

KiwiNet: helping fight fruit flies

Throughout 2019, KiwiNet members took part in the Auckland fruit fly responses. Here, KiwiNet member Sheryl Flett tells us about her time on the frontline.

Sheryl was an EastPack Quality Manager who retired in 2018 after 17 years with the company and is still involved in the kiwifruit industry as a GAP auditor. EastPack is New Zealand's largest kiwifruit post-harvest operation.

I have recently retired after many years in the kiwifruit industry and really enjoyed being involved in the Auckland fruit fly response.

The days were fun, interesting and busy, and we were well looked after. After a daily briefing early in the morning we were out and about for a lot of the day in our respective teams – some people were doing trapping, others were collecting fruit or talking to the public, and others were involved in fruit cutting and inspecting. Health & Safety was of the utmost importance. We were always kept safe and never worked alone.

I was in the trapping team and found things to be very well organised, including the thorough training we all had to go through. For the amount of traps we inspected every day and the amount of work we did, technology made a big difference. We were using a new app that was quite intuitive. Reporting anything suspicious we found in the traps was simple and the information we entered was instantly accessible by people in response headquarters and at the Wellington head office.

The good training combined with the easy-to-use app meant that we were very quickly able to get in to good routines, were efficient, and could get information to response headquarters in a timely manner.

By taking part in trapping and seeing it first-hand I have gained a far greater understanding of the surveillance system. It's good to know that the traps are doing what they're designed to do, and that New Zealand's biosecurity system is really working. Coming from the kiwifruit industry I have always known about the risk of fruit fly and been aware of how important it is to keep it out. This was a reminder that if they do get here, we need to have everything in place, ready to go so that we can make every effort to stop an incursion.

I came away thinking we can be proud of the fact the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and industry groups are well organised and doing a good job.

I would put my hand up to help out in a response again. I met a lot of people from different walks of life and they all enjoyed it as much as I did. I learnt a lot and feel very proud to be part of the biosecurity team.

