

REPORT

Information Exchange International Phytosanitary Portal Training Workshop for the Caribbean Region



The Blue Room, Faculty of Engineering
The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine Campus, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

November 14 - 18, 2005



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1. 0 OPENING SESSION

1.1 Opening Remarks

Mr. Wayne De Chi, Agricultural Health and Food Safety Specialist, IICA Office, Trinidad & Tobago, in his capacity as Workshop Chairman, welcomed the participants and informed them of organizational matters. Mr. De Chi expressed the hope that participants would enjoy their brief stay here, and would contribute actively toward a successful and fruitful workshop.

He expressed thanks to the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) Secretariat for the organization of the workshop, and to the participants for their attendance despite their busy schedules.

At this point Mr. De Chi introduced Ms. Carol Thomas as the new Regional Agricultural Health and Food Safety Specialist, based in Barbados. Participants were then invited to introduce themselves briefly.

1.2 Welcome Address

Mr. Jan Breithaupt from the IPPC Secretariat welcomed participants and announced that this workshop was the fifth of a series of worldwide International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP) workshops. It was noted that participants would be provided with background on the IPP, a detailed discussion on national reporting obligations under the IPPC, and an explanation of navigation and data entry into the IPP. Participants were encouraged to participate fully as the outcome of this regional workshop would contribute to the improved content and structure of forthcoming IPP workshops in other regions. As the needs of different countries would vary, Mr. Breithaupt encouraged free discussion to improve the IPP website through feedback from participants.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This was a Caribbean Region Training Workshop on Information Exchange using the IPP. Participants, who were *officially nominated national plant protection/information officers from IPPC member countries were trained in the use of the IPP to meet reporting obligations under the IPPC for the Caribbean Region (according to a standing Letter of Agreement between FAO and the IICA-Sanidad Agropecuaria e Inocuidad de los Alimentos - Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture / Letter of Agreement - PR 30797)*.

2.1 Background

The workshop was held at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad & Tobago from 14 - 18th November, 2005. It was jointly organized by the Secretariats of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), and was funded by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The workshop was intended for officially nominated participants responsible for information exchange in their respective National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) and more specifically those responsible for entering the relevant information in the IPP.

The IPP is an internet-based information system designed to hold phytosanitary information published in accordance with the Convention and decisions taken by the (Interim) Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (I/CPM). The system has recently been upgraded following the recommendations of the [IPP support group](#) with improved features, speed and reliability that allow IPPC contracting parties to use the system to meet their national information exchange obligations under the IPPC. These improvements have enhanced the ability to add news, calendars, publications, websites, projects, contacts and discussion groups, and so the IPP can now specifically accommodate in addition to **Pest reports** [Articles IV 2(b) & VIII 1(a) of the [IPPC New Revised Text\(NRT\)](#)];

- 1 **Description of the NPPOs** [Article IV 4];
- 2 **Phytosanitary restrictions, requirements and prohibitions** [Article VII 2(b)];
- 3 **Points of entry** with specific restrictions [Article VII 2(d)];
- 4 **Lists of regulated pests** [Article VII 2(i)];
- 5 **Emergency actions** [Article VII 6];
- 6 **Official contact point details** [Article VIII 2];
- 7 **Non-compliance issues** [Article VII 2(f)];
- 8 **Organizational arrangements for plant protection** [Article IV 4];
- 9 **Pest status** [Article VII 2(j)] and
- 10 **Rationale for phytosanitary requirements** [Article VII 2(c)].

The IPP Support Group offers members an opportunity to participate in the work of the IPP and guide its direction. Countries can make nominations for contact persons to join the group and so actively participate and have a voice in its meetings, working groups, subsidiary groups etc. There are no financial costs to join the IPP Support Group.

The primary objective of the IPP is to provide contracting parties with a single, freely accessible portal to meet their obligations to publish official phytosanitary information. In cases where a country already publishes information relevant to a particular reporting obligation, the IPP can incorporate links to the relevant authoritative official website. However, should a country not have their own website, they can upload the information into the IPP i.e. the IPP will act as that country's website.

Data can be entered into the IPP by the Official Contact Point (**OCP**), or by an officially nominated 'information officer/editor'. IPP Official Contact Points can liaise with the IPP manager regarding the password-protected user accounts required in order to meet their data entry needs (c/o Dave.Nowell@fao.org & Jan.Breithaupt@fao.org).

To support [contracting parties](#), the IPPC Secretariat arranged a series of regional and sub-regional workshops during 2005, and plans to continue this thrust in 2006. These training sessions will:

1. explain national phytosanitary information exchange obligations, and
2. provide basic training to Official [Contact Points](#) (and/or nominated information officers/editors) on the use of the IPP to meet these obligations.

2.2 Objectives and Focus of this Regional Workshop

The objectives of the workshop were:

- 1 To train nominated participants in the use of the IPP i.e. how to find and edit data on the IPP (as required by the IPPC);
- 2 To further test and introduce navigation techniques through browsing the IPP, at <https://www.ippc.int>, the official website of the IPPC;
- 3 To further test the training material which has been prepared for the forthcoming regional workshops on use of the IPP to meet reporting obligations under the IPPC;
- 4 To make countries aware of information exchange obligations;
- 5 To provide background information on the IPP;
- 6 To explain ICPM Programme of Work on information exchange especially Strategic Directions (SDs) -this workshop is SD#2;
- 7 To introduce/highlight the role and function of the IPP contact points;
- 8 To increase awareness of the role and function of the FAO Secretariat.

Expected Outputs

At the end of the Workshop, participants should:

- 1 Understand the context of information exchange under the IPPC;
- 2 Understand their country's obligations relating to IPPC information exchange;
- 3 Understand the function and application of IPP;
- 4 Understand their roles as information officers/ editors and official contact points;
- 5 Be able to suggest improvements in the structure and content of the IPP website;
- 6 Suggest changes deemed necessary for the IPPC information exchange Work Programme including new ideas for individual countries to ensure continuity;
- 7 Identify capacity building needs at national, regional and sub-regional levels (if the country is a member of the IPPC, the country is eligible for technical assistance).

The regional workshop was also used to highlight any design issues, including the identification of bugs within the system. Additionally stress tests of the website and its test-server website (<http://193.43.36.96>) were conducted to reflect the range of experiences and ability of the global phytosanitary community. The installation and performance of two special training instances of the system were used -one installed in the training room and one at FAO Headquarters.

Workshop Format

The facilitator expressed the desire for a structured, but informal session with active participation by all. He indicated that questions would be entertained at any time during the proceedings and a 'hands-on' session involving data entry and editing on the IPP was scheduled for day 3. At the end of the workshop there was an evaluation exercise aimed at improving subsequent workshops.

2.3 Participation

A total of fourteen (14) participants from twelve (12) countries attended the workshop (*Appendix I*). Ten participants were from IPPC member countries, which included Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago, while three participants were from non-member countries (Antigua & Barbuda, Cayman Islands and Dominica).

There was one observer from the IICA, Barbados.

Participants were senior plant protection/quarantine officers responsible for information exchange in their respective NPPOs who have a background in the management of phytosanitary information.

The resource person and additional support staff included:
FAO/IPPC Staff and Facilitator, Mr. Jan Breithaupt. Mr. Wayne De Chi and Ms. Lisa Britto, IICA, Trinidad & Tobago and Ms. Maureen Obando, IICA, Costa Rica represented the host institution which organized this training event in close collaboration with the IPPC Secretariat (FAO/AGPP, Rome, Italy).

Support on IT-related matters was provided by staff from The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad.

2.4 Workshop Program (Appendix 2)

The Workshop began at 8:45 am since the Registration period was incorporated into the Workshop and the Opening Ceremony was shortened to allow for more time in the actual workshop sessions.

Mr. Breithaupt informed participants that the Practical Exercises on Navigation of the IPP would therefore start earlier on the afternoon of Tuesday 15th November 2005. He also indicated that time would be allotted for Ms. Carol Thomas, the newly appointed Regional Agriculture Health and Food Safety Specialist, to address the meeting on a Regional Approach to Agriculture Health and Food Safety issues (Appendix 5).

2.5 Election of the Chair and Rapporteurs

Ms. Carol Thomas, Regional Agriculture Health and Food Safety Specialist was elected Chair of the session on Country Reports.

Ms. Kay Parkinson and Ms. Helen McConnie, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, Trinidad & Tobago, both served as rapporteurs and formed part of the drafting committee.

3.0 WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

Several papers were presented during the workshop:

- 1 The workshop program
- 2 Workshop objectives and expected outputs
- 3 Introduction to information exchange under the IPPC
- 4 NPPO information exchange obligations
- 5 Role of IPPC official contact points
- 6 Role and Relationship of Scientific and Official Information
- 7 Country Reports on National Information Exchange Processes within the IPPC Framework (Appendix 3)
- 8 Introduction to the IPP (online)

Discussions were held on the 'SPS Notification System'.

Details of [all papers and presentations](#) are found in the handout-binders, which were prepared for all participants (*Appendix 4*).

CDs containing all information on the IPPC up to October, 2005 (last update) were distributed to participants. The CDs are for use off-line. This is important for countries/Ministries that have limited/no Internet access, and for training courses. Continued distribution of such items depends on funding. *Also due to financial constraints, this may be the last opportunity for non-member countries to benefit from training.*

4.0 IPP Practical sessions (from day 2+)

4.1 Objective

The practical sessions served both to train participants in the use of the IPP and to provide extensive exercises on navigation and data entry in the IPP.

A secondary objective of the workshop was to identify any residual design or usability issues with the system when used outside FAO headquarters.

4.2 Navigation/browsing

Handouts on navigation exercises were distributed for participants to familiarize themselves with the use of the IPP website. The facilitator demonstrated the use of the IPP and the portal was extensively tested by the participants using the handouts. Exercises to browse based on real examples proved useful (e.g. finding specific contact point information and finding the details about this workshop; ICPM reports; replies to enquiries related to International Standards on Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM) #15; etc.). The remaining time was productive, with half-day dedicated solely to navigation as an introduction to two days of data entry beginning Wednesday 17th November, 2005.

Problems experienced in navigating the IPP website were readily solved by the facilitator. Problems were experienced with the speed at which presentations were downloaded from the Internet. A local server was set up using <http://192.168.24.207> in anticipation of similar problems that could occur when same sites were accessed simultaneously.

Points to Note

1. The IPP web address has built-in security measures e.g. <https://>
2. There is a limit to the size of documents that can be uploaded to the IPP. Documents should not be larger than 3MB. Larger documents need to split in sections.
3. Country reports and presentations can be edited and posted as publications.
4. Old versions of documents are archived as historic versions for legal reasons.
5. The E-mail address for IPP is - ipp@ippc.int.
6. On the IPPC website countries are grouped according to trading areas rather than geographic regions, which can sometimes make it difficult to locate them.
7. If asked for a password when logging on to the IPP this is an indication that you have clicked into an editing mode or onto a restricted area. Member contact details (e.g. IPP editors) are restricted and cannot be viewed, only the name will be displayed.

4.3 Data entry

This session began at 10.45 am on Wednesday 17th November, 2005.

Each participant was given the option of entering data either on the test site (<http://193.43.36.96>), laptop local server or IPP production site (<https://www.ippc.int>). The facilitator also informed participants that relevant information could also be sourced from the International Portal on Food Safety and Animal Health (<http://www.ipfsaph.org>) which contains official information submitted to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The test site can always be used for practical exercises while the IPP production site shall only be used to enter verified and official information.

Participants were asked to provide the facilitator with a list of their verified information placed on the test server or laptop to be taken across to the production site, as this information will otherwise disappear in two weeks time. All data entered was then presented to the workshop and discussed.

4.3.1 Suggested improvements:

- On the IPPC website countries should be grouped according to geographic areas rather trading areas.
- Handouts in manuals should be clearly numbered for easy retrieval.
- The Table of Contents should be simplified.

5.0 WORKSHOP DISCUSSION

5.1 Nomination of Official Contact Point

It was essential that an information officer/editor be nominated to enter data into the IPP on behalf of the OCP. This needs to be done officially using the '[nomination form](#)', duly endorsed by the IPPC Official Contact Point. Although it was possible to submit more than one nominee for training, this was not encouraged, as the Secretariat has limited funding for training. Also, having a number of persons submitting data for a given country, can lead to confusion. When entering official sensitive information it is important to avoid duplication of entries as well as omissions.

Some Contact Points are listed as 'unofficial' i.e. the IPPC's Secretariat has not received any official document from the country's Ministry/ Minister identifying that person as the OCP. The unofficial Contact Point cannot make changes to the IPP therefore details (name, status, etc.) must be clear and correct. It is expected that IPP workshop participants will train others in IPP data entry and usage upon returning home.

OCP nominations must be submitted to the FAO and IPPC through the official channels.

5.2 Role and function of contact points

Contact points should look at the varying needs of each country such as capacity building, the amount of training required, and the ways in which assistance can be rendered. The OCP needs to heighten awareness of government officials so that they understand the importance of the OCP position, for example through provision of summaries of relevant information. FAO may be able to assist with increasing awareness through letters highlighting the importance of the OCP to individual countries.

It was noted that while Contact details such as fax and email can be modified, the name of the contact person can only be changed through official government notification.

It was noted that there are no guidelines to deal with the legal and trade ramifications arising from the posting of incorrect information by the OCP. It was unclear whether this issue could be effectively dealt with through FAO or the Dispute Settlement Body, bearing in mind that once information comes through the OCP, it is official information. It was uncertain how the dispute settlement process could be initiated. It was suggested that the IPPC Secretary could be notified and approached for advice. Negotiations between/among countries were also proposed as an option.

5.3 The language barrier to information exchange

Data entry helps to increase the confidence of trading partners by providing transparency on phytosanitary issues. The facilitator explained that information posted on each country's website should ideally be in any of the five official FAO languages in the interests of transparency. He also indicated that approved ISPMs are translated into the 5 official languages English, Spanish, French, Arabic and Chinese and there are plans to make Russian one of the official FAO languages.

Where versions in FAO languages were not available, translations could be made available by trading partners, but such translations would be classified as unofficial. Translations provided by the originating country are "official". The IPPC would not be held liable for any consequences arising from incorrect translations.

It was pointed out that while the issue of translating requests presents a problem, countries are not obligated to provide requests for information in another language. IPPC will be making a recommendation to help with this issue.

5.4 Coordination of NPPO websites

In general, different NPPOs have different websites with diverse structures and content. To enable the coordination and integration of this information, the I/CPM has decided to accept data entry in two forms. Where the NPPO has no website, then an IPPC-compliant website should be created using the IPP. If the NPPO already has a website, then a link would be established, especially for small databases where further integration would not be cost-efficient.

5.5 The relationship between scientific and official information

The workshop agreed that any information coming from a source other than the IPPC Official Contact Point is not regarded as official information. **Official information is information that is approved by the government.** Scientific information (information sourced from the scientific community and peer-reviewed publications) is sourced from different establishments to ensure validity. References should be included where available.

There should also be an effort to facilitate the exchange of information within the country, in addition to that among countries. Participants agreed that both types of information would be difficult to acquire based on limited resources available to less-developed countries.

5.6 Electronic communications

The workshop discussed the benefits of electronic communications as opposed to the paper-based system. Electronic communications allow for faster, more extensive retrieval of data and a much larger storage capacity. In addition, the medium allows for analysis, comparison, cross-tabulations, editing, use of templates etc., resulting in overall increased efficiency and system performance. However, the issue of cost-savings may be debatable given the financial requirements to initiate the system, and the limited resources available to some countries. To achieve a functional system, the key inputs were training, infrastructure, equipment and Internet facilities.

The possibility of 'hackers' accessing data on the IPPC/IPP website is reduced through the following security measures:

- passwords are locked
- data are transferred in encrypted formats (similar to that used by banks)
- data entered onto the sites is locked and this allows for traceability

The IPP remains the fastest route to information because of its versatility.

5.7 ISPMs

Proposals for new standards should be submitted every two years since approvals are now issued over a two-year period rather than annually as was done before. Submissions made now will therefore be considered in 2007 (previous submissions will be discussed at current Standard Committee (SC) meetings). This new approach gives more time for review and development of proposed draft standards and reduces financial constraints. The Draft Standards are posted annually on the IPPC website during May-June and 120 days are given for comments. CD-ROMs of Draft Standards can be distributed to those countries with no Internet service.

Request for submissions of proposed Standards are posted on the IPPC website and submissions of these standards can be made to the IPPC via Official Contact Points.

An enquiry was made regarding the existence of ISPMs that deal with biological terrorism. The workshop was informed that while there are no formal standards that deal with bio-terrorism some countries e.g. the US have bio-terrorism acts.

5.8 Membership on Subsidiary Bodies

Participation in subsidiary groups is open to all members of the IPPC. Notifications for nominations are sent out from time to time. While this is an avenue for Caribbean countries to become involved, there is still a **critical lack of representation of Caribbean countries on subsidiary bodies** such as Expert Working Groups (EWGs), Standard Setting Committees and Dispute Settlement Bodies, which facilitate the approval process of Draft Standards. Personnel with required expertise should have their resumes sent via OCP to IPPC.

5.9 Regional Plant Protection Organizations (RPPOs) - CPPC and CAHFSA

Several participants indicated that regional representation was neither coordinated nor forceful as the Caribbean Plant Protection Commission (CPPC) is not functional and consequently there is no regional voice.

There has been much discussion and agreement about setting up a Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA) as the RPPO for plant health. However, such has not been formalized thus far. It was proposed that an interim body would carry out CAHFSA's role since CAHFSA was not yet operational. This interim organization, it was felt, would help to inform the CAHFSA's operationalization process.

It was agreed that CAHFSA be housed in the Caribbean Agriculture Research and Development Institute (CARDI). Funding poses a problem and this could prevent CAHFSA from becoming functional and satisfying the needs of the region.

Even if formal regional positions are not reached on any issue(s), individual countries can advance their position(s) as part of a proposed wider, regional position. Representatives are urged to raise issues, otherwise their interests cannot be regarded.

The Regional Agricultural Health and Food Safety Specialist will focus on the establishment of an interim body to attend to the needs of the region.

If IICA can be persuaded to host an e-mail group, funds will be identified to host an initial meeting to discuss relevant issues before the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and CPM Meetings scheduled for January, 2006. The Caribbean must be properly prepared to make serious contributions at these meetings since these are the for a at which the needs/proposals of Caribbean region can be highlighted. If this were done the Ministers of Agriculture would also take notice and recognize the importance of attendance of appropriate staff at these meetings.

There was consensus that Caribbean countries should put mechanisms in place for consultation among themselves to move CAHFSA forward, meet submission deadlines and actively participate in international meetings.

5.10 Attendance of Caribbean countries at Meetings

At previous ICPM Standards Committee meetings it was quite evident that communication among Caribbean countries is lacking. There was an increase in the number of Committee members from 3 to 4 and proposals were initiated for the Caribbean to join the Committee by taking up this fourth position. The FAO Group for Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) was inclined to have another Latin American country take up this fourth position and consequently, information on the availability of the fourth position was not forthcoming. This highlighted the importance

of having mechanisms in place for English-speaking Caribbean countries to have access to wider channels of information.

There is no Caribbean region representative, therefore there is no Caribbean representation at GRULAC meetings. Our Latin American counterparts' view is that there is no CPPC, therefore, the Caribbean has no voice in the proceedings although it is a Latin American/ Caribbean body. The Caribbean needs to take a firm stand and let the other players know that we also have urgent and important concerns and needs.

The importance of the OCP and of that person receiving relevant training will again be highlighted at upcoming regional meetings.

5.11 Information Flow

The Cayman Islands indicated that they were not up to date with the information being provided but hoped that more linkages would be established to ensure greater awareness/ participation in matters related to the CPPC/IPPC.

Problems were experienced with documents not reaching appropriate persons within Ministries. Recommendations were made for more efficient links e.g. letters can be sent directly from FAO to the Official FAO Contact Point.

5.12. IPP Data Entry Presentations

Data entry done by participants included:

1. Changes in Contact Information e.g. fax nos. emails
2. Inclusion of national emblems
3. Description of NPPO structures
4. Official Ports of Entry
5. Pest Lists
6. Current projects
7. Plant protection Acts
8. Links to PRAs, Plant Protection Acts and other websites
9. Procedures for Import Inspection
10. Official Pest Reports
11. List of Regulated Pests

Comments on Data Entry

System stability and reliability proved to be satisfactory and no major problems in data entry and/or simultaneous browsing were observed (see Workshop Evaluation report in [Appendix 6](#)).

While most participants entered data on the test site and laptop server, one participant entered data on the production site.

A **bug** was detected when a participant attempted to make an URL link between the IPPC website and their Plant Protection Act (reported to programmers).

One participant remarked that he found the IPFSAPH website, www.ipfsaph.org very useful for finding information that could not be found on other websites.

5.14 Workshop Evaluation

Appendix 6.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The workshop was executed in accordance with the scheduled program, and the overall objectives were met. Participants benefited from the training, and were ready to contribute to the IPP upon return to their home countries.

The facilitator noted the strengths, weaknesses and recommendations put forward by the participants. These will be discussed with the authorities at FAO Headquarters where decisions will be made to improve workshops.

The facilitator thanked participants for their enthusiasm and reminded them of the need to maintain and up-date their NPPO websites within the IPP. He also thanked the hosts for the excellent hospitality and resources made available for the running of this workshop.

Everybody has certainly learnt important lessons through the event, hopefully to the benefit of the entire workshop program and continued official information exchange through the IPP.