonal work. “That includes the pay rates – they are actually very competitive. We will highlight the facts about kiwifruit work through our campaign to rectify myths.” Johnson says kiwifruit work is an excellent option for backpackers looking to earn money while they travel and sightsee. “We’ll also be emphasising the long-term and permanent career roles available, as well – kiwifruit seasonal work spans up to 48 weeks in the year. As New Zealand’s largest horticultural earner, it’d be great to see more kiwis reaching out to their local kiwifruit employers and discussing potential career pathways that may be on offer.” View the Kiwifruit Jobs video [here](https://www.facebook.com/KiwifruitJobsNZ/videos/249554932638900/).   [Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9073727/kiwifruit-sector-front-foots-campaign-to-find-pickers/)

* 1. **Apple crop of excellent quality expected**

New Zealand’s apple and pear crop is forecasting a gross crop of 604,500 tons is 2.5% up on 2018’s yield. However, New Zealand Apples & Pears chief executive Alan Pollard says the result of the good growing season can be seen in fruit quality.    “The broad portfolio of varieties that we offer has changed dramatically since the mid-2000s, when Royal Gala and Braeburn accounted for almost 80% of NZ exports,” says Pollard.  “Today, Royal Gala remains our largest export variety accounting for around 30% of total exports. But varieties such as Braeburn continue to decline: that particular variety’s planted area was down 7% over 2018 and export volumes are expected to be down 8% for 2019. [Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9074141/new-zealand-apple-crop-of-excellent-quality-expected/)

* 1. **Potatoes New Zealand continues work after potato mop-top virus find**

Overall there’s been lots of rain across the potato growing regions this season which has meant the occurrence of black leg (bacteria) and powdery scab, which have been a concern in some areas.

Both these diseases can be transmitted via machinery and equipment and their presence this summer is a reminder to ensure to practice good farm hygiene as we enter and leave properties, especially as Powdery Scab is the known vector for Potato Mop-Top Virus (PMTV).  Details of both these SROs, including photographs of symptoms, can be found in the latest edition of the [*HANDBOOK of pests and diseases for New Zealand potato growers*](https://potatoesnz.co.nz/biosecurity/) – 2018 update.

As 2019 kicks off, PNZ continues to work alongside Biosecurity New Zealand in response to the PMTV incursion.  Intelligence gathering continue, test tubers and carry out soil bait testing. The situation remains much the same as it did at the end of 2018, with positive tests in the Canterbury region so far – the only region where field testing has been undertaken to date. [Full article available here](https://potatonewstoday.com/2019/02/16/potatoes-new-zealand-continues-work-after-potato-mop-top-virus-find/)

* 1. **New Zespri Chairman**

Bruce Cameron officially takes over from Peter McBride this week as the new Zespri Chairman . Bruce brings considerable experience and leadership to the role and will build on the excellent success Zespri has achieved in recent years under former Chairman McBride.

** Bits and pieces**

* 1. **Farmers must comply with society’s expectations**

A key theme of the 32nd annual Fertiliser and Lime Research Centre workshop at Massey University was that compliance means meeting both requirements of the regulator and expectations of society. For example, water quality is becoming more important for individuals and companies also have to follow regulations. [Full article available here](https://www.ruralnewsgroup.co.nz/rural-news/rural-general-news/farmers-must-comply-with-society-s-expectations)

 **Biosecurity**

* 1. **New species of fruit fly found in Auckland**

A second type of fruit fly has been found in a surveillance trap in the Auckland suburb of Otara.

This fly (*Bactrocera facialis* - the "facialis fruit fly") is a different species to the Queensland fruit fly and the detection is not related to the current Devonport situation. The solitary male fly was formally identified earlier this week and given no further facialis fruit flies have been found, officials are confident there is no indication there is an incursion of facialis.

Facialis is native to Tonga where it badly affects crops of capsicum and chilli but appears to be less harmful to other fruit and vegetables. It is a tropical fruit fly species so New Zealand's climate may not provide an ideal home for it. For more information: [www.biosecurity.govt.nz/protection-and-response/responding/alerts/fruit-flies](http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/protection-and-response/responding/alerts/fruit-flies) [Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9073524/nz-new-species-of-fruit-fly-found-in-auckland/)



1. **International news**

**Comment**

* 1. **GAIN reports**

Gain reports are from the “Global Agricultural Information Network” and are produced by the USDA. They are designed to provide timely information on the economy, products and issues in foreign countries that are likely to have an impact on United States agricultural production and trade. The information in them is written for USA exporters but the majority is equally relevant to New Zealand. With regard to import regulations for a particular market New Zealand exporters should first check the countries ICPR on MPI’s web site. These are collated specifically for New Zealand product. However, the Gain reports often provide additional information that is useful e.g. on grading and labelling, economic profiles. This week see:

1. **Germany Product Brief, Fresh Fruit, Fresh Deciduous Fruit, Stone Fruit, Strawberries, Citrus,** Germany is one of the largest markets for fruit in Europe.  The relative affluence of its population of 83 million people makes it an attractive outlet for exporters from many countries. . [Product Brief Fresh Fruits\_Berlin\_Germany\_2-5-2019](https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Product%20Brief%20Fresh%20Fruits_Berlin_Germany_2-5-2019.pdf)
2. **Japan 2018 Exporter Guide** Japan is the fourth largest export market for U.S. exporters of food and agricultural products.   The total Japanese food and drink market was valued at over $769 billion in 2017.   [Exporter Guide\_Osaka ATO\_Japan\_12-27-2018](https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Exporter%20Guide_Osaka%20%20ATO_Japan_12-27-2018.pdf)
3. **Malaysia Exporter Guide** Malaysia’s multi-billion dollar food industry is driven by an expanding economy, increased consumer spending and a very healthy tourism industry.  Although the country’s halal requirements complicate trade for certain products, Malaysia’s trade and regulatory policies are relatively open and provide opportunities for a broad range of imported foods and beverages.[Exporter Guide\_Kuala Lumpur\_Malaysia\_1-30-2019](https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Exporter%20Guide_Kuala%20Lumpur_Malaysia_1-30-2019.pdf)
4. **Singapore Exporter Guide** Singapore’s highly import dependent, multi-billion dollar food industry is driven by robust consumer spending, high disposable incomes and intense urbanization.   [Exporter Guide\_Singapore\_Singapore\_1-30-2019](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Exporter%20Guide_Singapore_Singapore_1-30-2019.pdf)
5. **Singapore Export Certificate Report** This report discusses food and agricultural export product certificates currently required by the Singapore Government. Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards Report\_Singapore\_Singapore\_1-31-2019
6. **Turkey Exporter Guide for Turkey** The Republic of Turkey has a young population of 81 million people fuelling consumption. The country is in a Customs Union with the EU and is the 17th largest economy in the world. [Exporter Guide\_Ankara\_Turkey\_2-12-2019](https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Exporter%20Guide_Ankara_Turkey_2-12-2019.pdf)

 **Regulatory**

* 1. **Tariffs: Gove wants protection on "sensitive" products**

Michael Gove told Britain’s food industry that the government will protect “sensitive” homegrown food with import tariffs in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Gove would not rule out zero tariffs for arable crops however, saying the tariffs would be prioritised towards meat such as beef and “particularly” lamb. The biggest import tariffs into EU currently mostly apply to animal products, but fruit and veg also has some duty protections from major producers like the US, Argentina, China and North Africa, which could impact domestic fresh produce. Gove also said he “would not hesitate” to provide financial support to the most vulnerable sectors. [Full article available here](http://www.fruitnet.com/fpj/article/177919/tariffs-gove-wants-protection-on-sensitive-produce)

The environment secretary said: “The government is, of course, doing everything it can not just to secure a deal but also to mitigate the impact of leaving without a deal. The NFU and others have made strong arguments about the need to ensure stronger tariff protection for British farming than any other sector of the economy. According to [huffingtonpost.co.uk](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/michael-gove-warns-there-is-no-guarantee-uk-could-export-food-to-eu-after-no-deal-brexit_uk_5c6bf278e4b01cea6b895bbd)¸ it was also unclear whether fruit, flowers and vegetable growers would have access to a sizeable global seasonal workers scheme. [Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9074146/no-guarantee-that-uk-can-export-food-to-eu-after-no-deal-brexit/)

* 1. **UK to sign post-Brexit trade continuity accord with Israel**

The UK and Israel are to sign an agreement, meant to ensure continuity in trade relations after Britain leaves the EU. Bilateral commerce reached $11 billion in 2018, a 15 percent increase over the previous year. The UK reached a similar agreement with Switzerland last week, allowing it to continue trade without any additional tariffs. [Full article available here](https://www.hortidaily.com/article/9074153/uk-to-sign-post-brexit-trade-continuity-accord-with-israel/)

* 1. **EFSA to share data on open-access platform**

In a report published last week, European Food Safety Association (EFSA) lays out how it intends to share data collected in areas such as: food consumption habits; pesticide residues in food; chemical contaminants and additives in food; foodborne disease outbreaks; and antimicrobial resistance.

The data will be made available on Knowledge Junction, EFSA’s curated, open repository, which was set up to improve transparency, reproducibility and reusability of evidence in food and feed safety risk assessments. The first datasets will be published this year.

The report was drafted by EFSA data specialists in close consultation with experts and authorities from EU Member States. It includes a review of the measures that individual countries are taking to provide public access to government data. Food and feed safety organisations are taking different approaches, but the availability of food safety data is increasing year by year. “We hope our report will help to stimulate the adoption of an open data policy in the food safety domain across Europe,”

[Full article available here](https://www.hortidaily.com/article/9073596/efsa-to-share-data-on-open-access-platform/)

 **Business/ Industry**

* 1. **No-Deal Brexit could cost grocery sector billions**

According to an analysis by operational improvement specialist Newton, the UK grocery industry could lose up to £4.5 billion of revenue in the three months after Brexit if retailers and manufacturers are not prepared by 29 March. The figure is based on an estimated 20% additional gaps on supermarket shelves due to supply issues caused by a no-deal Brexit. Newton’s research suggested that when this happens, 50% of people will buy an alternative product but 50% won’t buy anything at all.

Newton is recommending that retailers and manufacturers take five steps to mitigate fallout:

1. Focusing on produce availability and wastage  
2. Evaluating the supply chain and collaborating extensively  
3. Sensible stockpiling  
4. Mitigating labour availability  
5. Improving a store’s visual appeal [Full article available here](https://www.hortidaily.com/article/9073099/no-deal-brexit-could-cost-grocery-sector-billions/)

* 1. **Supermarkets will have to take a look at their margins**

As the Brexit deadline approaches, people in the UK are being told to stock up on toilet rolls and soup! But the general feeling within the trade, especially for bigger companies, is to just to wait and see what will happen. Paul Tomlinson from Davis Worldwide has a very relaxed attitude to the impending deadline, “This is what we do, and we will continue to do it regardless. We are still buying fruit and vegetables, we are using the Euro rate when we are forward buying to keep the price stable. There is no point stockpiling goods, that will just mean paying more to store them. People just have to be careful and not over commit or panic buy.”

The customs services have already said that if lorries are taking too long to get through the port, they will just let them pass, as they do at the moment. This whole situation might encourage people to get back to eating seasonal produce or even growing their own.” [Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9073743/supermarkets-will-have-to-take-a-look-at-their-margins-and-may-no-longer-be-able-to-dictate-to-the-market/)

* 1. **Germany remains a very price-sensitive market**

Germany is one of the largest markets for fruit in Europe. Germany, with a population of 82.8 million (16%of the EU-28 total population), has the largest economy in Europe and is a leading European market for foods and beverages. In 2017, food retail sales in Germany totalled 243 billion Euro (approx. USD274 billion)

In 2013, German households spend 23 Euro (approx. USD 25) per month on fruits. Germany is the 6th largest fruit producer in the EU-28 and the largest fruit consumer. In MY 2016/174, Germans consumed approximately 8.1 million MT of fruit, including frozen and canned fruits on a fresh weight basis. Germans show a preference for fresh fruits, but in MY2016/17 consumed 73,515 MT of frozen fruits and 122,000 MT of dried fruits. The top five fruits consumed in Germany are apples, bananas, oranges, grapes, and clementine’s. However, Germans are also quite familiar with exotic fruits such as mangos, passion fruit, avocados, and lychees. [Click here for the full report.](https://agfstorage.blob.core.windows.net/misc/FP_com/2019/02/18/Product%20Brief%20Fresh%20Fruits_Berlin_Germany_2-5-2019.pdf) [Full article available here](https://www.hortidaily.com/article/9073705/germany-remains-a-very-price-sensitive-market/)

* 1. **Delay concerns over piece-level inspection**

Fresh produce into Australia will undergo compulsory security screening via x-ray or metal detector from 1 March if it arrives at airports without prior security clearance. It’s not just fruit and vegetables that will need to meet the requirement, but all Australian exported air cargo regardless of article or destination.

Growers and traders can choose to either register as a ‘Known Consignor’, meaning they must meet certain security protocols to bypass airport screening at the take-off point or have goods screened by a Registered Air Cargo Agent (RACA).However, both Dominic Jenkin, CEO of the Australian Horticulture Exporters’ and Importers’ Association (AHEIA) and a representative from a global airline told Fruitnet that around two weeks out from the implementation date there are only a handful of RACAs on the list.

The aforementioned airline representative said the 1 March implementation date will be interesting to watch as it falls on a Friday which is a typical peak period for the week. “Our terminal operator has published an additional 3 hours in lodge-in times but a lot of us are anticipating a longer lead time would be required.” Jenkin predicts a 24-hour delay at terminals, while Australian aircraft service group, Menzies Aviation cite an additional six-hour allowance for the new screening process.

[Full article available here](http://www.fruitnet.com/asiafruit/article/177912/delay-concerns-over-piece-level-inspection)

 **China**

* 1. **Successful brand structure and promotion are key to market success"**

"The annual import volume of fruit into China has been around 4 million tons in the last 3 years. The average annual fruit import value was around 5.5 billion USD. This volume, however, only accounts for 3%-5% of the volume in China's fruit market. There is still great potential for imported fruit in the Chinese market, and in high-end markets in particular. Because the disposable income of Chinese consumers continue to increase every day, as does their awareness of healthy foods and China continues to open up the market to more countries

.

"The two greatest influencing factors in the competitive fruit trade are price and brand. The continuous increase in living standards in China mean that some previously high-end, expensive fruits have become relatively common products. part from this, branding has become one of the most important ways for consumers to recognize various fruits in the past few years. Several larger trading companies have recognized this development and stepped up the pace of branding in the fruit industry. Zespri kiwifruit, for example, has become the first choice for many consumers looking for kiwifruit. It is particularly important in the multi-layered fruit market of China to establish a unique brand and carry out effective promotional activities. "One expression that vividly describes the Chinese economy is that 'Chinese economy is not a small pond, but an ocean. '[Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9072957/successful-brand-structure-and-promotion-are-key-to-market-success/)

* 1. **Why is premium fruit becoming cheaper and cheaper in China?**

Consumers prefer more high-end products as their disposable income grows. However, some premium fruits are not that rare and expensive anymore. China represents a great potential market and countries that export to China see their export volume grow every year. The previously rare premium fruits have thus become more common and more affordable. China has also lowered the customs tariffs in recent years to allow Chinese consumers to enjoy more imported fruits. Some countries even enjoy zero-tariffs, which again lowers the market price of premium fruit in China.

[Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9072967/why-is-premium-fruit-becoming-cheaper-and-cheaper-in-china/)

* 1. **Why have fruit imports increased over the years?**

China's consumer market is changing. Income levels are relatively higher, especially as the disposable income of middle- and high-end income groups is increasing. Although the price( *of imported fruit*) is higher, consumers are willing to pay and try. They want to experience the new fruit in person or give it as a gift to friends and relatives. Imported fruit is a very popular gift in China, which is one of the reasons why fruit imports have grown so fast in these years." [Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9074939/why-have-fruit-imports-increased-over-the-years/)

* 1. **China & US start new round of trade talks in Washington**

Chinese Vice Premier Liu He, US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin co-chair the formal opening of a fresh round of high-level economic and trade talks at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building of the White House in Washington D.C., the United States, on Feb. 21, 2019. With the current round counted in, there have been three rounds of talks between the two sides in less than a month since the end of January. [Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9075105/china-us-start-new-round-of-trade-talks-in-washington/)



* 1. **Report raises new glyphosate fears**

People with high exposure to glyphosate are 41 per cent more likely to develop a type of cancer called non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL), new research has found. Scientists at the University of Washington said their findings support “a compelling link” between exposures to glyphosate-based herbicides, such as the world’s most popular weed killer Roundup, and an increased risk of NHL.

The Guardian reported that Monsanto and its German owner Bayer are facing more than 9,000 lawsuits in the US brought by people with NHL who think Monsanto’s glyphosate-based herbicides are to blame for their condition. A spokesperson from Bayer/Monsanto said the study was “flawed” and contradicted extensive science from regulators, including the European Food Safety Authorities (EFSA), the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), the EPA and Health Canada.

Sarah Mukherjee, chief executive of the UK Crop Protection Agency (CPA), added that the debate around glyphosate’s safety was more about politics and activism than science. [Full article available here](http://www.fruitnet.com/fpj/article/177890/glyphosate-increases-cancer-risk-by-41-per-cent)

* 1. **Thermolabel registers temperature of fruit and veg**

The operating group Thermolabel is moving forward in the development of a label that registers the temperature of fruits and vegetables. It would be a highly reliable label with the capacity to constantly register and authenticate the temperatures to which perishable products (mainly fruits and vegetables) have been subjected. The objective is to protect the cold chain during the entire process from field to the point of sale.  [Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9073453/spain-thermolabel-moves-forward-in-development-of-label-that-registers-temperature-of-fruit-and-veg/)

* 1. **Picvert goes for the label ‘Cultivated without Pesticides**

 For a few years now, the company Picvert has been wanting to reduce its use of phytosanitary products. “Given the political context in which many molecules are being removed from the market, and the fact that consumers are turning to healthier products, conventional agriculture is going to be facing more and more challenges. So, it is wiser to find cultivation alternatives in line with a sustainable development approach.

**Why go for Zero-Pesticide Cultivation instead of Zero-Pesticide Residue?** First of all, Louise specifies that the zero-pesticide residue approach is easier to implement in a controlled environment like greenhouses than in open fields where we have no power over what goes on in the neighbouring fields. It is therefore more difficult to guarantee that a product grown in open fields is completely free of pesticides.

“With the zero-pesticide residue, it is not forbidden to use pesticides. It only means that no pesticide residue can be found in the final products. At Picvert, we were leaning more towards not using them at all,” explains Louise.

“We practice crop rotation a lot, which is one of the first steps to get healthy crops. We are currently on a 5- to 7-year rotation cycle, which allows us to diversify soil life and to have cultures that are less affected by diseases. But if we turn to organic farming, we must convert our land and all crops cultivated on it must be organic. However, we want a smooth evolution towards a cultivation without pesticides, by choosing which productions we wish to convert. Moreover, contrary to the organic farming requirements, we use conventional seeds,” indicates Louise.

On the other hand, however, it is interesting to know that the company exceeds some of the organic farming requirements. “We chose not to use any chemical pesticide at all, or any copper-based products which are commonly used in organic farming,” explains Louise. “Instead, we use bio-control products from microorganisms and mushrooms. We also use ancestral farming techniques and mechanization.” [Full article available here](https://www.hortidaily.com/article/9073204/picvert-goes-for-the-label-cultivated-without-pesticides/)

* 1. **Paper replacement for polyethene mulches**

AgroPaper is a renewable and compostable paper that is designed to replace the plastic material used by many farmers and growers for 'mulching' when growing vegetables. Mulching refers to placing a material (mulch) on the ground to improve the soil around plants, to prevent weeds and to preserve the temperature of the soil.

Researchers found a way to use long needle fibres from sustainably managed local forests as the basis for the new paper. The removal of polythene that is most commonly used for mulches can be difficult and costly and leaves behind small fragments that may be consumed by animals. AgroPaper, on the other hand, is an environmentally friendly material that biodegrades safely and harmlessly as compost in the ground. [Full article available here](https://www.hortidaily.com/article/9072382/paper-protects-crop/)

* 1. **"No genetic engineering means people die"**

Prof. David Zilberman is holder of the Robinson Chair in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University of California. Berkeley is not enthusiastic about the organic food trend, "If someone in the West wants to pay six times more for each leaf, there's nothing wrong with that," he says. "Organic food is like riding on horseback. It's not more efficient, it doesn't really pollute less, but it's fun.

The problem starts when people try to force this attitude on the rest of the world. "Europeans go to Africa or poor countries in Asia and say, 'Don't use pesticides' or 'Don't use genetic engineering on fruits and vegetables,' 'Don't make the same mistakes we made.' But isn't it because of those 'mistakes' that our life expectancy has become so much longer that the pension funds are collapsing?

Without pesticides and genetic engineering, the environmental damage would be enormous. Who will suffer as a result? Not the people living in the city and eating organic food; it will be the people who will have no fruits and vegetables at all. What about people who have no money? In Africa or Albania, you call what they eat 'junk food;' for them, it's food."

Zilberman is not an unquestioning advocate of pesticides and genetic engineering, but he wants us to stick to the facts and balance different needs. "The challenge is to understand the whole system. Regulation can do this, sometimes more successfully than people think," he says. He cites the example of golden rice in Bangladesh. "500,000 people around the world go blind every year because of a lack of Vitamin A. Golden rice, which has been genetically engineered to contain a larger concentration of this vitamin, can prevent this, because rice is a basic nutritional item in the nations with people at risk," Zilberman argues. "The opponents of genetic engineering also opposed golden rice, because they thought that it was a slippery slope that would lead to more genetically engineered crops, a takeover of rice crops by giant companies, and a reduction in the diversity of rice strains in the world. Meanwhile, however, people are going blind because of this opposition. As a result of an article of mine, which analysed the risks and benefits of approving golden rice, 100 Nobel Prize winners signed a letter supporting this crop. That happened in 2017, and in 2018, several countries finally approved golden rice."

"People say, 'Genetic engineering belongs to the giant companies,' but genetic engineering belongs to humanity, not to them. A rich person with a full belly can say, 'I prefer not to take a chance.' Someone who is starving has to take risks.

"Although average global warming on Earth won't be so great, in certain regions, especially those that are already hot and dry, warming will be very significant, and food can't be grown there as a result. In regions that are cold now, on the other hand, it will be possible to grow much more food as a result of the change. "We therefore believe that the big problem caused by the change will not be a general worldwide shortage of food; it will be migration. The food that can't be grown in excessively hot regions can be grown elsewhere; that's not so terrible. But will people living in places where agriculture becomes difficult be able to move as they wish to a place with a more comfortable climate? Will the US open its gates to the Mexicans? Will the Europeans embrace the Africans? "The solution lies in the development of technology that will enable farmers in the hot and dry countries to continue growing enough food, despite the change." [Full article available here](https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-no-genetic-engineering-means-people-die-1001273665)

* 1. **Global organic acreage grows by 20%**

In 2017, the organic acreage worldwide reached a record high level, with 70 million hectares; 20% more than in the previous year, according to the statistical yearbook "Looking at per capita spending, the study points to Switzerland as the leader, with 288 Euro per person. Denmark has the largest market share for bio products (13.3% of the total), while India has the largest number of producers (835,200 of the 2.9 million that were accounted for worldwide in 2017). Lastly, in terms of acreage, Australia leads the ranking with 35.6 million hectares, followed by Argentina (3.4 million hectares) and China (3 million hectares).[Full article available here](Global%20organic%20acreage%20grows%20by%2020%25)

* 1. **Swedish vertical farming company Plantagon International bankrupt**

Another major vertical farming bankruptcy. Last week, Plantagon International has been declared bankrupt. Cashflow problems turned out to be insurmountable for the Swedish company.

Plantagon International is headquartered in Stockholm and describes themselves as an Agritechture company. "Plantagon moves food and food production into the city by implementing technical solutions into existing city infrastructure", they explain on their website. " The company made it into the news regularly with their city and indoor farming concepts and plans - like the 'plantscraper' and office blocks containing 60-metre high urban farms. Last year, the first Plantagon farm was opened, partly owned by Plantagon International.  [Full article available here](https://www.hortidaily.com/article/9075157/swedish-vertical-farming-company-plantagon-international-bankrupt/)

  **Health**

* 1. **Gut bacteria adapting to New Zealanders' love of fruit and veg**

New Zealand have discovered a gut bacterium that specialises in breaking down a hard-to-digest substance found in plants. This suggests that the human gut microbiome is evolving to accommodate our increased consumption of fibre-rich foods. Plant & Food Research scientists discovered a new human gut bacterium: Monoglobus pectinilyticus. It is the first specialist bacterium for pectin degradation and utilisation. Pectin is a plant’s natural barrier to protect against bacterial attacks. It is also a primary source of dietary fibre for humans. [Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9073644/gut-bacteria-adapting-to-new-zealanders-love-of-fruit-and-veg/)

* 1. **‘Blueberries can help lower blood pressure’**

A new study published in the Journal of Gerontology Series A has found that eating 200 gr of blueberries every day for a month can lead to an improvement in blood vessel function and a decrease in systolic blood pressure in healthy people.

Effects on blood vessel function were seen two hours after consumption of the blueberry drinks and were sustained for one month even after an overnight fast. Over the course of the month, blood pressure was reduced by 5mmHg. This is similar to what is commonly seen in studies using blood pressure lowering medication. If the changes we saw in blood vessel function after eating blueberries every day could be sustained for a person's whole life, it could reduce their risk of developing cardiovascular disease by up to 20%." [Full article available here](https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9074520/blueberries-can-help-lower-blood-pressure/)

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