

Risk management practices: Destroying infested lettuces

By Dani Baigorri, Biosecurity Officer

Biosecurity itself is more than a buzzword; it is the vital work of strategy, efforts, and planning to protect human, animal, and environmental health against biological threats. The primary goal of biosecurity is to protect against the risk posed by disease and organisms; the primary tools of biosecurity are exclusion, eradication, and control, supported by system management, practical protocols, and the rapid and efficient securing and sharing of vital information. Biosecurity is therefore the sum of risk management practices in defence against biological threats.

A big chunk of the biosecurity team job is to inspect products being imported into the islands to tackle the entrance of invasive alien species, i.e., non-native organisms that cause, or have the potential to cause, harm to the environment, economy, or human health.

Under this principle, large quantities of fruits and vegetables are being imported every month into the Falklands and the inspection of these commodities represent a key role for biosecurity officers purposes as these products are vulnerable to lots of different diseases and organisms that can endangered the environment, as well as to the agricultural crop and livestock industries.

On August during one of our inspections, we came across with 300 kilograms of lettuces infested in at least 4 types of bugs. We usually find some bugs in the fruits and vegs being imported into the islands but our plant material Import Health Standards allow a small percentage of soil or bugs on them. However, in this occasion the amount of bugs was well over the limit established by the Health Standards, therefore we were forced to make a decision regarding these 300Kg of lettuces.

As you may imagine, this decision wasn't easy, and we as residents of the island know and understand that destroying vegetables it's very close to a sin. Nevertheless our responsibility as biosecurity officers is to protect the islands environment, economy and human and animal health by preventing the entrance of any type of biological threats and we were to destroy all 300 kg. of lettuces.

One of the bugs we found on the lettuces and that led us to decide on destroying the lettuces was a green beetle commonly known as Cucurbit beetle (*Diabrotica speciosa*). This insect is considered to be an important pest throughout South America (except Chile) and is known to transmit several viruses such as comoviruses and different mosaic viruses. In its larvae state feed on the roots of crops and as an adult is cold – tolerant, what makes it highly hazardous for the Falklands, as the cold is one of our major defences against non-native species threatening the islands.



