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Agricultural statistics of Albania show that fruit trees have decreased by 30% from 1991 to 1996, transforming Albania from a fruit exporting to a fruit importing country. During 1996, about 80,000 tons of fresh fruits were imported, representing more than half the national consumption. The nursery activity for the production of grafted plants before 1990 was organised in public farms and satisfied the national need producing annually more than 1 million graftings for fruit species, 40% of which was stone fruits. At present, this public activity has ceased and the increasing demand of domestic market for grafted plants is met by the importation of grafted plants and, to a lesser extent, supplied by small private nurseries.

Beyond the problems of the national fruit industry, recent studies carried out in Albania have shown a compromised sanitary status of stone fruit trees due to the presence of virus diseases. As in many other Eastern-European countries, the presence of Sharka is the major threat for the stone fruit industry. Surveys to monitor the incidence and distribution of PPV in the stone fruit-growing areas of nursery activities and fruit production offer a complicated picture identifying PPV-free areas, and low and high-rate PPV infected regions.

Beside strict quarantine regulations applied to the importation of new propagating materials, results of such investigations provide the basis for the evaluation and launching of a national

certification programme which is highly desirable (Myrta *et al.*, 1994, Di Terlizzi *et al.*, 1996). The importance of virus-free certified material in establishing new orchards is not only an essential step for technicians, but also for private operators, farmers and policy-makers in the country. This, however, should be implemented without delay for minimising the risk of disseminating graft-transmissible diseases with uncontrolled distribution of propagating material from infected mother trees of local or imported origin. At the same time, the eradication of a quarantine agents (i.e. Sharka) must be organised in the framework of a collaboration between quarantine measures and certification programme for stone fruits to be improved in Albania. Considering the small size and limited number of orchards along the West Coast, the eradication of the disease should be possible. In this context, PPV-free areas would ensure the production of certified plants and the establishment of new healthy orchards in the near future.

In the framework of the co-operation between the Albanian Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF) (Plant Protection Institute and Pomology Institute) and Italian Institutions (Mediterranean Agronomic Institute and University of Bari), a long-term project was envisaged: "Production, conservation and use of certified propagative material for the development of qualified nursery activity in Albania" (Anonymous, 1996). This project includes stone fruits, grapevine, citrus and olive (Tab. 1).

This quality activity need to develop adequate legislation for the organisation of quarantine and certification services and the enforcement of technical protocols dealing with such subjects. In 1993, the Albanian Parliament issued the law Nr. 7659 "On seeds and grafted plants", and the law Nr. 7662 "On plant protection service". The first law provides for the establishment of legal bases for the activities concerning plant material and the second organises the plant protection service. In 1996, by enforcing the former laws, the MAF Regulation Nr. 163 issued several technical protocols dealing with the production, conservation and use of certified propagating material in Albania. In the same regulation, the measures were given to eradicate quarantine agents (Sharka, Erwinia), which could compromise a successful certification programme.

The infrastructures needed for such a programme (laboratory equipment for phytopathological diagnosis, glasshouse for biological indexing, screenhouse for the conservation of healthy plant material, and an *in vitro* laboratory for premultiplication activity, etc.) are to be supplied by the project. The training of the technical staff will be organised in collaboration with IAM-B and the University of Bari. An important aspect of the programme is the safeguard of Albanian germplasm for fruit trees, already well-established in different ecological areas of the country. Clonal and sanitary selection of native cultivars should improve their pomological qualities and their chance to be used in the future by local growers.

Recently, another collaborative project was established between the MAF and the Dutch Government on "Strengthening the plant protection services in Albania" (Anonymous, 1997), and deals more specifically with quarantine issues. This new scientific support well the objectives of the certification programme.

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Tab. 1. Scheme proposal for the organisation of a certification programme in Albania

Steps	Requirements and localisation	Responsible Institutions	Control Agencies	Controls	
				Trueness to-type	Sanitary
Conservation for premultiplication	Screen house	MAF	PPI	-	+
	PPI-Durres	Scientific Institutions	PI	+	-
Premultiplication	Screen house	MAF	PPI	-	+
	PI-Vlore	Scientific Institutions	PI	+	-
Multiplication	Open field	Private companies or nursery association	SASP	+	-
			DDAF	-	+
Propagation	Open field	Private companies or nursery association	SASP	+	-
			DDAF	-	+

MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Food (National Authority)
DDAF	District Department of Agriculture and Food (Regional Authority)
PPI	Plant Protection Institute (National Scientific Institution)
PI	Pomology Institute (National Scientific Institution)
SASP	State Agency for Seeds and Grafted Plants (National Professional Agency)