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Viroids are subviral plant pathogens whose genome consists of a small (240-370 nucleotide residues) circular RNA with a high degree of self-complementarity in its sequence (Diener, 1991; Flores *et al.*, 1997). In some well characterized examples, it was demonstrated that viroid infection cause plant diseases which affect agronomic quality. Hop stunt viroid (HSVd), as its name indicate, was first described as the causal agent of a stunt disease of hops in Japan, but since, has been found in several plant species, most of them fruit trees like citrus, pear, peach or plum (Shikata, 1990). These plants either showed specific disorders or were symptomless. The diseases known as cachexia of citrus (Diener *et al.*,1988; Semancik *et*

al.,1988; Levy and Hadidi, 1993) and dapple fruit of plums and peaches (Sano *et al.*,1989) were associated with sequence variants of HSVd. Previous results indicated the presence of HSVd in additional hosts such as apricot, almond and pomegranate (Astruc *et al.*, 1996; Kofalvi *et al.*, 1997; Cañizares *et al.*, 1998, 1999) on the basis of detection of HSVd by nonradioactive molecular hybridisation.

An extensive survey in field-grown apricot trees in the productive areas of Murcia (Spain) demonstrate that 81% of apricots were infected with this viroid (Cañizares *et al.*, 1998).

In an attempt to further evaluate the presence of the HSVd in the different Mediterranean countries, we assayed apricot trees by applying the non-radioactive molecular detection technique for viroid detection. Samples from apricot trees were collected during the spring of 1997 and 1998 from Morocco, Turkey, Cyprus, Albania, Malta and Greece and then processed.

Results showed that HSVd was present in Morocco (in 3 of 50 samples), in Turkey (in 1 of 49), in Greece (in 3 of 69 samples) and in Cyprus (in 9 of 86 samples). The viroid was not detected in Albania (in 15 samples) and Malta (in 19 samples). These results were confirmed by Northern blot analysis and RT-PCR. A detailed characterisation of the new isolates recovered on survey is in progress.

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