

Global body adopts new measures against spread of plant pests

The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) is a 1951 multilateral treaty deposited with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) that aims to secure coordinated, effective action to prevent and to control the introduction and spread of pests. This body, charged with keeping global trade in plants and plant products safe, has now adopted several new phytosanitary standards aimed at preventing destructive agricultural and environmental pests from jumping borders and spreading internationally.

The standardized norms developed by the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) cover a range of strategies and techniques used to prevent the introduction and spread of plant diseases and pests to new environments, thereby avoiding their often-devastating impacts on biodiversity, food security and trade.

"This is challenging work with high stakes: each year an estimated 10-16 percent of our global harvest is lost to plant pests. A loss estimated at \$220 billion", said FAO Deputy Director-General Maria Helena Semedo at the opening of this year's IPPC annual meeting in Rome.

Reliefweb.int reports on FAO data claiming that some \$1.1 trillion worth of agricultural products are traded internationally each year, with food accounting for over 80 percent of that total.

New measures adopted this week by the IPPC's governing body, the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM), include:

- Standard on the use of various temperature treatments against agricultural pests. The standard aims at ensuring that such treatments are consistently and effectively used in different operational contexts.
- Revised standard for sanitation of wood packing materials. An existing standard, known as ISPM-15, was updated to include the use of sulphuryl fluoride — a gas insecticide — and new-generation heating technologies that employ microwave and radio frequency waves to generate pest-killing temperatures deep inside wood products.
- An expanded standard on the use of heat vapour to kill Oriental Fruit Flies. The highly destructive, fruit-attacking *Bactrocera dorsalis* originated in Asia but has now spread to at least 65 countries. Its presence in Africa, where it first appeared in 2003, costs the continent an estimated \$2 billion

in annual losses due to fruit export bans. The control technique outlined under the new measure kills 99.98 percent of the bug's eggs and larvae when used correctly.

The IPPC Commission also approved revisions that streamline existing standards targeting fruit flies to make it easier for countries to comply with them and improve their effectiveness, as well as revisions to a standard that establishes best-practice benchmarks for the operation of national pest surveillance programs.

And it endorsed new diagnostic protocols for sudden oak death, a fungi-like organism of unknown origin that attacks a wide range of trees and shrubs in nurseries, introduced into western North America and western Europe through the ornamental plants trade. And it approved new diagnostic protocol for tospoviruses, which affect 1,000 plant species and are causing devastating losses, especially to tomato, potato and squash and cucumber yields.

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