

**Ministry for Rural Affairs
and the Environment**

PITKALI MARKETS

During the first quarter of 2004 part of the financial and technical assistance of the Fifth Italy – Malta Protocol has been assigned to the re-structuring of the Pitkali Markets and the establishment of Producers' Organisation. Thus local agricultural produce will be more appreciated and its commercialisation will be well-organised so that it will not only guarantee a good income to our producers but it will also encourage them to produce more economically; so the importance of Producers' Organisation.

As part of this agreement, Italian experts under the auspices of the Istituto Agronomico Mediterraneo di Bari, paid regular visits to hold discussions with all stakeholders of the Pitkali Markets. It is envisaged that grading stations and cold storage facilities will be set up both in Malta and Gozo. For four weeks in June and July, the Italian experts conducted a technical course for representatives of producers and government officials on how producers will organise themselves with special reference to specific EU directives and regulations and the Pitkali Markets.

In November these representatives spent a two-week stay in Italy as a practical experience. Producers' representatives were assigned to their Italian counterpart while government officials were assigned to both producers' organisations as well as to Italian officials responsible for the administration of wholesale fruit and vegetables markets.

In the final quarter of the year the Italian experts presented their final report to the Ministry. It is anticipated that the report will be discussed with the producers' representatives as well as with representatives of the pitkala in 2005.

Statistics

Sales from organised markets - 2004				
	Lm		Kgs	
	2003	2004	2003	2004
Pitkali	5,667,197	5,250,806	31,034,997	34,231,523
<i>Co-Op Stalls</i>	2,179,333	1,928,637	9,567,678	10,751,989
Total	7,846,530	7,179,443	40,602,675	44,983,512

There was a decrease in value (-Lm667,087) but an increase in volume (+4,380,837 Kgs) over 2003.

PLANT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Monitoring of Quarantine Viral and Bacterial Diseases

- *Citrus Tristeza virus survey*: In connection with the Protected Zone Status, the annual Citrus Tristeza Virus (CTV) Survey was carried out during January/March, May, and December 2004. A total of 1,163 ELISA tests were done throughout the year, on 3,305 citrus trees. These were collected from several nurseries, which import citrus, commercial growers and private gardens from Malta and Gozo.
- *Plum Pox Virus survey*: In connection with the Protected Zone Status, the annual Plum Pox Virus (PPV) survey was carried out during May/June 2004. A total of 689 stone-fruit trees were tested from government nurseries and private growers in Malta and Gozo, during 10 inspections. During the inspections visual observation for viral symptoms was made. All samples collected were tested at the Virology lab, PBC, using the ELISA technique.
- *Pepino Mosaic virus survey*: The Pepino Mosaic Virus survey was carried out in autumn 2004. Samples were collected from local tomato crops (254 compound samples), imported tomato seeds/seedlings (20 samples), and imported tomato fruit (10 samples). This survey was run in accordance to Commission Decision 2004/200/EC. A total of 25 greenhouse tomato growers from Malta and 1 from Gozo were sampled. The samples were tested by ELISA technique at the Virology Lab, PBC. During each inspection a Plant Quarantine officer was present.

- *Potato Ring Rot and Brown Rot survey*: A survey was carried out in line with EU Directives 2000/29, 93/85 and 98/57 and L.N. 270 and L.N. 290 of 2004. A sample, consisting of 200 tubers, from each of 53 containers of imported seed or table potatoes was collected and tested by dilution plating on a semi-selective medium, immunofluorescence antibody staining (IFAS) and Gram staining for *Ralstonia solanacearum* and *Clavibacter michiganensis* subsp. *sepedonicus*. Some samples were also tested with PCR.
- *Pine Wood Nematode (Bursaphelenchus xylophilus)*: Local Apeppo Pine Trees (*Pinus halepensis*) were sampled for this nematode together with wooden pallets imported from China, USA and Canada as per Commission Decision 2004/95/EC and 2001/219/EC.
- *Colorado Beetle (Leptinotarsa decemlineata) survey*: The survey was conducted during the months of November and December and included various potato-growing localities such as Żabbar, Żebbuġ and Rabat. No symptoms of the beetle effects on the potato crop were observed.

Plant tissue culture

The main tissue culture work was the production of virus-free rootstocks: GF677 and Myrabolan 29C. The starting material was obtained from Italy. The cultures were multiplied and rooted *in vitro* prior to transfer for *in vivo* acclimatisation. Acclimatised material was later certified on a voluntary basis according to EPPO standards. *In vitro* production of GF677 and Myrabolan 29C was mainly carried out to supply the SVDP nursery.

During the year a number of ornamental and endemic plants (such as Kalanchoe, ferns, Maltese cliff-orache and begonia) were also produced.

Plant Health Twinning Projects

- In September, the first Vademecum on the Border Inspection Posts (B.I.P.s) for Phytosanitary Inspectors was finalised with the assistance of the Italian experts as part of the EU-funded Phytosanitary Twinning Project.
- CN codes were worked out for all plants and their products (according to the format of Council Directive 2000/29/EC) so as to make them more understandable to Customs officers.
- Meetings were held with a number of Italian Experts as part of the Phytosanitary Twinning Project to help personnel from the Plant Health Department in matters such as Plant Protection Products (PPP), the registration system of pesticides products, manual of procedures for the implementation of EU Regulations., etc

Plant Quarantine Section

Phytosanitary inspections on commodities originating from third countries

- *Inspections*: Up to end April, 600 inspections were carried out together with 500 documentary checks. Post EU accession, 395 inspections were carried out of which 214 were full inspections and 181 documentary checks.
- *Interceptions*: Ten interceptions were made and reported to the EU Commission using EUROPHYT programme. The reasons included missing Phytosanitary certificates and incomplete additional declarations.

Phytosanitary inspections at local nurseries

- *Plant Passport System*: During the year, various seminars were held at the Plant Biotechnology Centre, Lija in order to give practical information on the implementation of the plant passport system. At the request of the traders, the system as proposed in 2003 was changed and made simpler to accommodate traders who have no knowledge of Information Technology. A register to be used by the traders together with various forms and procedures to be followed during the inspections was also compiled.

- *Number of Inspections:* Seven inspections were carried out at different government and private nurseries.
- *Internal Interceptions:* The inspectors during one of their inspections intercepted *Bemisia tabaci*. The case was notified to the EU Commission.

Phytosanitary certificates for export/re-export

- *Export:* 49 Phytosanitary certificates were issued for the export of table potatoes, flower seeds, succulent seeds, wood packing cases, wooden pallets, olive cuttings, olive fruits and succulent plants to Russia, USA, Canada, China, Japan, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Switzerland, Italy, Holland, Germany, France, UK and Denmark.
- *Re-Export:* Three certificates were issued on Fuji apples, Kiwi fruits, milling wheat and soft wheat. The countries of destination were Libya, Albania and Algeria.

Official registry for traders and producers

A National Register of producers and traders was set up. This Register was regularly updated, as per LN 97/2004 reg.6. Up to the end of the year, 174 companies were registered.

Plant Health Tender

Four microscopes were procured through EU funding. Each Border Inspection Post (BIP) will be equipped with two microscopes, one of which will be a dissecting microscope.

Revenue

Since EU accession the revenue collected per month decreased substantially. The total revenue collected for 2004 was Lm 28,260.37.

Mycology, Entomology and Nematology Laboratories

The main activities of the laboratory consisted in the diagnosis of samples intercepted by plant quarantine officers and the identification of insect pests brought to the laboratories by growers or extension officers. The best control strategies were provided to growers.

Mycology Section

This Section carried out a number of activities which included:

- the re-organisation of the whole laboratory while ensuring that all the equipment was in working order;
- the existing reference books for diagnosis of fungal diseases were reviewed and lists of books to be purchased to increase the laboratory diagnostic accuracy and reliability were prepared;
- routine diagnosis of diseased samples collected in the field, greenhouses, nurseries and other places or brought to the lab by Government officers or growers were carried out;
- microscopic observations, isolations and inoculation tests were carried out according to requirements;
- collections of fungal isolates were established and maintained. The collection of specimens of diseased plants used at the lab for diagnostic, extension and information purposes was enriched.
- new equipment was obtained from the funds available under the EU-funded Twinning Project. These included two stereomicroscopes, fridge and a freezer.

Nematology Section

The Nematology Section was re-organised. New procedures for the proper extraction of nematodes from the soil and other techniques were established while some essential equipment was purchased. This included a powerful dissecting microscope. Preparations were also made to procure a required centrifuge

that will eventually simplify the procedures while making them more accurate. A new water system was installed to cater for the extraction of nematodes from soil samples. During the year, the Section performed 414 diagnostic tests, maintained 70 fungal isolates, and prepared and maintained 30 specimens of diseased plants.

Apiculture

- *Bee Colonies:* The Apiculture Section, during 2004, increased the total number of colonies and nuclei at the Mdina apiary to 62 while 6 colonies were also maintained at the Research and Development Centre, Ghammieri. The two stations are kept separate in case of disease outbreaks.
- *EU Project Proposal:* A three-year apiculture programme was drafted and submitted to the European Commission in Brussels for partial funding. The programme provides assistance for the improvement of the marketing of honey and other apiculture products. Additionally, a manual of procedures was also finalised in compliance with EU Regulation 1221/97.
- *Apiculture Survey:* Several meetings were held with the National Statistics Office (NSO) to develop a strategy for retrieving accurate statistical data on the Apiculture Industry in Malta. In April, NSO published the Agricultural statistics concerning the Apiculture industry in Malta. The survey found that 168 holdings are engaged in apiculture activities in the Maltese Islands, with a total of over 2,000 colonies.
- *Apiary Activities:* All the colonies and nuclei at the Mdina apiary were inspected regularly, fed, supers added and given treatment as a control measure against the Varroa mite. Measures were taken to minimise robbing, especially during summer, by other colonies. All the colonies, especially the developing nuclei were monitored frequently for European Foul Brood (EFB) disease and their amount of food stores contained in the hives. When required, the weaker nuclei were boosted by additional one or two frames of hatching brood taken from established colonies.
- *Inspections:* Around 60 inspections were carried out at beekeepers' apiaries around Malta and Gozo. Inspections were carried out to prevent the spreading of foulbrood diseases, Varroa mite and to advise beekeepers in better colony management. The inspections were carried out at the request of the beekeepers who observed unusual symptoms or behaviour. EFB infected colonies were found in Chadwick lakes and Santa Maria Estate. The infected colonies were shook swarmed and the treatment proved to be successful. Inspections in Gozo were also carried out and on 3 occasions notifiable diseases were found. EFB was found in 4 separate apiaries in Mgarr and Nadur and these colonies were shook swarmed. An American Foul Brood (AFB) infected colony was found in the same apiary and this was destroyed.

Pesticides Section

- *Product Registration:* New applications and submission of dossiers for evaluation of Biocides and Plant Protection Products (PPP's): 166 applications for PPP's were received; 14 EU dossiers were received from companies and Draft Assessment Reports from other European Authorities regarding centrally authorised procedure of Biocides and PPP's across all EU Member States. These were registered in a database and catalogued. Applications for the temporary authorisation of PPP's on the Maltese market were reviewed on a chronological receipt order.
- *Registered products:* 18 products have been placed on the local market. Dossiers were being reviewed on a 'first come first reviewed' basis and eventually permanent market authorisation will be issued to these products.
- *Pesticides Control Board:* Three meetings were held during the year to discuss procedures to be adopted by the board regarding its activities in relation to the new legislation, to review pending applications and other general matters.

GEORGE CARBONE

Director General (Agricultural Services & Rural Development)