



**Ministry for Rural Affairs  
and the Environment**

yearly) declarations. The Paying Agency staff with the help of MITTS Ltd reacted promptly to ensure a smooth transition.

## PLANT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

### PLANT HEALTH LABORATORIES

During 2007, standard operating procedures were drawn up for a number of tests and assays performed in the respective laboratories according to approved international and EU protocols.

#### Diagnostic and Identification Laboratories

The overall responsibilities of the Plant Pathology Laboratory of the Plant Health Department 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.

#### Plant Pathology (Mycology) Laboratory

In 2007 the number of samples examined totalled 36, the number of tests amounted to 27, while 25 inspections were made.

- *Monitoring of quarantine fungal diseases:* During the year, *Phytophthora ramorum* was monitored and a survey was initiated on *Verticillium dahliae* olive trees at SVDP, analysis on grain samples for the possible presence of *Tilezia indica* and monitoring for the possible presence of *Gibberella circinata*.
- *Annual Surveys:* The annual *Survey for Phytophthora ramorum* for 2007 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 seven locations including public gardens, public green areas, parks of national importance, woodland pockets and garigue-type areas and three plant species (e.g. *Quercus ilex*, *Lonicera sp.*, *Laurus nobilis*) inspected. All visual inspections and laboratory tests on suspect samples were negative for *P. ramorum*, confirming the absence of the pathogen upon Maltese territory.
- *Fungal diseases recorded:* The following fungal species have been identified on the indicated host plants on the Maltese territory:
  - *Fusarium oxysporum* fsp *radicis-lycopersici* (FORL) on tomatoes
  - *Verticillium dahliae* on olives
  - A species of rust on *Limonium sinuatum*
  - *Rhizoctonia* on outdoor tomato
  - Olive cancer at *Ta' Baldu*.

#### Virology and Virus-like Laboratory

In 2007 the number of samples examined totalled to 1,388, the number of tests amounted to 1,939, while 148 inspections were made.

- *Monitoring of Quarantine Viral Diseases:* The national protected zone Citrus Tristeza Virus survey for 2007 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, 21 inspections of citrus trees were carried out at private gardens, commercial orchards in various localities. A total of 698 samples corresponding to 2,601 trees were collected. During the inspections, the trees were inspected for CTV symptoms and data on the trees was collected. All samples were tested by Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA) using commercial polyclonal antibodies (Bioreba). Suspect samples were also tested by RT-PCR during June to August. Results of tests performed were sent to the growers visited.

- *Pepino Mosaic Virus (PepMV), Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus (TSWV) and Tomato Yellow Leaf Curl Virus (TYLCV) Surveys:* These surveys were run in accordance with Commission Decision 2004/200/EC. Surveys were carried out in April, July and October. Inspections were made on field and protected tomato crops, during which a total of 223 compound samples corresponding to 1,085 tomato plants were sampled. The samples were tested by ELISA testing. Results were sent to the growers involved in these surveys. No symptoms were observed in the holdings visited.
- *Flavescence Dorée Survey:* The Grapevine *Flavescence dorée/Scaphoideus titanus* survey was carried out from July to November. A total of 101 inspections were carried out in vineyards as part of the survey for this disease and its leaf hopper vector *Scaphoideus titanus*. During the inspections all vines within the vineyard were inspected for Flavescence dorée symptoms. A total of 139 leaf-samples were collected from 43 vineyards to be tested by PCR for the presence of Flavescence dorée. Yellow sticky traps were replaced every 15 to 20 days for the monitoring of the vector. A total of 82 yellow sticky traps were set. Collected samples were extracted using Phytoplasma isolation technique followed by DNA extraction. A total of 316 tests were run by PCR and analysis of DNA amplicates was done by means of Agarose or Acrylamide Gel electrophoresis.
- *SVDP Government Nursery Monitoring:* Inspections at the SVDP Stone Fruit Government Nursery mother plots were performed during June, July and August. All stone fruit trees within Plots 29 and 30 (demonstration plot) were sampled (331 samples collected) and tested for the presence of Plum-Pox Virus (PPV) and a percentage for Prune Necrotic Ringspot Virus (PNRV) and Prune Dwarf Virus (PDV). The trees were inspected for viral symptoms and samples collected were tested with ELISA for each virus at the Diagnostic Laboratory. Thirty mechanical transmission tests were carried out for quality viruses.
- *Rootstock Certification:* GF 677 and Myrabolan rootstocks were certified to CAC standard for onward transmission to SVDP nursery. Tests were also specifically carried out for the presence of the fungal pathogen, *Thievaliopsis basicola*, which is locally a potential pest of these host plants and for viral pathogens namely PNRV, PDV and PPV.

#### Bacteriology Laboratory

- *Monitoring of Quarantine Bacterial Diseases - Potato Ring Rot (Clavibacter michiganensis ssp sepedonicus) and Potato Brown Rot (Ralstonia solanacearum) Surveys:* Between January and December 2007 a total of 145 samples were collected by the Inspectorate & Surveillance Unit and were tested for the presence of Potato Brown Rot and Potato Ring Rot. The samples were tested according to the test schemes given in Council Directive 98/57/EC on the control of *Ralstonia solanacearum* and Council Directive 93/85 on the control of *Clavibacter michiganensis sepedonicus*. In total, 10 inspections and 984 tests were carried out which included bacterial plating, immunofluorescence, gramstaining, PCR and biological assays. Biological assay trials of positive controls were performed on 38 tomato plants in the hot room.

SOP's for the diagnosis of *R.solanacearum* have been revised according to Commission Directive 2006/63/CE of 14 July 2006 and of *Clavibacter michiganensis sepedonicus* according to Commission Directive 2006/56/EC of 14 June 2006. SOPs for the diagnosis of *Erwinia amylovora* have also been compiled according to official EPPO standards.

- *Tomato Field Surveys:* Five inspections were carried out at tomato growers where plants in the growing phase were observed for symptoms. One sample of tomato showing wilting symptoms was tested by bacterial streaming, SMSA plating and Gram staining for Potato Brown Rot and Potato Ring Rot and resulted negative with all tests.

#### Entomology and Nematology Laboratory

Over 230 laboratory tests/diagnoses were carried out on entomological material and about 19 laboratory tests were carried out on nematode identifications. In total more than 30 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 Survey*: Monitoring of the Red Palm Weevil (*Rhynchophorus ferrugineus*) and of the Pine Wood Nematode (*Bursaphelenchus xylophilus*) was carried out together with the Surveillance and Inspectorate Unit.
- *Pest Identification*: Among the most common and important identifications carried out during 2007, the following are worth mentioning - *Othiorynchus moriger*, an endemic weevil found damaging olive trees; *Saissetia olea* and *Palpita unionalis* on olives; an unidentified species of wood boring insect which needs further studies; an unidentified species of aphid on *Pistacia*; *Greenidea ficicola* on *Ficus nitida*; *Tuberalachnus salignus* on *Salix*; an unidentified species of aphid on camomille; two aphid species on citrus: *Toxoptera aurantii* and *Aphis spiraeicola*.
- *Participation in the VI Framework Project (Second Ringtest Portchecks Project)*: As part of the Second Ringtest Portchecks Project, the SMART Cyclor and Homogeniser were in Malta during May/June. Real-time PCR tests were carried out at the Diagnostic Lab for *Phytophthora ramorum*. Tests for Potato ring rot and brown rot were carried out in Italy on Maltese samples.

### Tissue Culture Lab (In Vitro Laboratory)

The Tissue Culture Lab focused on the production by micro-propagation techniques of endangered plant species and also the sanitation of accessions of local varieties of peaches was continued.

#### Micro-propagation

- *Production of Myrobalan 29C plants*: The variety Myrobalan 29C which had been conserved in the cold room from the previous year has been used for the production of plants. Survival and rooting of the healthiest plantlets was attempted. The propagation process yielded a satisfactory multiplication rate and a total of 4,532 plantlets were transferred for rooting purposes. Around 3,000 trees were transferred to the glasshouse of the Plant Biotechnology Centre for acclimatisation.
- *Production of GF677 plants*: During the year, clones of GF677 were micro-propagated. The consignment of plantlets brought from Italy in September 2006 to initiate a new culture, did not respond well to micro-propagation techniques and therefore their condition had deteriorated to the point that very few plantlets survived; however they were not suitable and were eventually discarded.
- *Production of ornamental plants*: During 2007, a batch of 435 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 150 plants has also been transferred to rooting media *in vitro*.
- *Research Works*: Research work was carried out on indigenous endangered wild plants by the adviser at the Plant Tissue Culture Laboratory, who was previously employed with MEPA as a consultant. Most of the work is being undertaken upon MEPA's initiative which is being conducted at the Tissue Culture Lab because of lack of facilities at MEPA. The following is a brief description of the research carried out in 2007:
  - *Micro-propagation of Maltese indigenous plants*: The micro-propagation of the endangered local species of orchids and tulips was continued this year. This is a project sponsored by HSBC under the Care for the Environment Fund. The orchids *Ophrys lutea*, *Ophrys italica*, *Spiranthes spiralis*, *Barlia robertiana* and the tulip *Tulipa sylvestris* were chosen for this regeneration program to prevent plants from disappearing from the Maltese archipelago. From the beginning of this year until October 2007, routine transfers of the plantlets were carried out. Experimentation on the media composition to be used in the different stages of growth was performed. Few plants have been transferred *ex vitro* in compost.

Micro-plants of the evergreen rose (*Rosa sempervirens*) were propagated on a small scale at the Tissue Culture Lab and experiments on the composition of the media for proliferation and multiplication of the plants were carried out. No success with rooting was achieved.

The micro-propagation of *Aristolochia clusii* continued. A number of healthy and well-developed plants were transferred for acclimatization in the growth room and greenhouse. Others were transferred to the cold room for long-term storage.

Action plans for the re-introduction of the plants that are being micro-propagated have been drafted. Protocols for the propagation including the costs of production of *Rosa sempervirens* and *Tetraclinis articulata* (*sigra tal-gharghar*) were prepared.

- *Sanitation of local varieties of stone fruit trees*: The trial on the sanitation of local varieties of peach trees being kept at Plant Biotechnology Centre continued throughout the year. Experimentation with varying concentrations of chemicals in media and types of containers was carried out in order to note the effects on shoot tip proliferation.

### Chemistry Laboratory

The main activity of the Chemistry Laboratory was the testing of soil and irrigation water supplied by farmers and public or private entities.

#### Lab analysis

A summary of the number of samples received and the laboratory tests performed in 2007 at the Chemistry Laboratories is shown below:

Type of agricultural material	No of samples received	No of tests performed
Soil (routine)	207	1,221
Irrigation water (routine)	138	721
<b>Total</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>1,942</b>

#### Oenology and Viticulture Laboratory

Following the approval of the DOK and IGT protocols, around 700 grape samples were collected from various wineries in order to test the sugar content as stipulated by the protocols due to eventual certification.

In accordance to Commission Regulation 2729/2000 and Commission regulation 1607/2000, wine samples were produced from local grapes for analysing. The results were then forwarded to the Joint Research Centre in Ispra, Italy.

#### Dissemination of Information

Limits of salinity of irrigation water for various agricultural crops/fruit trees and the susceptibility limits that lead to foliar injury from saline water were prepared and distributed with the test reports. In detail interpretation of the test reports has been carried out on a regular basis.

### Students/Trainees at the Plant Health Laboratories

The main activity of the Chemistry Laboratory was the testing of soil and irrigation water supplied by farmers and public or private entities.

- *Plant Tissue Culture Laboratory*: The laboratory was visited by a number of students from different schools in Malta. A presentation on the main activities of this lab was given by MRAE officials.
- *Chemistry Laboratory*: A number of post-secondary, graduate and post-graduate students of the University of Malta carried out soil and irrigation water analysis as part of their dissertation under the supervision of lab officials. Another student who finished secondary school paid regular visits to the lab during the

summer of 2007 as part of her interest in getting familiar with the work carried out by the Plant Health Department. Students together with their teachers from local and foreign schools have also visited the lab.

- *Bacteriology and Virology Laboratory*: An MCAST student (lab technologist) worked at the lab between February and September while another student who had just finished her O level exams worked at the lab during the summer months. A Junior College student attended five lab sessions as part of her Systems of Knowledge project.
- *Mycology and Entomology Laboratories*: A University student reading for BSc Biology & Chemistry worked in the entomology and mycology laboratories during the summer months; most of her work involved research and drafting of SOPs.

## SEEDS AND OTHER PROPAGATION MATERIAL

### General Issues

Officials of the Seed and Propagation Material Unit (SPMU) regularly visited local nurseries to gather information on the plant varieties being introduced in Malta of agricultural plants (cereals, fodder plants and potatoes), vegetables, fruit trees and vines. The data collected are being used for the national catalogues of the various species.

### Seeds of agricultural plants and vegetables

The Plant Health Department went through notifications received from other Member States on varieties of agricultural plants and vegetables which are regularly added, deleted or modified on the Common Catalogues of varieties. Also, notifications on authorisations for the marketing of seed of not yet listed varieties according to Commission Decision 2004/842/EC were reviewed.

Trials on varieties of cereals and vegetables belonging to plant genetic resources which are at risk of genetic erosion have started. These are taking place in the fields of the Plant Biotechnology Centre. The aim is to compile descriptions of all the varieties of local varieties marketed in Malta and also as part of conservation activities. Melon, watermelon, kohlrabi, vetch, onions, marrows and carrots were sown for such purposes. Morphological characterisation of the mature fruit was carried out and recorded.

Research was carried out on the weeds which are regulated by the national legislation on the marketing of agricultural plants for the various crops and the respective seed categories. This exercise was considered important as the SPMU needed to familiarise itself with the seed infestants.

### Fruit trees and vines

The SPMU focused on the establishment of the national catalogue of varieties, and where appropriate their clones, of fruit trees and vines which are covered by Legal Notices 271 and 470 of 2004 and 188 of 2006. Only varieties and clones included in this catalogue will be allowed to be marketed in the Maltese territory. A description of the main morphological and physiological characteristics of the plants shall also be endorsed for each variety.

Batches of rootstocks of fruit trees that were produced by micro-propagation purposes were certified. A total of 6 certificates, which approve the designation of the trees as CAC material, consisting of 6,060 trees, were issued by the SPMU.

A plan of action for the national certification of local varieties/ecotypes of citrus fruit trees has been drafted. It includes all the steps from the identification of candidate stocks to the certification of the plant material.

Recommendations on the draft EPPO guidelines for grapevine and strawberry (schemes for the production of healthy plants for planting) were forwarded to EPPO Secretariat.

### Forest trees

Communication with the PARC Unit was held in order for the SPMU to gather information on the species of forest trees being imported and marketed in Malta.

A search for any records of a fungal disease caused by *Chalara fraxinea* that attacks forest trees has been carried out.

### GMOs

During the year, the Plant Health Department held meetings with MEPA to discuss issues on GMOs, bio safety and co-existence of crops. The MRAE EU Directorate forwarded a number of Commission Decisions on the withdrawal from the market of seeds and derived products of genetically-modified maize and oilseed rape. Also, questionnaires on the labelling of authorised genetically-modified seeds in conventional seed lots have been received and comments forwarded where appropriate.

### Advisory Services

The SPMU gave advice and shared its knowledge and experience with other national and foreign public and private entities on the introduction of varieties of seeds and other propagation material in Malta and re-export, and on verification of the type of which submitted wheat samples belong.

Officials of the SPMU also participated in local television and radio programmes during which dissemination of information was carried out.

## PESTICIDES UNIT

### Product Registration

During the year, 39 EU Active Substance Dossiers were received from companies in relation to Plant Protection Products (PPPs) and Draft Assessment Reports from other European authorities regarding centrally authorised procedure of biocides and PPPs across all EU Member States. Several meetings were held with foreign companies interested in registering their products locally.

Twenty-nine PPPs and two biocides have been authorised and placed on the Maltese market. Dossiers were being reviewed on a 'first come first reviewed' basis and eventually permanent market authorisation will be issued to these products.

### Product Approval

Six licences were issued for the importation of biocides and PPPs from third countries. All the licences were approved.

### Pesticides Control Board

The Pesticides Control Board met on 19 January, 23 February, 23 April, 4 May, 25 June and 18 July. No quorum was reached in meetings held in August, October and November.

## Inspections and Sampling

### *Placing of Pesticides on the market*

During 2007, the Plant Health Department started the routine inspections at the retailers for plant production products on the market. These inspections were carried out according to the Manual of Procedure drawn up by officials of the Department.

In all, 150 inspections were carried out in the localities of Attard, Balzan, B'Kara, Dingli, Għargħur, Ħamrun, Luqa, Mgarr (Malta), Mosta, M'Scala, Mtarfa, Naxxar, Paola, Qormi, Qrendi, Rabat (Malta), St Julians, San Ġwann, Siggiewi, Sliema, Sta Venera, Ta' Qali, Tarxien, Żabbar, Żebbuġ (Malta), Żejtun and Żurrieq.

### *Biocide inspections*

During this year, 13 leading supermarkets were visited for the biocides inspection, all of which were found to be non-compliant with Legal Notice 294 of 2004 under the Pesticides Control Act 2001. All retailers were given three months grace period by the Pesticides Advisory Control Board to abide by the said legal notice.

### *MRL analyses*

Samples (65 in all) were also collected from various retail outlets. The samples were sent to CEFIT for testing for pesticide residue levels. Samples included peaches, nectarines, grapes, *Girgentina*, tomatoes, lettuce, head cabbage and apples. Most of the results returned as negative, however there were a few tomato samples with low levels of residues and some peach samples which had excessive residues. Meetings were held with the peach growers concerned.

## Revocations

Twenty-five plant protection products have been revoked as they have been removed from Annex 1 of Commission Directive 91/414.

## Rapporteur - Member States (MS) for Biocides

As a rapporteur for two active substances for biocides, in June 2007 the Plant Health Department signed an agreement with the Italian Competent Authority to help it carry out the necessary evaluation of the dossiers forwarded. The completeness checks were carried out and the results forwarded to the Commission.

## SURVEILLANCE AND INSPECTORATE UNIT

### Phytosanitary Inspections

#### *Inspections of Commodities originating from Third Countries*

- During 2007, 394 full inspections were carried out on third country commodities subject to inspection as per LN 97/2004.
- A small consignment of vine cuttings originating from America were retained at the customs airfreight for destruction. These were held as their entry in Malta is prohibited as per Annex III of EU directive 2000/29 EC.

#### *Inspections of Wood packaging material (WPM)*

- WPM originating from third countries are subject to inspection as per ISPM 15 and EU Directive 2004/102/EC. All WPM imports were in line with ISPM 15.



- Inspectors were involved in the stamping of WPM for Comtec Ltd, a service which is being given free of charge. There were 332 heat treatments consisting of 3,590 pallets, 213 boxes and 570 dunnage.
- Training was also given to the S&IU staff by Head of Unit on how to carry the survey for WPM as per ISPM 15.
- All non-conforming wood packaging material arriving at the *Hal Far* container terminal from third countries was destroyed.

#### Plant Passport System

- A seminar on plant passports was held during November. All nurseries and other entities dealing with the propagation of plants and registered with the Plant Health Department were invited for this seminar. The seminar was addressed by Director (Plant Health), the Head of the Surveillance and Inspectorate Unit and an official from the Virology Section. Following this seminar, various outlets were visited. During the visits, information regarding the databases was explained in further detail. A booklet, *Guide to Marketing Requirements and Plant Passports*, was produced for the seminar and was placed on the departmental website.

#### Sampling

- During the year, various samples were collected with regard to the brown rot and ring rot survey, the Colorado beetle survey and the *Phytophthora ramorum* survey. A sample brought by the PARC Unit was sent to Bari for Mycology identification. During the year, seven samples were obtained from importers and farmers. One of the samples consisted of a compound sample of grain which arrived from Bulgaria and was taken to the Mycology Laboratory for testing of *Tilletia indica*. Another sample was taken from Pine plants to be tested for the pine wood nematode while another sample was sent to the Nematology Laboratory.
- During the year inspections regarding the *Citrus tristeza virus*, *Pepino Mosaic virus*, *Flavescence dorée* and its vector *Scaphoideus titanus*, Pine wood nematode and *Phytophthora ramorum* and for CAC certification were carried out. Various samples were collected and sent to laboratories for testing. Seven citrus trees were found to be infected with CTV and had to be uprooted.
- The Red Palm Weevil was first detected in June in a private residence in Wardija; following the first detection, around 150 traps were set in Burmarrad, Gozo, Gżira, Sliema, Marsaxlokk, Qormi, Żebbuġ, St Paul's Bay, Mellieħa area, Naxxar, San Ġwann, Mtarfa and Fgura. Monitoring for this pest was carried out between June and December and the beetle was detected in various areas. During the 150 inspections which were carried out the beetle was found in all the different stages of growth, ie from egg to adult.
- Other inspections were carried out regarding the leaves and penduncles of oranges on fruit arriving into Malta from Italy.

#### Inspections on Pesticides

Around 150 pesticide inspections in various locations were carried in conjunction with the Pesticides Unit.

#### Phytosanitary Certificates

- A total of 28 export phytosanitary certificates (Phyto number 000174 - 000202) were issued.
- 17 re-export Phytosanitary certificate (Phyto number 000019 - 000036) was issued during 2007.

#### Collection of Revenue

During 2007, a total of Lm4,007.61 (€9,335.220) was collected by the S&I Unit.

## Registration

During 2007 there were 18 new entries in the Traders Registration and a total of 238 imports of various agricultural products and timber from third countries which were duly registered in the database.

## Others

- During 2007 the SIU was involved in the Portchecks project. This project is part of the EU VI framework Programme and is combined to RTD and demonstration activity. The aim of this project is to deliver tools and procedures to aid Plant Health competent laboratories to carry out inspection services and molecular diagnostic assays “on-site” and at points of entry. The tests carried out were for *Phytophthora ramorum*, Potato Brown Rot and Potato Ring Rot. Activities included sending equipment and samples to Italy for further diagnosis, budget formulation for obtaining of EU funds and correspondence with the Customs Department for payment duty.
- Contingency and Emergency plans for both the Citrus Tristeza Virus and the Red Palm Weevil have been compiled by staff from the Diagnostic and Control and the Surveillance and Inspectorate Unit.

## Advisory Work

- Inspectors visited a number of private farmers to carry out inspections and collect samples for further diagnosis.
- Most advisory work by the SIU was on the Red Palm Weevil. The Unit received many queries from third parties who sought help through all possible means. Many inspections were also carried out following such requests.
- A number of importers and individuals called at the Unit for queries regarding any import regulations.

## PLANT BIOTECHNOLOGY CENTRE MANAGEMENT

### Glasshouse Facilities

Routine work such as cleaning of pots, application of pesticides and fertilisers was carried out in the glasshouses, screen houses, shade house, mother block and outdoor plants. Routine works for the up keeping of the PBC grounds were carried out. These included weeding and rotovation of fields and general cleaning of the premises.

- *Acclimatisation Glasshouse:* During the year, 200 jars of Myrabolan containing approximately 3,250 plantlets were transferred from the lab for acclimatisation. A quantity of around 500 ferns which had been propagated in the *in vitro* lab was also acclimatised. Rootstocks and ornamental plants were continually cared for and regular applications of insecticides were necessary to control sciarid flies and other insects. Preventative drenching with fungicides was carried out to avoid soil borne fungal diseases and fertilisers were applied during irrigation. Acclimatised rootstocks were transferred to the shade house for hardening and certification.
- *Diagnostic Glasshouse:* A continuous production of herbaceous indicator and indexing plants for virus diagnosis was carried out throughout the whole year. Apart from the regular herbaceous plants, pumpkins, tomatoes, aubergines, fava beans and others were used as indicator plants. Chardonney vine cuttings were propagated for indexing and Mexican lime, GF 305 and Elberta seeds were also sown for indexing purposes. 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.
- *Plastic House:* A continuous production of herbaceous indicator and indexing plants for virus diagnosis was carried out throughout the whole year.
- *Shade House:* Rootstocks were transferred to the shade house for hardening off prior to being certified and transferred to SVDP for eventual sale to growers. Regular irrigation, application of pesticides and

drenching with fungicides for the control of *Thialaviopsis basilicola* was carried out. Other work included organisation of plants and weeding. The *Sarcopoterium* plants are currently waiting to be re-introduced into nature by MEPA. Their roots had to be pruned as they started to grow into the gravel.

- *Screen Houses*: Plants were regularly cared for and required irrigation, weeding and spraying for scale insects, red spider mites and whiteflies.

### Sale/Donation of Plants

During 2007 the following rootstocks were forwarded to SVDP - 2,450 Myrabolan and 1,360 GF 677. The following plants were donated to various entities including PARC Unit, Nature Trust and MRAE – 50 ferns, 19 spider plants, 1 *Philodendron*, 1 *Yucca*, 205 carob, 17 Casuarina and 6 rootstocks. A further 30 baskets with plants were donated to MRAE upon request.

### Maintenance Work

- During the year several maintenance works and services were carried out at the PBC premises for the upkeep of the laboratories, offices, glasshouses and ancillary equipment. The Diagnostic lab backyard was converted into an office with kitchenette.
- Efforts were made to obtain specifications, costs and approval for the new Surveillance and Inspectorate Unit and also for the extension to the Diagnostic lab. These projects have been approved and a bill of quantities has been drawn up. Current efforts are aimed towards obtaining the necessary MEPA permits.
- Action was also taken to have the glasshouse computer system and the hot room repaired by a team of engineers from the University Engineering Department who have been carrying out tests to try and isolate the cause of the problems.
- The shift of the maintenance section was terminated by the beginning of 2007 and the working hours of the maintenance section were brought in line with normal office hours.

### Other Activities

- A total of 114 small bales of hay were grown within the PBC and sent to the Agricultural Research & Development Centre, Għammieri.
- During the year, trials on the local vegetable seeds were started within the premises. Such trials included local varieties of melons and watermelons which had been obtained from San Lawrenz, Gozo and from Mdina. The aim of these trials was to determine the characteristics of the varieties. These trials will be continued during 2008.

## 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.
- *Attendance at meetings*: Department officials attended various meetings of the Plant Health Standing Committee, Seeds and Propagation committee meetings and meetings of the Administrative Council of the Community Plant Variety Office.
- *Communications to the EU*: The Department submitted comments on a number of working documents on various topics, the main ones being
  - the halting of the loss of biodiversity by 2010 and beyond which focused on the main areas which shall be covered by this initiative, key policy areas and priority objectives for 2007 to 2013;

- the acceptance and marketing of seeds of other propagation material of landraces and varieties of agricultural plants, vegetables and seed mixtures of fodder plants;
  - national focal points for the Common Catalogues of varieties of agricultural plants and vegetables;
  - better organisation of the work and dates of the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) sessions;
  - total area accepted for certification and the estimated harvest for the years 2006 and 2007 of seed of the species specified in EU legislation;
  - testing of new hemp varieties and the assessment of the content of *tetrahydrocannabinol*;
  - amendment of the Regulation on the entitlement for the filing of an application for a Community plant variety right;
  - new structure of the Common Catalogue of vegetables and on the varieties of shallots, beet and pepper;
  - authorisation for derogations to Member States to market seeds of agricultural plants satisfying less stringent requirements;
  - questionnaire on ornamental species in which a list of all harmful organisms that have been documented to affect the species covered by the relevant EU directive were enclosed; and
  - renewal of the temporary derogation allowing the import of seed potatoes from certain provinces of Canada.
- *Preparation of Memos:* A number of restricted and unrestricted explanatory memoranda on various draft Commission documents relating to plant health were prepared.

### National Legislation - New Legal Notices Adopted

A total of 53 EU Directives were transposed into Maltese law during 2007, 13 legal notices under the Pesticides Control Act 2001 and 10 legal notices under the Plant Quarantine Act 2001 were published in the Government Gazette.

### Seminars/Meetings

- Following the detection of the Red Palm Weevil the Plant Health Department organised three informative seminars about the topic. Two of the seminars were held in Malta (one was aimed at gardeners and the other at local councils), while the third seminar was held in Gozo and catered for the Gozitan local councils and the general public. The Department also organised a seminar regarding Plant Passports aimed at the local nursery men.
- Departmental officials attended several meetings, seminars and training courses, both locally and abroad, in the course of the year.

### Publications

During the year various related articles were published in the MRAE monthly magazine *Biedja u Sajd*, and press releases appeared on the Government Gazette and on the Department of Information website.

### General Issues

- During the year, the existing Department website was kept up to date with regard to the published legal notices and the list of plant protection products. New information was also added to the site regarding the revoked plant protection products in Malta, the Red Palm Weevil, *Citrus Tristeza Virus*, marketing requirements for various commodities and plant passports.
- The new Department website was completed and sent to Alert Communications in order to be aligned with the required rules and regulations as stipulated by MITTS Ltd. and FITA. Upon completion, the site was then forwarded to MITTS Ltd for testing and approval.
- During the year the Department bought specific health and safety wear and equipment; it is envisaged that during the coming year more safety wear will be purchased.

- Staff within the Department was involved in field inspections and on-the-spot controls organised by the Control Unit of MRAE in connection with the single payment schemes.

## **RURAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

In 2007, the Rural Development Department (RDD) served three main functions. It was primarily responsible for the management and implementation of the various measures funded under both the Guidance and Guarantee (EAGGF) 2004-2006 programmes as well as for preparing the 2007-2013 Rural Development Plan.

In the case of the Guidance funds, the RDD was the final beneficiary under the Single Programming Document for Malta and, as such, it was responsible for the implementation of Priority 3 measures, mainly Investments in Agricultural holdings and Improving the Marketing and Processing of Agricultural Products. This task involved continuous liaison with the Managing Authority (PPCD), the EU Affairs Directorate, as the Intermediary Body, and the Paying Authority (Ministry of Finance) for successful implementation of the programme.

In respect of measures funded under the RDP Guarantee section, the Department was responsible for the management and implementation of the various measures found in the 2004-2006 programme. This also necessitated numerous other tasks associated with the programme in its totality to be undertaken as well.

During 2007, the RDD continued in its development of the new programme for the 2007-2013 period. This involved the drafting and elaboration of a National Strategy Plan for Rural Development, continuous stakeholder consultation, the co-ordination of an ex-ante evaluation and an environmental strategic assessment, together with the fulfilment of the common monitoring and evaluation framework obligations. Under this new programme, the RDD will take the role of Managing Authority and, together with the Paying Agency of MRAE, shall see to the successful implementation of the funding programme under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

### **Implementation of Measures Funded through the EAGGF Guidance Fund (2004-2006)**

During 2007, the Rural Development Department monitored the implementation of the projects contracted in 2006 under both Measure 3.1 – Investments in Agricultural Holdings and Measure 3.2 – Improving the Marketing and Processing of Agricultural Products. Moreover, the flow of payments continued as planned and as at the end December 2007, the Department had administered invoices amounting to €2,553,428.77 for Measure 3.1 with €2,519,860.17 of invoices being processed by Treasury and with €33,568.60 pending at their end. With regard to Measure 3.2, a total of €2,023,599.96 in invoices was processed by the RDD with €1,751,762.07 being processed by Treasury, and with €271,837.88 still pending at their end.

In November, an Audit was conducted on Measure 3.2 by Price Waterhouse Coopers on behalf of the Internal Audit Investigations Directorate, whereby both systems used by the Rural Development Department to implement the measure and pay final recipients selected were checked. A report on the findings is on the process of being finalised and presented by PWC.

### **Implementation of Rural Development Plan (2004-2006) Funded through the EAGGF Guarantee Fund**

#### *Implementation of Measures*

With regard to Agri-environment measures, during January 2007, an Offer Letter was sent to respective beneficiaries of the rubble-wall sub-measure and the first payment pertaining to 2006 commitments was carried out. A total of €423,363.90 was disbursed to 699 beneficiaries.