

Deepening the roots of collaboration on phytosanitary research

“ This ERA-NET is great news for European Plant Health. It will help protect our agriculture, horticulture, forestry and environment from the increasing threats that quarantine plant pests and diseases pose. ”

Plants are important both for Europe's economy and the environment. Agriculture, horticulture and forestry provide food, plant products and raw materials, as well as ornamental plants that contribute significantly to our quality of life. Environmental plants are the building blocks of habitats and are an invaluable natural resource and heritage. It is the role of Plant Health to protect all of Europe's plants from the new threats that are emerging such as foreign plant pests and diseases, and invasive plant species. Plant protection is therefore an issue of mounting importance for economic reasons as well as for biosecurity. The EUPHRESO ERA-NET project aims to intertwine national programmes of phytosanitary research at the Member State level and to promote increased cooperation, thereby contributing to the preservation of one of Europe's most important economic and natural resources. The work will also foster expertise in this challenging field and thus improve Europe's scientific capabilities and competitive position.

Most people do not think of plants when considering their country's economic and natural resources. However, agriculture, horticulture and forestry are important parts of the European economy, and plants found in the natural environment represent a valuable social, natural and economic resource. Increasingly, natural habitats are coming under threat from foreign plant pests, diseases and invasive species, as typified by the Dutch elm disease epidemics of the twentieth century. The main aim of Europe's Plant Health policy makers is to protect Europe from quarantine plant pests and diseases.

Today, there are multiple threats to plant health that must be addressed. The accelerating trend of globalisation has brought Europe new trading partners from all parts of the globe, and has increased the volume and diversity of trade in plant material. Unfortunately, this has also simultaneously opened the door to unwanted imports such as foreign pests, disease and invasive plant species which threaten agriculture and the environment alike. The recent enlargement of the European Union has exacerbated matters by further expanding Europe's borders. The potential impact of climate change on plant life is not fully understood as yet, though it has been suggested that growing zones may shift dramatically and many foreign plant pests may also be able to invade Europe if conditions change to suit them. Plants, specifically our agricultural crops, have

also been identified as a possible target for terrorist attacks in the future. Hence, Plant Health plays an important role in the biosecurity of Europe's food supply and the environment. Finally, the financial costs of not dealing effectively with these hazards should not be overlooked. To date, the research intended to address these risks to Plant Health has been conducted almost entirely at national level, even though Plant Health policy is determined at EU level. Increased research coordination is therefore needed, to better support and underpin European Plant Health policy, so that it can tackle the increasing number of economic and environmental threats.

Reaping what you sow

Any success in meeting these challenges at the European level must be driven by strong collaboration between governmental ministries, research institutes and other stakeholders at national level. Since this prerequisite is presently lacking, the EUPHRESO ERA-NET project intends to plant the seeds for this much needed cooperation.

The EUPHRESO consortium represents a critical mass of 24 organisations that belong primarily to national ministries of agriculture. A total of 17 countries are represented, 15 of which are Member States while the other 2 are Associated States. The goal of the coordination action is threefold: 1) to develop European phytosanitary research priorities and agendas; 2) to optimise the use of the



Coordination Action EUPHRESKO



“ *The competitiveness of European crop production and the health of plants in our environment depend on good biosecurity. By combining collective knowledge more effectively and improving the efficiency of research funding, EUPHRESKO will help protect Europe’s plant-related resources against the growing number of exotic threats.* ”

Full title:

Coordination of European Phytosanitary (Quarantine Plant Health) Research

Research field:

Plant Health

Coordinator:

UK: Central Science Laboratory

Partners:

- UK: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, Plant Health Division
- Austria: Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment & Water Management
- Austria: Austrian Agency for Health & Food Safety
- Belgium: Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research
- Belgium: Federal Public Service for Public Health, Food Chain Safety & Environment
- Bulgaria: Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry, National Service for Plant Protection
- Cyprus: Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources & Environment, Agricultural Research Institute
- Czech Republic: Ministry of Agriculture, National Agency for Agricultural Research
- Denmark: Directorate for Food, Fisheries and Agri Business
- Finland: Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry
- France: Ministry of Agriculture and Fishery, General Food Directorate
- France: National Institute of Agronomic Research
- Germany: Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection
- Germany: Federal Biological Research Centre for Agriculture & Forestry
- Ireland: Department of Agriculture & Food
- Italy: Ministry of Agricultural and Forestry Policy, Research and Experimentation Unit
- Italy: Agricultural Research Council
- Netherlands: Ministry of Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality
- Netherlands: The Plant Protection Service
- Slovenia: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food

limited human and financial resources to carry out this research; and 3) to bolster Europe’s knowledge base and prestige in this increasingly important field.

EUPHRESKO enjoys a wide base of support, including endorsements from the EC Directorate General for Health and Consumer Affairs (DG SANCO), the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). EUPHRESKO will also seek to establish additional strategic partnerships with other stakeholder organisations within Europe, as well as national and international bodies outside the European Union.

Bearing fruit

The EUPHRESKO Coordinator, the Central Science Laboratory (the UK Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, known as DEFRA), and the other project partners, have defined a number of key actions that are central to achieving EUPHRESKO’s commendable goals. Getting national entities to engage

in dialogue is crucial. This will facilitate the sharing of information, including best practice for research management. All existing links between national phytosanitary research programmes must be identified and then enhanced. Countries lagging behind in the establishment of phytosanitary research infrastructures must be encouraged to act. Confidence in the instruments and tools needed to facilitate increased transnational research collaboration must be built through pilot research projects. Links to regional, European and international plant protection organisations must also be strengthened.

Common research agendas will be determined based on shared priorities. Only then can targeted research projects be designed and executed through transnational activities, after the project ends in 2010. The EUPHRESKO consortium intends to achieve this by establishing a long-term network of phytosanitary research funders that will endure well beyond the 51-month lifetime of the project.

- Spain: The Plant Protection Department of The National Institute of Agriculture Research
- Switzerland: Federal Office of Agriculture
- Turkey: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, General Directorate of Agricultural Research

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