Plant Health: Strong rules for a better protection from plant pests

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By contributing to the early detection of plant pests and a more efficient monitor the new rules on **Plant Health** will also play an important role in delivering the objectives of the new "Farm to Fork Strategy".

Why is plant health so important?

Plants form the basis of our food chain: without plant production there would be neither food for humans nor feed for animals. They are also a part of the natural environment in which we live, as well as the landscape of our daily lives. Therefore, outbreaks of plant diseases may have devastating effects on the quality of our lives and our economy. Plant diseases may affect the livelihoods of farmers, nursery owners or traders, the quality and prices of our food as well as the condition of our forests and parks.

The United Nations has declared 2020 the International Year of Plant Health.

What about the economic impact of plant diseases?

The example of **Xylella fastidiosa,** a plant quarantine bacterium present in some regions **in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal** on some fruit tree species (like olives and almonds) and a series of ornamental plants (like oleander and lavender) illustrates the importance of plant health: the economic impact of this pest in the EU keeps increasing, especially as there is no curative solution available. Impact simulation indicates that Xylella fastidiosa has the potential of causing annual production losses of **5.5 billion euros** in a scenario of full spread across the entire EU.

An outbreak of **pine wood nematode in Portugal** has caused a significant economic loss for the local timber industry since 1999: it has destroyed millions of pine trees, negatively affecting the productivity of the timber processing industry. It has also increased costs as all pine wood needs to be heat-treated before it can leave the Portuguese territory.

What is the EU's added-value in this area?

Billions of plants and plant products move every year within the borderless internal market of the EU, or are imported from non-EU countries. New devastating pests from third countries, however, do not stop at the EU's borders. It is therefore necessary to adopt common rules at EU level concerning the **production, inspection, sampling, testing, import, movement and certification of plant materia**l, as well as the **notification, detection or eradication of pests** that the plant material may host. This is important in order to ensure the same level of phytosanitary protection within the EU and a level playing field for the numerous EU producers and traders.

What are the new rules on plant health?

The new rules will help protect the EU against the introduction of new pests as well as tackling existing pests more effectively.

The new plant health policy focuses particularly on **screening for new devastating plant pests worldwide, prevention of entry of such plant pests and, if arrived within the EU territory, early detection and eradication**. It is based on the conclusion that we need to allocate more resources at an early stage to avoid the destruction of the Union's agricultural production potential or the environment by those pests.

It sets out detailed rules for the **early detection and eradication of Union quarantine pests** if found present in the EU territory. These rules establish obligations for the notification of outbreaks by professional operators, surveys and multiannual survey programmes, demarcation of areas for the purpose of eradication, as well as enhanced requirements for the priority pests.

Under the new Regulation that enters into force on 14 December, **all Member States will have to immediately proceed with the eradication of a Union quarantine pest** if found present in an area where it was not yet known.

How are the pests now grouped?

Under the Regulation, **all regulated plant pests** are now under three main categories:

Union quarantine pests: Not present at all in the Union territory (e.g. Citrus black spot) or, if present, just locally and under official control (e.g. *Xylella* which is present in a few demarcated areas only). Strict measures must be taken to prevent their entry or spread within the EU.

Protected zone quarantine pests: Present in most parts of the Union, but still known to be absent in so-called 'protected zones'. For example Phylloxera on grapevines: present in the Union territory except in Cyprus. Restrictive measures are in place to avoid the introduction of these pests from infested areas into the protected zones.

Regulated non-quarantine pests: Widely present in the EU territory but plant reproductive material on the market should be guaranteed free or almost free from the pests since they can have a serious impact on the quality and economic value of many agricultural crops as well as forestry and fruit plants. For example, Sharka (or plum pox virus) is known to be harmful to the production of plums in the EU, therefore certified plum trees are not allowed to be marketed if contaminated by this virus.

What are "priority pests"?

Twenty Union quarantine pests with the most severe potential impacts on the economy, environment and/or EU society have been identified as 'priority pests'. They are subject to enhanced measures concerning surveys, action plans for their eradication, contingency plans and simulation exercises. The prioritisation allows the EU and the individual Member States to focus resources in the most efficient manner for the protection of the agricultural production and environment. EU co-financing is possible if the legal requirements are met. Examples are *Xylella fastidiosa*, citrus greeningandcitrus black spot with major impact on agricultural crops, and the Asian longhorn beetle and the Japanesebeetle with major impact on forestry.

Are imports of plants and plant products from non-EU countries affected?

The import of most plants and plant products from non-EU countries is allowed, subject to certain conditions. Some plants are prohibited or subject to very strict requirements if a risk assessment indicates that this is necessary due to the pests they may host**. An implementing Regulation sets out the precise rules** with the lists of regulated pests, regulated commodities, import prohibitions and requirements for import and internal movement, reinforcing the Union's phytosanitary protection.

All living plant material (entire plants, fruits, vegetables, cut flowers, seeds, tubers, etc.) and some plant products (e.g. wood of certain tree species) can **only be imported into the EU if accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate confirming their compliance with the EU legislation**. The only exceptions relate to 5 fruit species: bananas, coconuts, dates, pineapples and durians do not need a phytosanitary certificate for import into the Union.

The **import of 38 so called 'high risk plants or plant products' is provisionally prohibited** as long as no full risk assessment has been carried out to determine if such imports should be acceptable and, if yes, under which conditions.

Are passengers allowed to bring with them plants/plant products from their trips outside the EU?

Passengers are no longer allowed to introduce into the EU any living plant material (entire plants, fruits, vegetables, cut flowers, seeds, tubers, etc.) from non-EU countries if they are not accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate. Information material in the form of posters and a video are available in all EU languages for warning passengers entering the Union.

What are the rules concerning plant passports?

Plant passports in the form of harmonised labels have to accompany the **movement of all plants for planting within the internal market**, at a business to business level. This is important in order to ensure the absence of quarantine pests, compliance with regulated non-quarantine restrictions and traceability for this important category of plants, which mostly consists of plant reproductive material or plants in pots.

However, in order to avoid disproportionate administrative burdens, no plant passports need to be issued when the plants are transferred to non-professional final consumers such as flower or other retail shops.

Why are professional operators key in the implementation of the legislation?

The new Regulation recognises the role that professional operators have to play in the safe production and movement of healthy plants/plant products.

Professional operators have to **notify any quarantine pest they find in the areas of their control**. For the purpose of more efficient controls, the professional operators have to be registered by the competent authorities. The professional operators also have to ensure the traceability of the regulated plants/plant products they receive from and submit to other professional operators.

Professional operators will be authorised to issue plant passports, under the supervision of the competent authorities. To that purpose, they need a specific authorization, subject to specific conditions and regular controls to ensure that their production place is free from any quarantine pest.

What is the role of the national authorities?

Member States' competent authorities play a key role in the implementation of these rules. They are responsible for a great array of activities such as surveys, notification of pest occurrences, eradication of outbreaks, contingency plans, simulation exercises, controls at import, registration of professional operators, authorisation of professional operators to issue plant passports and other attestations.

In this respect, the Plant Health Regulation is complemented by the Regulation on Official Controls which sets out the obligations of Member States with regards to official controls and other official activities.

What is the role of science?

In addition to data from research projects, all technical requirements are based on specific scientific data, pest risk analysis, impact assessment and survey results: listing of quarantine pests, priority pests, high risk plants, import requirements, protected zones, etc. The **European Food Safety Authority and the Commission's Joint Research Centre** are the Commission's main providers of scientific input, but also the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO) and national risk assessors provide assistance.

How does the EU Plant Health Regulation fit in the international framework?

The EU and all Member States are contracting parties of the International Plant Protection Convention, a multilateral treaty under the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. The EU legislation is based on the principles of the Convention and the IPPC standards. Furthermore, Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures are laid down by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). EU legal acts are notified to WTO and its members for information and consultation.

At regional level, the EU and all Member States are involved in the work of the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO). It provides technical information concerning pest status, pest risk analysis, standards on phytosanitary measures and diagnostic protocols.

The United Nations have declared **2020 as the International Year for Plant Health**, providing a unique opportunity to raise the awareness of the international community on the importance of healthy plants.

For more information

Plant health and biosecurity

EFSA & Plant Health

Q&A on Official Controls

Q&A on RASFF@40

[1]Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 on protective measures against pests of plants

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