

UN INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF PLANT HEALTH: 2020

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¹Chethan Patil N. D*, ¹Bindu K Ramalingannanavar and ¹Rahul Dundesh Bellagi

¹Dairy Extension Division, ICAR-National Dairy Research Institute (NDRI), Karnal, Haryana, India.

Email: chethanpatilnvl@gmail.com

Plants are essential to our daily lives. They not only produce 98% of the oxygen we breathe, but they also make up 80% of our food. Plants are, however, under constant and increasing threat from pests and diseases. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), pests and diseases account for up to 40% of the world's food crops lost. This leaves millions of people facing poverty and seriously destroys agriculture, which is the primary source of income for many countries around the world. As in human health, it is much more cost-effective to protect plants from pests and diseases than coping in full-blown plant health emergencies. In reality, plant pests are often difficult to eliminate once they have established themselves and are time consuming and costly to handle. Prevention is critical to avoiding the devastating impact on agriculture, livelihoods and food security of pests and diseases. For these and more factors the UN General Assembly has called 2020 the “International Year of Plant Health (IYPH)”.

UN International Year of Plant Health History (IYPH) for 2020

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) launched the UN International Year of Plant Health (IYPH) for 2020 at the UN Agency Council meeting on 2 December 2019, with the aim of raising global awareness on how plant health protection can help end hunger, reduce poverty, protect the environment and boost economic development.

The key objectives of the year are;

- Awareness raising of the value of safe plants in achieving the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030
- Stressing the impact of plant health on food safety and ecosystem functions
- Sharing best practices on preserving safe plants while protecting the environment

Why would you worry about Plant Health?

Plants are the source of the air that we breathe and much of the food we consume, and we still don't care about keeping them safe. That can result in devastating results.

- From plants, air and food we get two main life-essentials
- Plant safety is becoming ever more endangered
- Climate change and human actions are rapidly changing the landscape, growing biodiversity and developing new invasive species niches and habitats
- International commerce and travel help to spread disease
- Prevention is often easier than cure when it comes to plants and diseases
- Plant health policies and activities are necessary if sustainable development goals are to be achieved

What can we do to support Plant Health?

A common man

We must all respect plant health regulations put in place to protect agriculture, forestry and the environment. Pay attention to moving plants and plant products (e.g. seeds, vegetables, cut flowers) across boundaries, even when buying from online outlets. As well as reducing your environmental footprint, protecting natural resources and spreading the word, everyday actions include.

- Be careful when taking plants and plant products with you when you travel, as plant pests and diseases may spread. Beforehand, contact the national plant health authority to ensure that you do not infringe plant safety laws
- Be vigilant as small packages can easily bypass normal phytosanitary controls when purchasing plants and plant items online or via postal services
- Spread the word #PlantHealth during 2020 and beyond on social media and in your culture.
- Take regular steps to reduce the environmental impact and actively participate in conservation and natural resource management programs

A farmer or worker in agribusiness

You can have a direct influence on plants, and the management of natural resources. Women and men who work in agriculture play a vital role in protecting plant health.

- Prevent the spread of pests by using only certified pest-free seeds and seedlings
- Regularly monitor and report the occurrence of pests on your farms
- Adopt environmentally friendly pest-management practices – including those based on biological approaches that do not kill pollinators, and beneficial insects and organisms
- Use modern digital technology, mobile apps and software to access information on how to prevent and manage pests and diseases in plants, and report outbreaks

Governments

The government can, in many ways protect plant health, thus enhancing food security, protecting the environment and facilitating commerce.

- Promoting public awareness campaigns on the importance of plant health and what plant protection can do for everyone
- Invest in plant safety organizations, and ensure sufficient human and financial resources are available
- Invest more in plant health research and innovative practices and technologies, and provide incentives for both the private sector and farmers to do so
- Ensure that phytosanitary import requirements are based on IPPC standards and are technically justified, consistent with the pest risk involved, constitute the least restrictive measures available and result in minimum impediments to the international movement of persons, commodities and transports
- Implement plant health standards and enhance plant protection capacity, including through a Phytosanitary Capacity Assessment (PCE) in collaboration with the IPPC Secretariat
- Improve control and early warning systems for plant and plant health protection
- Align policies and actions with sustainable plant health development goals, in particular, those designed to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and reduce poverty and environmental threats

Private sector

Businesses in the private sector play a vital role in plant safety, as they can contribute to and help enforce global plant health standards. The private sector is also a driver of plant-health innovation and a major player in the food and food nutrient development and safety.

- Encourage environmentally sustainable pest control and management goods and practices;
- Make trading and transportation safer for plants and plant products by meeting international plant health standards and legislation
- Inform customers that transportation of plants and plant products may spread pests and diseases – sometimes with devastating consequences
- Sustain innovative plant health practices and use of new technologies to facilitate market access according to international standards

Conclusion

This year, efforts to provide disease resistance to many crops around the world should be underlined. Many vulnerable crops are cultivated in regions of the world where underdeveloped plant science. We can both avoid and combat plant pests and diseases in environmentally sustainable ways-by, for example, integrated pest control. This approach to the ecosystems incorporates different management approaches and practices to grow safe crops while reducing pesticide use. Healthy plants are the foundation of all life, the functions of ecosystems and food safety. Plant pests and diseases damage crops, diminishing food availability and increasing their cost. Sustainable plant health protects the atmosphere, forests and biodiversity from plant pests, tackles the impact of climate change and promotes efforts to end hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

References

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