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UE-DGI/CIHEAM Study: Production and exchange of virus- free plant propagating material in the Mediterranean region

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One of the long-term objectives of the Barcelona Declaration adopted at the Conference of 27 and 28 November 1995, was the progressive establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean free-trade area. Considering the high importance of agriculture for the economy of many Mediterranean countries, the free movement of agricultural products and especially of plant propagating material is of utmost importance for its further development.

The progressive worsening of the sanitary status of the fruit crops in the Mediterranean, the presence of some devastating and quarantine diseases (i.e. tristeza, sharka, fire blight) and strict certification rules on the plant propagation material, adopted by the EU member countries, threaten to isolate Southern Mediterranean countries from the rest of the market. Accordingly, there is an urgent need for upgrading the sanitary and quality levels of fruit nursery production in these countries giving them the opportunity to compete in the international market and to become an active partner in the exchange of plant propagating material and fruit products.

Overall objective

The Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (MAIB), after a very positive experience in the leadership of research networks (Mediterranean Networks on Integrated Pest Management of Fruit Crops) dealing with certification of fruit crops, has been charged to promote and coordinate a study on "*Production and exchange of virus-free plant propagating material in the Mediterranean region*". The initiative has aroused great interest resulting in the participation of 11 Mediterranean countries.

The study aimed to define and propose common phytosanitary rules regarding production, conservation and use of plant propagating material in

order to facilitate the movement of this material throughout the Mediterranean seen as a free-trade area.

Objectives

Specific objectives of the study were:

- to assess the current situation on factors (laws, facilities, human resources, etc.) limiting implementation of an appropriate certification program in participating countries;
- to analyse fruit industry, in particular the nursery sector in the different Mediterranean countries and the level of their self-sufficiency;
- to analyse the sanitary status of the main cultivated species with particular attention to the presence of quarantine and economically important diseases;
- to promote certification as the unique tool which guarantees quality of nursery productions and a key point for the development of the fruit tree industry;
- to identify, for each country, the critical points which still obstruct the application of well-defined and internationally accepted rules related to the production of sanitarily improved plant propagating material.

Study organization

The study was intended to collect updated and detailed data on the current phytosanitary situation in each participating country as the basis for elaborating a common document and identifying the needs of each country. Some of the information used was collected from previous surveys carried out by Italian scientific institutions (MAIB and University of Bari) in the Mediterranean.

The study resulted in a phytosanitary proposal for the Mediterranean seen as a free-trade area covering a spectrum of topics addressing the following problems:

- phytosanitary problems of Mediterranean fruit tree industry;
- certification issues (legislation, facilities and human resources) in Mediterranean countries;
- legislation aspects and technical features of the certification service;
- proposal for the sanitary improvement of Mediterranean fruit crops and actions to protect the health of typical productions.

Students trained at the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari within “Integrated Pest Management of Mediterranean fruit crops Courses” were in the first line in promoting and implementing this study.

Meeting and visits

A round table on “*Production and exchange of virus-free plant propagating material in the Mediterranean region*” (Bari, 16 October 1999) was attended by decision-maker participants (Technical and Advisory Committee) appointed by Ministers of Agriculture of 11 Mediterranean countries and experts from international institutions (EPPO, MAIB and University of Bari). Participants visited certification facilities respecting EU standards in Apulia Region and a National Conference on “Certification of nursery production”.

Beneficiaries and impact of the Study

The study should benefit decision-maker participants by upgrading their level of knowledge through the exchange of experience with other participants and by giving them the opportunity to use this document as guideline for the implementation of a certification program of fruit tree propagating material.

The output of this study represents the first step towards the establishment of a free-trade area for plant products in the Mediterranean in view of which, a proposal for a common certification policy in the Mediterranean is put forward. This proposal, already discussed in the framework of former CIHEAM/DGI Research Network activities is now submitted at the decision-maker level of Ministries of Agriculture. Besides the harmonisation of the phytosanitary legislative aspects and technical protocols to be used in the certification process, the study draws a clear picture of the problems (legislative, facilities, human skills) that Mediterranean countries will encounter in the implementation of certification programmes and proposes a project that might be possibly financed by potential donors to overcome constraints and fill gaps. This should allow a possible integration of the North and South shores of the Mediterranean in the future regional market.

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STUDY

Production and exchange of virus-free
plant propagating material in the
Mediterranean



PROJECT PROPOSAL

Actions to promote sanitary
improvement of Mediterranean fruit
crops and to ensure the food safety of
local products