

# Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment

## PAYING AGENCY

In view of the fact that the Paying Agency is responsible, amongst other things, for the administration of the 'Guarantee part' of the EAGGF (European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund), during 2006 representatives participated in various meetings in Brussels held every fortnight/month, namely, Group of Experts, EAGGF Management Committee and Agricultural Funds Committee.

The Paying Agency replied to a number of official communications by the Commission through the office of its Competent Authority in connection with audit missions carried out in 2005.

During 2006 the PA asked its internal auditors (in line with the One-Year Plan) to carry out an audit of each and every EU measure, as well as an IT Audit (including audits of the IACS/LPIS/INTERTRACE) so as to obtain a broader picture as to whether the Delegated Services were fulfilling their obligations (as per Memorandum of Understanding dated 2 March 2004 (Art. 5 (2))).

Moreover, the Paying Agency also hired the services of a private audit firm so as to improve on the authorisations performed by the Delegated Services/Authorisation Units and to ensure their compliance with the relevant regulations. This exercise is over and above the Pre-Accreditation audit in line with the EC Regulation 885/2006.

The PA took measures to reinforce the effective capability of the Control Unit. With effect from the current financial year, the Control Unit will submit the 'Controls Checklist', which is a mandatory authorisation document, directly to the Head - Paying Agency and it will fall within the latter's discretion whether to accept the current authorisation or else ask further re-performance of the controls.

The Control Unit has also taken on responsibility of the 'Cross-Compliance controls' so that better controls performance can be attained through centralisation. In this respect the MOU is to be revised to cater for the new work structures of MRAE, new regulations and any additional measures being implemented.

The Appeals Board structure has been revised through an amendment to current PA legislation so as to better deal with current and future appeals lodged by third parties.

The Paying Agency has also effected a number of payments through the direct credit system amounting to some Lm3,421,779.

The 'Clearance of Accounts' procedure in order to validate the transactions effected during 2006 has also been performed in line with its EU obligations. The PA is awaiting the final communication, through the office of its Competent Authority, from the DG AGRI as to whether the Maltese Paying Agency has been granted full 'Accreditation' status.

## PLANT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

During 2006, the Plant Health Department was significantly restructured. As from August 2006, all the laboratories under the Rural Affairs and Paying agency Division (RAPA) were incorporated within Plant Health. Furthermore, the Seeds and Other Propagation Material Unit that formerly formed part of the Agricultural Services Laboratories was also transferred to the Plant Health Department.

### PLANT HEALTH LABORATORIES

As from August 2006, the Plant Health Department was restructured such that all the laboratories within the RAPA Division were incorporated within this Department. Laboratories that fall within the Plant Health remit include Diagnostic and Identification Laboratories; Tissue Culture (*In vitro*) Laboratories and Chemistry Laboratories (including Oenology and Viticulture Laboratory).

During the second half of 2006, a detailed document which defines all obligations that fall under the remit of the Plant Health Laboratories, as specified by EU regulations under the respective EU and local regulations, has been collated. This document denotes in detail all the specifics listed in the regulations, which are the responsibility of the mentioned laboratories.

### Diagnostic and Identification Laboratories

The overall responsibilities of the Plant Pathology Laboratory of the Plant Health Section, Department of Agriculture, consist of the detection of plant diseases caused by plant pests and pathogens in respect of Council Directive 2000/29/EC and Plant Quarantine Act 2001 (ACT No XVIII OF 2001), honouring all entailed obligations thereof.

Work to set up a unique harmonised system to record samples tested within these laboratories started during 2006. A database was formulated in which each sample submitted or collected through the diagnostic laboratories is recorded. As from 1 January 2007, all records are kept on this database.

### Plant Pathology (Mycology) Laboratory

In 2006 the number of samples examined totalled 380, the number of tests amounted to 565, while 170 inspections were made.

#### Monitoring of quarantine fungal diseases

Visual inspections were performed at various public gardens and road-side embellishment sites for white rust disease. This was in fact identified upon chrysanthemum at various sites in St Julians and Sliema. Identification using microscopy was used in both cases confirming the disease agent *Puccinia horiana*, while pathogenicity tests were used by inoculating 12 healthy chrysanthemum plants with diseased material originating from the three inspected areas. Pathogenicity tests resulted positively confirming the rapid diffusion of the disease and possibly indicating a disease outbreak of *P. horiana* which may result in severe economic losses to local growers of cut flowers.

#### Annual Surveys

- *Survey in conjunction with Council Directive 2000/29/EC*: The annual *Survey for Phytophthora ramorum* for 2006 as specified by Council Directive 2000/29/EC and Commission Decisions 2002/757/EC and 2004/426/EC was carried out and forwarded to the Commission. The report included forty locations including public gardens, public green areas, parks of national importance, woodland pockets and garigue-type areas and 12 plant species (e.g. *Quercus ilex*, *Lonicera sp.*, *Laurus nobilis*, *Arbutus unedo*) inspected. All visual inspections and laboratory tests on suspect samples were negative for *P. ramorum*, confirming the absence of the pathogen upon Maltese territory.
- *Surveys in conjunction with local exigency and Plant Quarantine Act (Act No XVIII OF 2001)*: A survey performed for Malta on the presence of Plant Diseases upon Spontaneous Flora was conducted throughout the months of March, April and May. Amongst various new cases of rust diseases noted on various hosts, in Dwejra, Gozo a case of *Melampsora euphorbiae* on tree spurge (*Euphorbia dendroides*) was identified. This is a new record for Malta. Considering that an endemic spurge variety grows upon Malta, commonly known as Maltese spurge (*Euphorbia melitensis*) and that poinsettia production is also important, pathogenicity tests were performed on both these possible hosts of the disease, as well as on tree spurge. *M. euphorbiae* is an aggressive rust disease known to kill its hosts and is used as a biological control agent of various weeds belonging to the *Euphorbia* genus. If proven pathogenic on poinsettia and/or Maltese spurge an outbreak of this disease would have severe implications on local biodiversity and endemism and poinsettia production.

- An ongoing *Survey for Verticillium spp. in Malta* was performed for 2006. Various localities throughout the entire Maltese archipelago were inspected for the presence of fungal agents pertaining to the *Verticillium* genus. Various cases of *Verticillium dahliae* on olive were identified while *V. albo-atrum* were identified on potato. *Verticillium* species are mostly synonymous with wilt disease and *V. dahliae*, is an important quarantine disease on olive resulting in tracheo-mycosis and sudden death symptoms. Relevant analysis performed on olives believed to be aged in excess of 2000 years in the locality of Bidnija indicates that these trees are free from *V. dahliae* infection. Further analysis is to be carried out during 2007 prior to the completion of this survey.

#### Outbreaks of fungal diseases

- *Powdery scab on potato*: A case of extremely severe potato powdery scab was first observed in Qrendi on tubers of cv Derby in 2005. Throughout 2006 ten further cases of potato powdery scab were intercepted during an exercise performed during the months of February to November to identify major diseases affecting the Maltese Potato industry. A case of *Fusarium* dry rot was also observed in Rabat on a lot of potatoes kept in storage.
- *Further outbreak of Forl on greenhouse tomatoes*: In 2004, a new pathogen attacking greenhouse tomatoes, *Fusarium oxysporum oxysporum* f. sp. *radicis-lycopersici* (FORL) was recorded in the Northern localities of Malta. This disease was once again identified in November 2006 in the localities of Ta' Qali and Rabat. Inducing typical symptoms of root and crown rot, FORL can incur severe damages to tomato crops. Its frequent incidence in Malta confirms that this disease is widespread in Malta and poses a threat to the local tomato industry.
- *SVDP Government Nursery monitoring*: *Cladosporium carpophyllum*, a fungal agent resulting in leaf spot and shot hole symptoms, was identified on a large number GF 677 plants at the SVDP government nurseries. A large number of plants of GF 677 and Myrabolan produced in vitro at PBC were found infected with *Thielaviopsis basicola*. Following a detailed survey performed at each stage of production at the PBC and SVDP government nurseries, a large number of both GF 677 and Myrabolan seedlings were found to be suffering from severe root rot caused by *T. basicola*. *T. basicola* is in fact a pathogen of relatively minor importance that however can induce severe symptoms in high stress environments. *Verticillium dahliae*, a severe wilt disease, was also identified with great frequency on various olives at the SVDP government nurseries.

#### VIROLOGY AND VIRUS-LIKE LABORATORY

In 2006 the number of samples examined totalled to 1,356, the number of tests amounted to 1,672, while 104 inspections were made.

- *Monitoring of Quarantine Viral Diseases*: The national Citrus Tristeza Virus Monitoring for Protected Zones survey for 2006 was carried out in accordance with Council Directive 2000/29. Sampling of citrus was performed during the months of January and February, April and June as well as in November and December. In all, 40 inspections of citrus trees were carried out at private gardens, commercial orchards in various localities and also at commercial nurseries.
- *Pepino Mosaic Virus (PepMV) Survey*: This survey was run in accordance with Commission Decision 2004/200/EC. The PepMV survey was carried out during the periods January-March and October-November. Inspections were made on field and protected tomato crops, during which a total of 395 compound samples corresponding to 1975 tomato plants were sampled. Crops were inspected for viral symptoms and data on each tomato crop visited was collected. The samples were tested by ELISA testing. During the inspections a plant quarantine officer was present. Results were sent to the growers involved in this survey.
- *Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus (TSWV) Survey*: In continuation with the survey performed during 2005 for the presence of Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus on protected tomato crops in Malta and Gozo, a total of 105 tomato

leaf compound samples (corresponding to 525 plants) were tested for this virus. These tests were performed in conjunction with the PepMV survey.

- *Flavescence Doree Survey*: During November planning for the setup for the survey for *Flavescence doree* and its vector *Scaphoideus titanus* to be commenced in April/May 2007 was made. The survey is to be performed in preparation for applying for protected zone status for both the phytoplasma and vector. Collection of quotations for chemicals and reagents required during the survey and issuing of request forms was made. Necessary information and scientific publications are being collected.
- *SVDP Government Nursery Monitoring*: Inspections at the SVDP Stone Fruit Government Nursery mother plots were performed during September. A total number of 415 trees from Plots 29, 30, and Plots 8, 9 (demonstration plot) were sampled and tested for the presence of Plum-Pox Virus (PPV). During these visits the trees were inspected for viral symptoms. Three shoots from different areas of each tree were sampled for testing. The samples collected were tested with ELISA for each virus at the Virology Laboratory, Plant Biotechnology Centre, Lija.

Mechanical transmission tests were carried out for trees suspected of infection by quality viruses. Tests were run on *Chenopodium quinoa*, *C. amaranticolor*, *Cucumis sativus*, *N. occidentalis*, and *N. benthamiana* indicator plants.

- *Bidnija Olive Testing*: During March, October and November molecular tests were performed for the presence of dsRNA (Double Stranded Ribonucleic acids) in olive samples from Bidnija. Presence of DS RNA in plants signifies viral infection by one or more viruses. Total nucleic acids were extracted from each olive sample using phenol/ chloroform extraction, and purification by enzymatic digestion. DS RNAs were analysed on TAE poly-acrylamide gel electrophoresis.

### Bacteriology Laboratory

- *Monitoring of Quarantine Bacterial Diseases - Potato Ring Rot (*Clavibacter michiganensis ssp sepedonicus*) and Potato Brown Rot (*Ralstonia solanacearum*) Surveys*: Visual inspections of plants and cut tubers were carried out from March till May on potato plantations for ring rot and brown rot diseases of potato in terms of Council Directives 98/57/EC and 93/85/EEC. A total of 18 inspections were carried out. Plantations were observed for symptoms of ring rot and brown rot on foliage and for bacterial wilt. When available, samples of 10 tubers per field were cut and observed for symptoms of ring rot or brown rot. Suspect plants/tubers were cultured onto SMSA media. Suspect colonies were tested by immunofluorescence.
- *Tomato Field Surveys*: In June and July, surveys on open field tomatoes were performed at 32 sites. The tomato plants were inspected for bacterial wilt. Compound samples made of 200 leaf base cuttings were sampled from each field and tested by culturing on semi selective media SMSA. Suspect colonies were tested by Immunofluorescence.

### Entomology and Nematology Laboratory

Over 230 laboratory tests/diagnoses were carried out on entomological material and about 25 laboratory tests were carried out on nematode identifications. In total more than 80 inspections were carried out. These tests/diagnoses came mainly from part-time and full-time growers, private gardens and nurseries and from interceptions or material collected by plant quarantine personnel.

### Monitoring Surveys

Between November and December, more than 500 *Pinus halepensis* trees (including nursery stock) were observed and examined for the possible presence of *Bursaphelenchus xylophilus*, the pine wood nematode. Thirteen locations where pine trees are present were examined. This was part of an obligatory survey which all Member States have to carry out for this pest nematode. In all suspected cases, laboratory tests were carried out but all resulted negative for this pest.

Other obligatory surveys such as that for *Dryocosmus kuriphilus*, the oriental chestnut gall wasp and that for *Diabrotica virgifera* were not carried due to the almost complete lack of the host plants of these pests in Malta, i.e. chestnut trees and maize.

### Participation in EU and other funded projects

#### Sub-sector studies CT2463/2005

During March till May, the Diagnostic Section was involved in five missions with Italian experts from CIHEAM (Bari) as follows:

The first mission took place from 21 to 23 March with fruit tree expert Dr Arben Myrta. This mission aimed at continuing the clonal and sanitary selection for local varieties of stone fruits, and on starting the local pome fruit clonal selection.

Dr Luigi Catalano, expert on fruit tree certification visited Malta between 5 and 7 April during which period meetings were held on the certification schemes of fruit trees at Żebbug, San Blas and Salib ta' l-Għolja to assess commercial fruit tree cultivation in Malta.

Citrus pathologist Dr Annamaria D'Onghia visited between 10 and 13 April, and between 16 and 19 May. During both her visits, work on the clonal and sanitary selection for citrus was revised. Agricultural holdings, from where the selected clones were chosen, were revisited.

Dr Michele di Giaro, vine and olive pathologist, visited Malta from 26 to 28 April. During this mission, meetings were performed on clonal and sanitary selection of local grapevine and olive varieties together with the Virology section at PBC, and the Viticulture section of Għammieri.

### Other Projects

In February 2006, Dr David Mifsud and Mr Timothy Pace-Lupi applied for a Leonardo Mobility Project under the Leonardo da Vinci Programme entitled *Plant Pests and Diseases of the Maltese Islands*. This project was approved and was rated first from all submitted projects. A total financial contribution of €13,280 was approved for mobility studies.

In December 2006, Dr David Mifsud, Mr Timothy Pace-Lupi and Dr Inga Zazada submitted a project proposal for possible financial award under the John and Ann Niederhauser Endowment Award. The project consists of the combination of soil solarisation and nitrogen-containing animal manure for soil-borne pest management, particularly towards the response for *Phytophthora* spp. and *Meloidogyne* spp. If the project is approved, a total of US\$8,760 will be devoted entirely for this work.

### Publications

Various publications related to plant health were published in 2006. They represent new records of plant diseases found in the Maltese Islands. A review of all plant pathogens was also published in which more than 300 different diseases found in the Maltese Islands are included.

### Tissue Culture Lab (In-Vitro Laboratory)

The main mission of the Tissue Culture Lab until recently was the production of virus-free rootstocks to be used for the grafting of stone fruit trees in Malta. The plant material used for micro-propagation belongs to the almond species and was purchased virus-free from the Centro di Ricerca e Sperimentazione in Agricoltura located in Locorotonda (Italy). The varieties GF677 and Myrobalan 29C were propagated. In October 2006, MRAE decided that the activity of the Plant Tissue Culture Lab be diversified to the conservation and sustainable use of local varieties of fruit tree species which are in danger of genetic

erosion. Therefore, no more virus-free rootstocks shall be micro-propagated but imported by the government-owned St Vincent de Paule nursery from abroad already rooted and acclimatised.

#### Micro-propagation

- *Production of Myrobalan 29C plants:* Clone number 3 (MYR003) of the variety Myrobalan 29C which was conserved in the cold room from the previous year has been used for the production of plants. The propagation process yielded a satisfactory multiplication rate and a total of 13,260 plantlets were transferred for rooting purposes. The plantlets transferred onto rooting media were then acclimatised and satisfactory results were achieved as regards the survival rate of such plants.
- *Production of GF677 plants:* During the year 2006, three GF677 clones (GF008, GF009 and GF010) were micro-propagated. A total of 19,820 plantlets of GF008 and 1,960 plantlets of GF009 clone were transferred for rooting purposes with the total quantity of GF677 plantlets obtained from these two clones being 21,780.

Two jars containing the new GF677 (Clone GF010) plantlets were purchased from Italy and delivered to the Plant Tissue Culture Lab. These were opened in September 2006 for the first sub-culture to be performed. Following this sub-culture, one of the jars was found to be contaminated with fungi. Control tests on the nutrient agar which were carried out prior to sub-culturing confirmed that the jar with the plantlets was already contaminated prior to its delivery to Malta. The Plant Health Section communicated with the supplier on this matter. It was also noted that the remaining plantlets of the new GF677 clone did not respond well to micro-propagation techniques.

- *Production of ornamental plants:* During 2006, a batch of around 360 Boston ferns of the genus and species *Nephrolepis bostoniensis* were rooted using *in vitro* techniques and were then acclimatised in the glasshouse in pots. Another batch of about 130 plants has also been transferred to rooting media during the last three months of 2006 and such plants will be acclimatised during the first 6 weeks of next year 2007.
- *Research Works:* Research work was carried out under the supervision of Dr Elena Yasnetskaya (Adviser at the Plant Tissue Culture Lab). This included propagation of rootstocks; micro-propagation of orchids and tulips; and sanitation of local varieties of stone fruit trees.

#### Chemistry Laboratory

The Chemistry Laboratories as from August 2006 became part of the Plant Health Section. These labs were formerly known as the Agricultural Services Laboratories. The duties consisting mainly of analysis of soil and irrigation water were retained.

#### Lab analysis

A summary of the number of samples received and the laboratory tests performed in 2006 at the Chemistry Laboratories is shown below:

Type of agricultural material	No of samples received	No of tests performed
Soil:		
routine	396	1,980
projects (MALSIS)	200	400
Irrigation water (routine)	141	705
Liquid extracts	103	249
Plant matter	10	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>850</b>	<b>3,394</b>

Furthermore, analyses of 103 extracts for metallic contamination were carried out during 2006. A total of 249 tests were performed during which iron, nickel, zinc, lead, copper and chromium was determined. Tests were performed using the flame atomic absorption spectrophotometer (FAAS).

### Oenology and Viticulture Laboratory

During 2006 five wine samples were processed through the Oenology and Viticulture Laboratory namely: Chardonnay, Syrah, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon (Malta) and Cabernet Sauvignon (Gozo). The grapes were broken and fermented, then filled in demijohns till fermentation stops. These samples were sent for official analysis to the Joint Research Centre in Bari, Italy.

It is envisaged that in the future, wine sampling in supermarkets will take place to conduct analysis for official use. The checking of labels is also a task which will be started in 2007.

### Seeds and other Propagation Material

#### *Fruit trees and vines*

From September, the SPMU started gathering information from competent MRAE entities regarding the varieties of fruit trees and vines being cultivated and marketed in Malta. This data shall be used to formulate the official registers of fruit trees and vines as requested under the Legal Notices 271 of 2004, 470 of 2004 and 310 of 2006. A database of fruit tree and vine varieties was compiled and the data obtained already from other MRAE entities was inserted.

Work was done in October on the conservation and production of the local varieties of citrus species. Information on the rootstocks that can be utilised to graft such varieties was gathered by the SPMU and forwarded to interested parties. The conservation and production of local varieties is being given importance by MRAE as there is the intention of setting up a genebank of local varieties of citrus species and also due to the fact that a quarantine pest (citrus tristeza virus) has been detected by the Plant Health Section on imported material.

Protocols for the certification of propagating material and plants of various species of stone fruits, citrus, vines and olives were formulated. The standards of the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO) were being followed. After the final evaluation by the Plant Health Department, these documents shall be subjected to the approval by the Scientific & Technical Committee on certification and implemented by MRAE.

### GMOs

Consultations were held among MRAE entities on the proposal for the establishment of a national technical committee which would act as the focal point on issues related to GMOs in agriculture and to draft the national coexistence measures which are an obligation of Malta. It was then decided that MEPA should remain as the national competent authority. Emphasis is being made on the report drafted by the European Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the implementation of national coexistence measures.

### Sub-sector Studies

A sub-sector study (key sector CT 2463/2005) on the cultivation of fruit trees commenced in March 2006 between MRAE and IAMB (International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies) and the first visit by a foreign expert was held in the same month. During these periods, the main issues tackled were the identification of new local ecotypes, the evaluation of the local ecotypes collected in previous years and the clonal and sanitary selection of local germplasm. Certification and pomological



characterisation of propagation material was also discussed. Farmers in various localities in Malta and Gozo cultivating local varieties of stone fruits and citrus were visited including the government nursery. During the field visits, samples of plant parts of various species have been collected and morphological characterisation was commenced in accordance with the protocols for the distinctness, uniformity and stability testing established by the CPVO and IPGRI (International Plant Genetic Resources Institute). This characterisation shall lead to the formulation of a description of such varieties.

A seminar was held in September during which the main achievements and future activities of the sub-sector studies were presented.

### **ECP/GR networks and EURISCO**

The data that is being collected for the local varieties of various species as described in the IPGRI technical protocol of plant descriptors will be included in the national inventory of Malta on plant genetic resources.

The replies for two surveys on the status of national inventories of *ex situ* plant genetic resources in Europe and on the status of the European Plant Genetic Resources Search Catalogue (EURISCO) were sent to IPGRI.

### **Field Trials**

Trials have been carried out during 2006 in conjunction with the Fruit Tree and Crop Husbandry Section within the Rural Development Department. These include trials on onions and garlic.

## **PESTICIDES UNIT**

### **Product Registration**

During the year, 99 new applications for Plant Protection Products (PPPs) were received.

EU Active Substance Dossiers were received from companies, of which 56 were in relation to Biocides and 210 in relation to PPPs and Draft Assessment Reports from other European authorities regarding centrally authorised procedure of Biocides and PPPs across all EU Member States. As from September 2006, a new filing system was set up to catalogue the dossiers sent by manufacturers for the registration of PPPs. Each product was catalogued and a reference number given to every dossier received. These were then registered in an appropriate database.

Applications for the temporary authorisation of PPP's on the Maltese market had to be halted until the Pesticides Control Board was set up in December.

Several meetings were held with foreign companies interested in registering their products locally.

### **Registered Products to be Placed on the Maltese Market**

Twenty-nine PPPs and 10 Biocides have been authorised and placed on the 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**

The composition of the Pesticides Control Board was published in the Government Gazette number 18,004 on 1 December 2006. The first meeting was held on 23 December 2006.

## Inspections and Sampling

During 2006, eight inspections were carried out for the purpose of checking compliance with MRLS; 46 samples were collected covering 10 types of commodities of vegetable origin.

Visits to growers were paid to advise them on the correct use of PPPs and the exceeding of Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs). Advice was also given to growers regarding the use of specific PPPs against particular disease, methods of mixing, calculation of the dose to be used on particular field or crop, and equipment and its maintenance.

Inspection of retail outlets selling Biocides and PPP were made to check for non-authorised products on the market and to ensure that the proper label was affixed to the product.

## PLANT QUARANTINE UNIT

- *Phytosanitary Inspections of Commodities originating from Third Countries*: 282 full inspections were carried out on commodities subject to inspection in terms of Legal Notice 97/2004.
- *Inspections were carried out on wood packaging material (WPM) originating from third countries* – all consignments were according to ISPM 15. Inspectors were also involved in the stamping of WPM for Comtec Ltd. During the year there were 268 heat treatments consisting of 2,838 pallets, 108 boxes and 50 dunnage.
- *Plant Passport System*: The plant passport system started to be implemented in November by visiting various nurserymen and explaining how the systems work. During the year as well, the plant quarantine inspectors inspected open markets in different villages of Malta to check for any presence of leaves with imported citrus from Italy since the latter is not recognised as protected zone for CTV. There were no interceptions on citrus coming from Italy.
- *Phytosanitary Certificates for export/re-export*: 52 certificates were issued during 2006 (49 export certificates, of which 36 were for succulent seeds; 2 re-export certificates [bananas, yellow corn]; 1 Russian export certificate for succulent seeds.
- *Revenue* collected in 2006 amounted to Lm5,141.
- *Registration*: There were 22 new entries in the Traders Registration. During the year there was a grand total of 337 imports of various agricultural products and timber from third countries which were duly registered in the database.
- *Eurepgap*: From February till May 2006 most of the plant quarantine staff was involved in the Eurepgap certification scheme of potatoes for export. Furthermore during the months of January to March Quarantine staff reported to the Pitkali Markets on Mondays and Thursdays to solicit growers to improve the quality and advise how to pack better their produce.

## PLANT BIOTECHNOLOGY CENTRE MANAGEMENT

### Acclimatisation Glasshouse

During the year, a total number of 11,900 Mirabella plants and 13,680 plants were transferred *ex vitro* for acclimatisation. In October, the production of GF 677 was halted.

New compost was used for acclimatisation and several experiments were done in the glasshouse so as to improve the survival rate and better the quality of plants.

A number of ornamental plants were propagated as well. Ferns were propagated *in vitro* and acclimatised as well. Other plants like Yuccas, Cremonophyton, Helicrysum, Myrtus and spider plants were propagated by cuttings. Regular caring of such plants was carried out.

### Diagnostic Glasshouse

A continuous production of herbaceous indicator and indexing plants for virus diagnosis was carried out throughout the whole year. Such work includes regular sowing, transplanting, repotting, irrigation and spraying. Old material was discarded. Hygiene such as cleaning of benches and floors was carried out. A stock of mother plants for the collection of seeds was kept as well.

### Sale/Donation of Plants

During 2006 the following rootstocks were forwarded to SVDP; 8,556 Myrabolan and 13,505 GF 677. From these rootstocks, 1,000 Myrabolan and 1,000 GF 677 were forwarded directly to the Gozo farm. Therefore the total number of rootstocks forwarded to SVDP this year was 22,061.

The following plants were donated to various entities including Parcs Department, Nature Trust and MRAE - 146 carobs, 4 Myrtus, 1 Helicrysum, 1 Lavander, 94 Crataegus, 1 Cremnophyton, 70 Yuccas, 90 ferns, 158 spider plants and 1 Fiddle wood. A further 16 baskets with plants were donated to MRAE upon request.

The following plants were sold during the Green week, Trade fair and Eco-fest - spider plants 15, Yucca 18 Carob 88, Ferns 93 and Philodendron 4. The total amount was Lm373.

## PLANT HEALTH – TECHNICAL AND OPERATIONAL

### EU Related Affairs

- Various *EU related meetings* were attended. Instruction notes and reports were prepared by the respective officials for such meetings and the former have also been prepared for meetings for which no Maltese representative was present. All the documents to be used in the meetings were reviewed thoroughly and comments were sent to the European Commission and the Presidencies when needed.
- *MERTENS/COPEPER/AGRIFISH/SCA/Environmental Council and other EU matters*: Comments, speaking and briefing notes were prepared by the officer in charge upon request by the EU Affairs Directorate (MRAE) and the OPM EU Secretariat to be used in the meetings in caption that were held during this year. The main issues tackled during such meetings were Seeds and other Propagation material, Plant Protection Products and Harmful Organisms.
- *GMOs*: Draft Council Decisions were received by the Plant Health Section from the EU Affairs Directorate (MRAE) for comments on the placing of the market of genetically-modified propagation material or parts of plants in accordance with Directive 2001/18/EC. The SPMU provided information when issues were related in some way or another to its field of work. Also, information on the current situation of the marketing of genetically-modified varieties of seeds for sowing and their inclusion in the Common Catalogues was forwarded from time to time.
- *Communications to the EU*: A Council document on the halting of the loss of biodiversity by 2010 and beyond was forwarded in November for comments. It focused on the main areas which shall be covered by this initiative, key policy areas and priority objectives for 2007 to 2013. The objectives relate also to plant genetic resources and the conservation and availability for use of genetic diversity of crops and commercial tree species within the EU and the promotion of their *in situ* conservation. Reference to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture was made. MRAE had already taken the initiative years ago to carry out activities related to the conservation and use of plant genetic resources especially in the case of fruit trees.

### National Legislation - New Legal Notices Adopted

Six legal notices under the Pesticides Control Act 2001 and four legal notices under the Plant Quarantine Act 2001 were published in the Government Gazette.

## Appointment of Boards

The Scientific and Technical Committee on certification of propagation and plants of vegetables, fruit trees, vines and ornamentals was appointed during 2006 and met for the first time in October. This Committee was set up in terms of regulation 5 of Legal Notice 138 of 2005 – Plant Quarantine (National Certification Scheme) Regulations, 2005.

## MAINTENANCE SECTION

The Maintenance Section carried out the normal day-to-day maintenance and repairs at the various departments within the Ministry, namely: National Agricultural Research and Development Centre – Għammieri, Ministry, Head Office, Plant Biotechnology Centre, Civil Abattoir, Extension Service Offices, Pitkali Markets, EU Offices at Lija, National Park Ta' Qali, and Salina Park.

Besides these works the section carried out the following works:

- Embellishment of the departmental stands for the Echofest and the Malta International Fair;
- Implementation of a major programme of works at the Agricultural Research and Development Centre, involving dismantling and reconstruction of a gate situated within the Centre, reconstruction of a 78 metre stretch boundary wall complete with galvanised metal security fencing, demolition of a dangerous building and laying of foundations for new buildings, refurbishment of four offices, with new lighting and water systems, housing the Apiculture Offices; construction of a new apiary and fencing of the area with a metal structure to support a netted tunnel for visitors; refurbishment of office space to house the EU Affairs Directorate;
- Construction of 26 pieces of furniture for the Ministry;
- Erection of new chain link fencing and gate at the Grading Station Area, upgrading works on security lights; and repairs and maintenance to hawkers' stalls roofs at the Pitkali Markets;
- Fitting of new electrical installations and overall general maintenance to walkway lights at Ta' Qali parks;
- New installations of a Security Room and security lights at Salina Park;
- General overhaul and upgrading at pump room area at San Luċjan, involving replacement of a catwalk, construction of two galvanized metal doors, and cleaning of the ditch area.

MARTIN BUGELLI

*Director General (Rural Affairs and Paying Agency)*