

24th August 2020

## **Current situation about the sustainable use of PPPs in Malta**

### **Combating plant pests and diseases in Malta is a major challenge for growers.**

Over the past few decades, the variety of pests and diseases has drastically increased due to the importation of live plants, fresh fruits and vegetables. Although the work within the Plant Protection Directorate and MCCA is to be commended, we need to acknowledge the fact that newly introduced pests and diseases are a harsh reality that Maltese growers are facing. Due to free trade agreements within the EU, and bilateral agreements with non-EU countries, Malta is open to a high influx of fruit and vegetable imports which may impose a risk on our agricultural biodiversity.

### **Local research about the latest IPM technologies and pesticide efficacy is needed.**

Growers do not have the necessary scientific tools available at hand to guide them on how to combat pests and diseases efficiently. When crops manifest signs of infection, growers need to act fast to avoid losses. A loss in production will result in a loss of revenue and possible profits. Very often, authorised sellers of PPPs are the only ones to recommend which product to use in a particular circumstance. The "trial and error" approach should not be encouraged, however minimal efforts are being made by relevant stakeholders to offer alternative unbiased solutions.

Apart from becoming ever-more sensitive towards the environment and their own health, growers strive to avoid the use of PPPs since they are extremely expensive and their use drastically increases the total cost of production. Having said that, treatment of crops may sometimes be necessary to ensure a sustainable harvest.

### **Local growers are expressing concerns about the limited variety of PPPs available to them**

Malta has a narrower range of PPPs available on the local market, compared to our neighbouring countries. Local growers have often pointed out that a number of organic pesticides can considerably alleviate infestation of certain pests in Malta. Such organic pesticides, which may also be potentially used by conventional growers, are not available in Malta for a number of reasons. This is once again limiting local growers' options and forcing them to use synthetic pesticides rather than organic alternatives.

### **Awareness amongst the general public is necessary to portray the reality**

More awareness is needed to communicate facts amongst locals on how growers ensure the production of safe and nutritious food. Following a series of deceitful, negative articles in the press, law-abiding growers have become victims of a misleading campaign. Public perception has affected sales of locally grown fruits and vegetables and more needs to be done to counteract lies and inaccuracies that have been disseminated.

Many local growers are nowadays users of the internet and carry out research about possible IPM strategies to implement on their farms. Young farmers are also more pro in using information from reliable sources on the internet and often make direct contact with experts abroad who may give specific advice and share knowledge.

Registered farmers are not only aware about which PPPs are legal, and how to use them, but the vast majority also attend obligatory courses to obtain licenses as PPP handlers. This should be enforced across the board with anyone else who grows plants (edible and ornamental) and intends to purchase over-the-counter PPPs.

### **Recommendations**

- Stricter border controls to keep new pests and diseases away from our shore
- Better enforcement through tougher fines for those who breach legislation
- Outreach amongst the local community about locally grown fruits and vegetables
- More tailor-made training for growers about IPM