



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



International
Plant Protection
Convention

Championing an International Year of Plant Health

In 2018, the United Nations General Assembly will vote on a resolution to proclaim 2020 as the International Year of Plant Health. This is a unique opportunity to raise global awareness on how protecting plant health can help end hunger, reduce poverty, protect the environment, and boost economic development, as well as to highlight the importance of international, regional, and national plant health organizations.

Our plan for 2020 is to mobilize governments, industries, civic organizations, scientists, and the public to:

- **Work** together in protecting the world's plants against the spread of devastating pests,
- **Encourage** scientific innovation to address pest threats,
- **Promote** responsible practices that reduce pest spread, and
- **Increase** public and private sector support for more sustainable plant health strategies and services.

Protecting plant health

Plants are under constant attack from invasive pests. These pests can severely damage crops, forests, and other natural resources that people depend on. Every year, they cause billions of dollars of losses in crops and trade revenue, in addition to expensive eradication efforts. They are most often spread by people, especially through international travel and trade. Despite declining resources for plant health protection services, international, regional, and national plant health organizations continue in their efforts to protect plant

health around the world. One of their primary goals is to prevent the spread of plant pests into new areas where they could cause significant environmental and economic damage.

These organizations accomplish this critical goal in many ways, from regulating the global trade of agricultural products to developing innovative, scientific methods for addressing pest threats and promoting responsible practices that reduce pest spread.



Aproceros leucopoda young larva feeding on *Ulmus* cultivar 'Resista' ©Thomas Schröder

How protecting plant health can help solve major global challenges

Plant health protection agencies are helping to address a number of critically important issues, both locally and globally. By protecting plant health from invasive pests, they are helping to increase food security, reduce poverty, protect the environment, and boost economic development, especially in low- and middle-income countries where agriculture is a primary industry. Here's how:

Boosting food security

A sufficient and sustainable food supply is necessary for increasing food security and eliminating hunger, but achieving this has been difficult for many countries. One threat to food security is invasive pests – experts from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimate that invasive pests are damaging as much as 40 percent of all food crops globally each year. Using science, technology, and regulations, plant health organizations are helping to slow the spread of damaging pests into new areas. They are also fighting back against pests that are destroying food crops and other resources that are critical to long-term food security.



A woman farmer living in Burundi checking for ripe mangos ©FAO/Giulio Napolitano

Reducing poverty

For most developing countries, agriculture is a primary source of income. Studies have shown that growth in agricultural incomes can significantly reduce poverty. For example, agriculture played a key role in reducing Bangladesh's poverty from 48.9 to 31.5 percent in 10 short years, according to a World Bank report. However, invasive pests can have devastating effects on agriculture and natural resources. By protecting plants against pests, plant health organizations are helping to increase agricultural productivity, improve rural incomes, and reduce poverty.

Plant varieties in Italy © FAO/Mirko Montuori



Protecting the environment and human health

Invasive pests are one of the main factors in biodiversity loss worldwide. When a pest is introduced into a new area, it can outcompete native species for resources because it may have no natural enemies.

Pest outbreaks have devastated crops throughout the course of history (e.g. *Phytophthora infestans* triggered the Irish famine in 1845, and a severe outbreak of Brown spot fungus destroyed the majority of rice crops in the Bengal area in 1942-43), and they continue to threaten food security today (e.g. Fall Armyworm, native to the Americas and recently detected in Nigeria, has rapidly spread across sub-Saharan Africa, and a strain of *Fusarium* wilt disease, which has been causing serious losses in Southeast Asia, has recently spread to the Middle East, Africa and South Asia).

By preventing the spread of plant pests into new areas, plant health organizations are helping to preserve the variety of species within a given ecosystem.

Their efforts to reduce the spread of invasive pests are also helping to curb the world's use of pesticides, which affect bees and other pollinators. When plants are not under constant attack from pests, farmers and homeowners use fewer pesticides, which helps protect our environment and all life, including human life. In 2016, the World Bank reported that 1.3 million square kilometers of forest was lost every hour between 1990 and 2015. According to a study by USDA economist Geoffrey Donovan, 21,000 people died in 15 USA states because there were fewer trees providing health benefits.

Supporting economic development

Local, regional, and global trade of plants and plant products is vital for many economies, especially in developing countries. Experts estimate that nearly half of the world's population relies primarily on agriculture for income, and low and middle-income countries account for approximately one-third of global trade in food and agricultural products. According to FAO, trade in agricultural products is worth \$1.1 trillion annually, but pests cause losses of around \$220 billion a year. This trade provides job security and stimulates economic growth in the exporting country's farm sector. However, trade can be limited by unnecessary plant health-related restrictions.

National, regional, and international plant health organizations play an important role in leveling the playing field for all countries. Working through the International Plant Protection Convention, plant health organizations establish globally harmonized, science-based plant health standards that help prevent pest spread. They also facilitate the trade of agricultural products without spreading pests, which allows countries, including developing nations, to grow their economies.

The case for an International Year of Plant Health



Quinoa plantation in Ecuador ©FAO/ Roberto Sciotti

Plants are the foundation of life on earth. They produce the oxygen we breathe. They provide more than 80 percent of the food we eat. We use them to make clothes, shelter, medicines, and many other things that are essential to our lives. For nearly half of the earth's population, plants are a primary source of income. Almost every country trades plants and plant products to create wealth and support economic development. A threat to plant health is also a threat to the health and prosperity of people across the globe – especially the most vulnerable.

Any effort to achieve the vision set out by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must acknowledge the critical importance of plant health. An International Year of Plant Health is essential to raise awareness, drive concrete action and ultimately contribute to a safer, more prosperous and peaceful world.