CIHEAM actions to combat X. fastidiosa in the Mediterranean region

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CIHEAM actions to combat *X. fastidiosa* in the Mediterranean region

Cosimo Lacirignola[1], Maurizio Raeli[2]

[1] CIHEAM - Paris
[2] CIHEAM, Istituto Agronomico Mediterraneo di Bari - Italy

For its strategic role in the Mediterranean agricultural area, CIHEAM, an intergovernmental organization gathering 13 member countries, could not turn a blind eye to the serious phytosanitary emergency due to the introduction of *Xylella fastidiosa* in Puglia (southern Italy), a region which hosts one of its four Institutes, the CIHEAM Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (MAIB).

CIHEAM Bari, which was founded in 1962, has hosted more than 40 000 trainees, technicians, experts, researchers and public officers; the activities that it has been carrying out for more than 50 years have involved 3 000 people, 650 scientific institutions of 50 different countries; at present, it plays an active role in 90 research and cooperation projects.

The phytosanitary status of Mediterranean crops, and, in particular, that relating to the "Certification of the plant propagating material" and to "Quarantine", has always been strategic for the Mediterranean agriculture. To this end, in 1985, jointly with the FAO, CIHEAM Bari launched the Master of Science course on "Sanitation and Certification of the Plant Propagating Material" which is now a course on the "Integrated Pest Management of Mediterranean Crops".

Over the years, awareness-raising and training actions on these topics have been backed up by the promotion of meetings, research networks with several Mediterranean scientific institutions, and of bilateral research and cooperation projects (with Albania, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Kosovo, Malta, Serbia, Syria, Tunisia, etc.) in which CIHEAM Bari has instilled its long experience gained in the regional territory. In fact, it has been involved, together with institutions and the phytosanitary service, in activities of Voluntary Certification of the plant propagation material and of monitoring and eradication of some major quarantine diseases (sharka of stone fruits, citrus tristeza, grapevine golden flavescence, fireblight of pome fruits, etc.).

Thus, CIHEAM Bari has also contributed to finding solutions to the serious threat posed by *Xylella fastidiosa* to the Puglia olive industry. This is witnessed by the scientific publications on this topic, 13 Master of Science or PhD theses in collaboration with other Italian scientific institutions, the training of over 300 local and foreign technicians on investigation and diagnostic techniques, about 45 000 diagnostic tests on plants and/or insects, participation in some major national (e.g. Mix-CoDiRO) and international (e.g. Horizon 2020, *Xf*-Actors) research projects. A ceaseless activity which has yielded fruitful results mainly in the framework of plant pathology diagnostics (technical protocols of DTBIA and real-time LAMP techniques, which are reliable, highly sensitive, ready to use) and of IT tools for large-scale pest surveillance (XylApp and XylWeb).

The correct scientific investigation, the tight collaboration with scientific and institutional operators from different countries and timely measures are crucial for tackling such emergencies. This is why CIHEAM has promoted the organization of two international workshops on *Xylella fastidiosa* and the Olive Quick Decline Syndrome (OQDS) which have triggered so much interest: the first in collaboration with IPPC-FAO (International Plant Protection Convention) in the framework of the CIHEAM-FAO Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2015, with the involvement of NEPPO and EPPO (Near East and Euro-Mediterranean Plant Protection Organizations), addressed to officers, technicians and experts of Mediterranean and Middle-East National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs); the second with the International Olive Council (IOC) with the purpose

to provide updated information on the current situation of the infection in order to propose recommendations to prevent, identify, and combat the OQDS in IOC member countries worldwide.

“Plant Health” is one of the 15 pillars in the CIHEAM Strategic Agenda 2025 which will enable CIHEAM to serve the Mediterranean area through its 50 years of experience in the field of education and training, research and cooperation in agriculture. An ambitious programme which aims at: (i) the protection of the planet struggling against triple waste (not only waste of food and natural resources but also of knowledge); (ii) food security and correct nutrition with the use of sustainable agriculture and promotion of the Mediterranean diet; (iii) inclusive development (investing in new generations and women) and development of marginal areas; and (iv) understanding the root causes of crises (migrations, climate change, emerging diseases) through risk prevention and management of international tensions.