



European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)

37/4 Meeting of the Executive Committee

5 February 2019, 15.00 to 17.00

Rome, FAO HQ, Espace Gabon

Provisional Annotated Agenda

Forty-first Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)

Budapest, Hungary, September 2019

(DRAFT)

The assessment conducted on the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) has highlighted that many member states consider the added value of the biennial ECA Session could be increased by focusing on fewer topics to allow for more in-depth technical discussions and to stimulate the participation of national technical experts. This was successfully implemented during the Fortieth Session of the ECA in September 2017. Following the review of potential topics for the Forty-first Session of the ECA, the Executive Committee has identified plant health as the main overarching theme of the Forty-first Session, encompassing related subjects. Based on these recommendations, the ECA Secretariat has developed the following draft annotated agenda for the review of the ECA Executive Committee members.

This background document focuses on the technical agenda items (Item 2) and does not provide details on other standing points of the ECA agenda. The complete overview of ECA agenda points is given in Annex 1.

Main theme for the Session:

2. Plant health in Europe and Central Asia countries

Plant health affects many areas of socio-economic development, as well as the food security and nutrition situation of countries. In some cases, the stakeholders, from government agencies through to the general public, may not be fully aware of those impacts. Thus, relevant monitoring and information systems and policies are needed to raise the awareness on and address the risks from plant pests.¹ This agenda item aims to review the mechanisms and tools available, both at the national and regional levels, to address key issues identified related to plant health.

2.1 Plant health in Europe and Central Asia – relevance, trends and developments

Importance of plant health for the region and relevance to regional priorities

¹ The term pest is used as defined in ISPM 5 (“any species, strain or biotype of plant, animal or pathogenic agent injurious to plants or plant products”). It covers weeds, insects and nematodes, but also bacterial, viral, fungal and other agents that cause plant diseases. The expression “plant pests and diseases” is used in some cases to further emphasize the range of objects covered.



Plants are the foundation of life on earth. They produce the oxygen we breathe and provide more than 80 percent of the food we eat. We use them to make clothes, shelter, medicines, and many other things that are essential to our lives, food systems and industry. Plant resources, as key element of ecosystems, contribute to weather and climatic patterns and are essential for stabilizing the climate (temperatures, precipitation, wind, and more) and prevent climate change. For nearly half of the Earth's population, plants are a primary source of income. Almost every country trades plants and plant products to create wealth and support economic development and assure food security. Plant health is key to the sustainable intensification of agriculture aimed at feeding the growing global population. Thus, recognition, advocacy and support for the promotion of plant health is of paramount importance if the international community is to guarantee plant resources for a food-secure world based on stable and sustainable ecosystems.

Europe and Central Asia is a vast and extremely diverse region. Many countries in the region have abundant and diverse plant resources, as well as strong agricultural sectors. Conducive environmental conditions provide a basis for well-developed plant production in the countries, while international trade of plants or plant products contributes to economic development. In many countries, agricultural production provides essential elements for food security, employment and livelihoods for large parts of the societies. From the food security perspective, it is critical to minimize pest-related losses in plant production and throughout the value chain. Estimates of those losses range from 20 to 80 percent, depending on the type of plants, locations and climatic conditions. According to recent estimates, the value of crop losses globally due to the presence of plant pests and diseases amounts to EUR 450 billion a year.² In most cases, the quality of products is also severely affected, but these go unaccounted. For individual farms, especially small ones, destruction of crops by pests can be devastating.

Plant health is highly relevant to achieving all regional priorities established by Member Countries in Europe and Central Asia, which are being addressed through three Regional Initiatives, namely:

- 1) Empowering smallholders and family farms for improved rural livelihoods and poverty reduction;
- 2) Improving agrifood trade and market integration; and
- 3) Managing natural resources sustainably, under a changing climate.

Food security and nutrition in the Europe and Central Asia region is addressed as a cross-cutting issue across all three Regional Initiatives.

Furthermore, within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is foreseen that national policies and programmes, as well as regional collaboration to enhance plant health, contribute to achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 2, 8, 12, 13, 15 and 17) as well as the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Trends and developments

The current environment for national operations in the area of plant health can be characterized by the following main aspects and trends:

- increasing and more diversified trade;
- structural and operational challenges in the way national plant protection organizations (NPPOs) work;
- scientific and capacity development and innovation;
- impacts of climate change on plant health; and
- more frequent pest incursions and outbreaks.

² https://www.ippc.int/static/media/files/publication/en/2016/05/Food_Security_RudyRabbingeFAO04042016v3RR.pdf

Ecosystem-based approaches and international collaboration are essential in minimizing the impacts of plant pests and managing them in a sustainable manner. The utilization of genetic resources in developing resistant varieties and their combination with environmentally sound techniques are the core elements of integrated pest management. New and existing bio- and digital technologies may also contribute significantly to addressing old and new threats in plant health. Frontier technologies³ such as genome editing for pest resistance and distributed ledger technologies (such as blockchain) that improve accountability and transparency by tracking the plant health status at each and every step of the food system, including transboundary movements, are some of the examples available today. However, harnessing those and other technologies, as well as approaches such as Ecologically Based Pest Management (EBPM) or agro-ecology for improved plant health and pest traceability, requires targeted efforts by governments and innovation system actors to maximize benefits and minimize possible safety and social risks through the development of strategies, the adjustment of research and innovation agendas, the development of capacity and the alignment of regulatory systems with relevant international agreements.

In this context, the draft IPPC Strategic Framework for 2020–2030⁴ foresees the following key development programmes under the IPPC for the years 2020–2030:

- 1) harmonization of electronic data exchange;
- 2) commodity and pathway-specific international standards on phytosanitary measures (ISPMs);
- 3) management of e-commerce and courier mail pathways;
- 4) enabling the use of third-party entities;
- 5) strengthening pest outbreak alert and response systems;
- 6) assessment and management of climate change impacts on plant health;
- 7) global phytosanitary research coordination; and
- 8) the establishment of a diagnostic laboratory network.

When adopted, this *IPPC Strategic Framework* should form the basis for the work of the global plant health community on developing harmonized solutions and guidance on their implementation, as necessary. These strategies are foreseen to be implemented at regional and country level, where the regional plant protection organizations would have important roles through providing support, and where the countries would have a forum to discuss and address challenges concerning plant health implementation issues.

Proposed discussion topics:

- Overview of status of plant health issues and trends in the region
- Food security and nutrition: the impact of plant pests
- Plant health and the SDGs (SDG 1, 2, 8, 12, 13, 15 and 17)
- Potential challenges and opportunities for the implementation of plant health development programmes
- The need for ecosystem-based approaches for the sustainable management of pests and diseases

2.2. Plant pests and diseases in the context of climate change and climate variability, food security and biodiversity risks

³ OECD, 2016: Frontier technologies have the following characteristics:

- (a) address large-scale economic, social or political opportunities or problems;
- (b) are characterized by rapid rates of technological development and advancement;
- (c) have broad potential impacts across diverse fields;
- (d) carry substantial potential for displacing or leapfrogging existing technologies, or previous technological pathways taken in developed countries; and
- (e) involve considerable uncertainty about opportunities, risks and future pathways.

⁴ <https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/governance/ippc-strategic-framework/>

Plant pest threats are on the increase with changing climate

Plant production is vulnerable to climatic conditions and increasingly affected by natural disasters (floods, droughts) and the degradation of natural resources (such as soil degradation and water scarcity), intensified due to unprecedented spatial and seasonal patterns of temperatures and precipitation. Among others, there is an increasing concern about many pest species extending their geographic ranges due to changing climatic conditions, bringing damage to plants in new areas and threatening the sustainability of agricultural sectors in those areas. These impacts extend beyond agriculture, especially to natural environments such as forests. The introduction of new species, strains and biotypes into ecosystems may also pose a risk to the local biodiversity through direct damage or through the competition of new species with the endemic ones, especially where environmental conditions favour the establishment and development of the alien species and where natural defence mechanisms are lacking. This process can be compounded by the lack of knowledge and of early detection, prevention or control measures among local actors in relation to these new pests.

Pests can also extend their geographical ranges through natural spread over borders, especially under changing climatic patterns that create opportunities for pests to colonize new areas. These are considered transboundary pests, for which monitoring, preventive measures and international collaboration are key to minimizing impacts. For example, certain species of locusts in the Caucasus and Central Asia are known to expand their distribution area to the north, breed at higher altitudes in the mountains, hatch earlier, develop faster and produce a second annual generation under the influence of a changing climate.

Climate change and its variability are considered one of the factors enabling the establishment of introduced pests in new areas, as they may create environmental conditions conducive for their development. Also, the growing frequency and intensity of climatic disasters such as hurricanes and floods may foster the movement of pests, affect agricultural and food systems (and the livelihoods depending on them) and may increase the need for national and international food assistance. The impact of climate variability and extremes and of changes in climatic patterns on risks posed by pests needs further investigation, and countries and relevant scientific institutions are encouraged to cooperate to enhance their technical knowledge and better assess those impacts. This analysis may need to consider not only the implications of changing environmental conditions on plants, but also on related issues such as on food safety, nutrition and agro-biodiversity. Efforts for addressing these climate change and disaster risks are underpinned by international policy drivers such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Koronivia joint work on agriculture, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Pests spread as a result of human activities

Plant pests move between countries and continents, especially with consignments in trade, tourism and food aid. Currently, this human-driven movement of pests is likely to occur more than before, as international trade⁵ and travels⁶ increase their intensities and range.

In the past, the Europe and Central Asia region saw numerous introductions of plant pests and diseases from other parts of the world, with immense impacts on food security and on economic and social development. The risks of further introductions and movement of pests are increasing due to intensified international trade and changing climatic conditions. Information on pests posing threats to the region is available from the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO).⁷

Examples of recent incursions into Europe through trade or human mobility include *Xylella fastidiosa* devastating olive trees in southern Italy and red palm weevil wiping out palm trees in some parts of the

⁵ https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statistics_e/its2015_e/its15_merch_trade_product_e.htm

⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/209334/total-number-of-international-tourist-arrivals/>

⁷ <https://www.eppo.int/QUARANTINE/quarantine.htm>

Mediterranean. An advance pest risk analysis for potential threats and an implementation of preventive measures would be necessary to avoid such incursions.

Transboundary plant pests respect no borders: cooperation is essential

Countries take actions to protect their territories from the introduction and spread of new pests, usually through the adoption of sustainable preventative measures at farm and landscape level and through the establishment of relevant legislation and its implementation by national plant protection organizations (NPPOs), often in cooperation with other partners, public or private. Plant health activities are harmonized and phytosanitary measures are agreed on globally under the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). It is of key importance that countries maintain sufficient capacities of their NPPOs in order to operate sound and effective plant health systems, enabling them to timely identify and address challenges coming from the introduction and spread of plant pests and diseases.

For the successful management of transboundary plant pests and diseases (for example, locusts in the Caucasus and Central Asia and wheat rust diseases all over Europe and Central Asia), the careful monitoring of pest populations and the exchange of information and coordination of activities among countries is essential. It is indeed crucial that appropriate monitoring/surveillance systems be timely implemented to facilitate early detection and warning, as well as timely response, and thus reduce the negative impacts of such pests on food security. An example of recently developed tools for improving collection and analysis of standardized data, and also forecast, is the Automated System for Data Collection and Geographical Information System called “Caucasus and Central Asia Locust Management System” (CCALM), which concerns three locust pest species in that area. Similar approaches and tools available for the monitoring of wheat rust diseases in Europe are further being strengthened and expanded to Central and West Asia. Such enhanced monitoring should be accompanied by strengthening the capacities of countries, entities or individuals to apply relevant pest control measures effectively while protecting human health and environment.

It is important that countries share information on the status of pests in their territories, as a pest risk reduction measure and as a tool to build trust among them, especially in the context of international trade. Guidance on sharing such information and on other national reporting obligations (NROs) of countries under the IPPC is available on the International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP).⁸

Given the complexity of environmental impacts on the development of plant pests, as well as the impacts of pests on the environment, trade, development, livelihoods and food security, the effective planning and implementation of actions aimed at the reduction of pest impacts require good cooperation and information exchange not only among countries, but also with relevant governmental or non-governmental stakeholders within countries, to enable their participation. This is essential also to ensure the timely distribution of information and the building of awareness among the concerned institutions, traders and farmers. Examples of partners for NPPOs in the development and implementation of plant health strategies may include, for example, research/scientific institutes or universities, extension services, organizations of farmers, and organizations of importers or exporters of plants and plant products, as appropriate.

Role for international institutions

The WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) and the IPPC provide platforms for cooperation among countries on plant health issues. Countries may make relevant plant health-related information available on the International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP)⁹ or on the Phytosanitary Resources Page.¹⁰

⁸ <https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/information-exchange/nro/>

⁹ <https://www.ippc.int/en/>

¹⁰ <https://www.phytosanitary.info/>



FAO, and in particular its Plant Production and Protection Division (AGP),¹¹ promotes sustainable intensification of crop production, with a focus on activities to develop and strengthen national capacities to monitor and to respond effectively to transboundary and other important plant pests and diseases, and maintains a number of specific databases/information systems¹² relevant for agricultural production or plant protection. Furthermore, FAO's Emergency Prevention System¹³ promotes international cooperation, preventive approaches, monitoring, early warning, rapid response and integrated management. This is fully supported by FAO's Strategic Programme 5¹⁴ on resilience.

At the regional level, the exchange of expertise and information, as well as work on the development of effective plant health solutions, is supported by regional plant protection organizations (RPPOs).¹⁵ An example of a platform supporting the scientific cooperation in plant health in Europe and Central Asia is EUPHRESKO¹⁶ – a network of organizations funding research projects and coordinating national research in the phytosanitary area, supported by EPPO. There are also some subject-specific networks and initiatives operating in the region, offering potential for collaboration and synergies.

The Commission is requested to discuss current trends, challenges and opportunities, and progress made and to review evidence and to make recommendations to Members and stakeholders and to the Regional Conference in 2020 for consideration and action.

Proposed discussion topics:

- Regional situation of emerging plant pests in the context of the changing climate
- Economic and environmental impacts of plant pests in the context of climate change
- The most threatening emerging plant pests in the region and cooperation on plant health activities
- Efforts by countries and roles for international institutions in addressing plant health threats in the region
- Possible regional actions from the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia to assist the region's Member Countries in cooperating on plant health issues, including discussing current trends and progress made, reviewing evidence, and making recommendations aimed at improving strategies and measures to prevent incursions and manage pest outbreaks

2.3. Impact of global trade and human mobility on the health of agricultural crops and forests in Europe and Central Asia

This topic focuses on the importance and implications of pests (including pathogens) entering the Europe and Central Asia region. There is a wide range of examples that illustrate the potential these organisms have to damage the agriculture and forestry ecosystems.

Examples of areas not receiving sufficient attention in the past include:

- international trade of live plants, including forestry species;
- Internet trade (e-commerce); and
- human mobility.

Insufficient pest risk management in the global trade of live plants is often considered the main reason for the rise in the number of introduced pests over the last 25 to 30 years. Although EPPO monitors the distribution of pests that may potentially be introduced or cause serious damage in the region and the

¹¹ http://www.fao.org/agriculture/crops/agp-home/en/?no_cache=1

¹² <http://www.fao.org/agriculture/crops/information-resources/en/#c68639>

¹³ <http://www.fao.org/food-chain-crisis/how-we-work/plant-protection/en/>

¹⁴ <http://www.fao.org/about/what-we-do/so5/en/>

¹⁵ <https://www.ippc.int/en/external-cooperation/regional-plant-protection-organizations/>

¹⁶ <https://www.euphresco.net/>



spread of pests already established in the region, the mitigation measures available to reduce and prevent incursions and to manage pests that have already entered Europe are limited. ISPM 36 *Integrated measures for plants for planting*, adopted by the Commission of Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) in 2012, redresses the balance somewhat by emphasizing the roles of the producers of plants and countries of origin in making certain that exported live plants are free from pests of quarantine status for the importing country.

Internet trade in plants, plant products or other regulated articles of phytosanitary concern, as a pathway for the introduction and spread of pests, has been underestimated for quite a long time. However, its rapid development in recent years and the accompanying pest risks have attracted the attention of the phytosanitary community. Plants purchased through e-commerce often originate in a country or a continent different from the country of destination and may carry dangerous pests. In many cases, the shipping companies do not consider the phytosanitary import requirements of the country of destination and neglect phytosanitary controls both at the origin and at the country of destination. Those concerns related to e-commerce have been considered and addressed by the Commission of Phytosanitary Measures in CPM Recommendation R-05,¹⁷ adopted in 2014.

Another aspect that deserves greater attention is human mobility. Individuals moving between countries, regions and continents quite often carry with them plants or parts of plants, such as twig, fruit or some seeds, and in some cases these may harbour pests. Sometimes those plants are planted indoors or outdoors in the environment, where the pests may develop and spread. Usually, individual travellers do not undergo regular phytosanitary checks at border crossings, since that might require a lot of resources which may not be available. Nevertheless, other relevant activities may be considered, such as aiming at raising the public awareness on the issue. An example of such an activity may be the “Don’t Risk It” campaign launched by EPPO in 2013.¹⁸

Members will be invited to consider relevant international standards and recommendations and review pest risks associated with various pathways and the implementation of additional activities or measures, including inspection and diagnostic techniques needed to enhance the capacity of phytosanitary inspectors to detect new pests at points of entry. Members also will be invited to review the continuous training programmes to be put in place to maintain the abilities of phytosanitary staff to apply state-of-the-art protocols for pest detection and diagnosis, and they will be invited to consider incorporating elements relating to plant health into their national climate change policy strategies, especially to the adaptation plan. They also will be invited to consider adapting and implementing the principles of FAO’s Emergency Prevention System, which also cover plant pests and diseases (EMPRES).¹⁹ Members may also consider supporting the need to enhance the knowledge, skills and practices of farmers and extension services to address current and new pest threats to their crops.

Proposed discussion topics:

- Gaps in the management of pest risks in the global trade of live plants
- The importance of the capacity development at the national level

2.4. Information item: update on the International Year of Plant Health in 2020 and other relevant initiatives

The implementation of the strategies described under point 2.4, aiming at increasing the effectiveness of NPPO operations, requires that sufficient resources are allocated for plant health purposes. Currently, plant health is often not resourced at a level that would reflect its importance, which may be due to low levels of awareness on plant health impacts on food systems, the natural environment and the socio-economic development. These considerations have led the proposal to hold an International Year of

¹⁷ https://www.ippc.int/static/media/files/publication/en/2017/08/R_05_En_2017-08-23_Combined_5Pax7M6.pdf

¹⁸ https://www.eppo.int/RESOURCES/eppo_publications/don_t_risk_it

¹⁹ <http://www.fao.org/food-chain-crisis/how-we-work/plant-protection/en/>

Plant Health (IYPH) as an international event that could increase the awareness and understanding of plant health issues globally.

At the request of Finland, the year 2020 has been proclaimed the IYPH by the General Assembly of the United Nations.²⁰ The initiative of IYPH is aimed at strengthening global, regional, and national structures and activities dedicated to the protection of plant health through the raising of awareness among the main stakeholders and the public at all levels on the relevance of plant health for global issues related to food security, economic development and environmental protection.

Countries are encouraged to contribute to the IYPH initiative by promoting plant health and raising the awareness of stakeholders and the general public about its importance. The activities will most likely be coordinated by ministries of agriculture and executed by NPPOs. The activities may include, for example, the distribution of advocacy materials, presentations at national and international conferences, workshops, and more. NPPOs may need to cooperate with other stakeholders active in the area of plant protection, such as scientific institutes and universities, governmental and non-governmental agencies, representatives of relevant industries (such as exporters), international organizations, and others.

As the IYPH is forthcoming, countries will benefit from greater knowledge on the topic and the scope of this important event in order to be able to contribute to achieving its global success.

3. Advancing gender equality in the region, with special focus on FAO support to rural women in income diversification

The Secretariat will provide to the Members an update on progress made by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in advancing gender equality in the region and on the pilot activities carried out to support rural women in income diversification, entrepreneurship and rural crafts in the framework of the Regional Initiative for strengthening agrifood trade and market integration (RI2), contributing to FAO's Strategic Objective to build more inclusive and effective agrifood systems (SO4) and other related activities in the region.

4. Progress made by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia on the main recommendations of the Fortieth ECA

This agenda item will focus on updates on a) progress made on anti-microbial resistance (AMR) and b) follow-up regarding the recommendations of the assessment of the European Commission on Agriculture conducted in 2017.

It is expected that the Members will review the progress made and provide guidance for further implementation.

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²⁰ <https://www.ippc.int/en/news/plant-health-in-the-news/>



Draft agenda for the Forty-first Session of the European Commission on Agriculture

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2.1 Plant health in Europe and Central Asia - relevance, trends and developments
2.2 Plant pests and diseases in the context of climate change and climate variability, food security and biodiversity risks
2.3 Impact of global trade and human mobility on the health of agricultural crops and forests in Europe and Central Asia
2.4 Information item: update on the International Year of Plant Health in 2020, and other related initiatives
3. Advancing gender equality in the region, with special focus on FAO support in income diversification
4. Progress made by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia on the main recommendations of the Fortieth ECA
5. Election of members of the Executive Committee
6. Any other business
7. Date and place of the Forty-second Session of the ECA
8. Review and endorsement of the Report of the Commission
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