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Agriculture position in the overall economy

The contribution of agriculture accounts for 5% of GDP and 10% of gainful employment. Agriculture still continues to be significant because it provides employment to a relatively large percentage of people in rural areas, it is a strategic supplier of food, earns large sums of foreign exchange through exports, provides raw materials for manufacturing and helps maintaining the rural environment. The broad agricultural sector is dominated by crop production, which accounts for 65% of added value. Cypriot agriculture is characterized by crop diversity with leading crops of vegetables, potatoes, citrus, vines, fruit trees, olives and cereals. Fruits and vegetables constitute the most important sector of Cyprus agriculture. They account for about 20% of arable land but over 60% of the value of crop production and over 30% of total agricultural output. They account also for 20 to 30% of all domestic exports. The most important export products are potatoes, citrus, table grapes and some vegetables.

Fruit tree industry

Grapevine. Wine grapes constitute a major crop in Cyprus. They are mainly grown in semi-mountainous and mountainous regions, almost under rain-fed conditions. Wine grape plantations occupy more than 13% of the total cultivated agricultural land and the value of their production accounts for slightly over 7% of crop production. The total area under wine grapes is about 18.000 ha of predominantly poor, rain-fed land, while table grapes are grown

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in 1800 ha of fertile irrigated land along the south-western coastal plain. The dominant wine-grape cultivar is the local Mavro, followed by the also local Aspro or ynisteri. Recently, however, selected introduced cultivars are used for replanting old and unproductive Mavro vineyards. The main table-grape cultivar is Sultanina.

Fruit trees. Deciduous fruit trees represent an economically important group of crops in Cyprus and are a major source of revenue for people living in mountainous and semi-mountainous areas, although in recent years the cultivation of some early cultivars has expanded to the plain.

The cultivation of deciduous fruit trees covers an area of 2500 ha with about 800.000 trees and a production of 10,800 ton.

Citrus. Citrus is one of the major export crops of Cyprus covering an area of about 8300 ha with 2,6 millions of trees. The main varieties are Valencia, Washington Navel and Jaffa oranges, the local Lapithos lemon, Marsh seedless and Star Ruby grapefruit, Clementine, Ortanique and the local Arakapa mandarin. Recently some new varieties of mandarin and orange have been introduced. The production in 1998 was about 160.000 tons.

Olives. Olive tree cultivation constitutes a traditionally important activity in Cyprus. In 1998, olive orchards in Cyprus covered an area of about 6,600 ha, representing 5.6% of cropped area, with about 2.5 millions of productive trees. Olive trees are grown all over the island in compact groves, irrigated or not and scattered on uncultivated rain fed land.

Average yearly production of olives is about 12.000 tons and the production of oil around 2,500 tons. In recent years about 500 tons of olive oil was imported annually.

Sanitary status of crops

Fruit trees. The cultivation of stone fruits was restricted to the mountainous areas, in very small

fields counting very often only few trees per grower. Due to this fact little attention was paid to the sanitary status of stone fruits. The situation has changed rapidly after the expansion of some early cultivars in the semi-mountainous areas and in the plains. After the discovery of Plum Pox Virus in 1982 regular surveys were carried out. Plum Pox Virus is the main problem of stone fruit cultivation rendering some heavily infected areas unsuitable for growing valuable stone fruit cultivars. Information about other virus diseases occurring in stone fruits is scant. However, Prunus Necrotic Ringspot Virus seems to be widespread. Prune Dwarf Virus and other virus and virus-like diseases seem to be rare.

Fire blight was reported in 1984 for the first time and caused severe damages on susceptible pear and apple cultivars. In the following years many thousands of trees were destroyed. The disease has not been since then in epidemic form. So far there has not been any systematic survey carried out concerning pome fruit virus and virus-like diseases in the country.

Citrus. In 1986 a virus indexing programme was initiated in order to determine the problems and sanitary status of citrus in Cyprus.

The main virological problems identified since 1986 are Psorosis A (scaly bark), citrus impietratura (mostly on grapefruit), citrus exocortis and related viroids, citrus cachexia viroid, stubborn (Spiroplasma citri) and tristeza.

The citrus tristeza virus was first detected in 1968. In a survey, which started in 1992 an average of CTV incidence of 5.5% and a disease prevalence in 262 groves of 26.6% were revealed. A project for the control of CTV was initiated in 1992. It has two basic objectives: a) mapping of CTV infection and b) removal of CTV-infected trees or groves.

Recently a clean stock programme has been set up by the use of the shoot tip grafting technique for native varieties and virus-free material of introduced varieties.

Grapevines. An indexing programme for the detection and identification of the main virus and virus-like diseases of grapevine was initiated in 1992, using biological indexing on woody indicators and herbaceous host plants and the Eliza technique. The results revealed the presence of eight virus and virus-like diseases, of which fan leaf, yellow mosaic, leaf roll and rugose wood appeared to be of major economic importance. Grapevine leaf roll is the most widespread virus disease of grapevines in Cyprus and it was detected in virtually all introduced and local varieties at an average incidence of about 80% and 45% respectively. Four different types of CLRaV, designated I, II, III and IV have been identified.

From an epidemiological study, which was conducted starting from 1992, the role of mealy bug has been established for the natural transmission of CLRaV, while for other closterovirus related diseases, such as rupestris stem pitting and corky bark, it is still under investigation.

Certification programme

The production and marketing of propagating material is controlled by the legislation, which is being implemented since 1996. The implementation is carried out by a board under the Department of Agriculture with the participation of the Agricultural Research Institute and the private nurseries. The supervision of the nursery establishments and the inspection of their production are carried out by authorized inspectors of the Department of Agriculture.

Plant Quarantine

Plant quarantine is controlled by relevant legislation for the importation of agricultural produce. Plant propagation material is mainly introduced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment and this material is maintained at the post-entry quarantine station until all necessary tests are completed. After the release from the

quarantine station, the material is subjected to pomological evaluation.