

PACIFIC COMMUNITY

SIXTH REGIONAL MEETING OF
HEADS OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY SERVICES (HOAFS)
(Apia, Samoa, 01-02 October 2019)

PACIFIC ACTIVITIES FOR THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF PLANT HEALTH - 2020

(Paper prepared by the Secretariat)

Purpose

1. To seek recognition and participation in a Pacific response to the declaration of 2020 as the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH), as a platform for longer-term plant health response.

Background

2. There is a global history of economic and social disruption caused by plant pest and disease outbreaks. In the Pacific, taro leaf blight (TLB), Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle (CRB) and Coffee Berry borers are only a few of the many pests and diseases that have major impact on food security and economic advancement.
3. For TLB alone, it has been estimated that Samoa has foregone domestic consumption valued at WST 11 million (USD\$ 4.1 M) and a loss in the taro export market valued at WST 9 million (USD\$3.4 M)¹.
4. Food security, national economy and trade are threatened by multiple potential invasive pests and their interaction in each of the unique environments of the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs); such as Cassava Brown Streak Disease, Fall armyworm, and Banana TR4 which, once they arrive in the Pacific, would have severe consequences. There are many pests² existing in the PICTs, such as Fruit Fly and Aflatoxins, which require ongoing vigilant monitoring to avoid outbreaks.
5. SPC-LRD is assisting with trade in germplasm materials. Work undertaken by The Pacific Centre for Crops and Trees (CePaCT) to test for viruses enables the safe transfer of plant materials from one country to another. For example, recent work has created new protocols for monitoring taro badna viruses.

¹ McGregor, A. et al. 2011. 'Assessing the social and economic value of germplasm and crop improvement as a climate change adaptation strategy: Samoa and Vanuatu case studies.' A background case study prepared for IUCN's report.

Lal, P.N. 2011. Climate change adaptation in the Pacific: Making informed choices. Prepared for the Australian Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Suva, Fiji: IUCN, xvii + 35. Quoted from Taro leaf blight manual / by Mary Taylor and Tolo Iosefa. SPC https://lrd.spc.int/lrd-publications/doc_download/2200-taroleafblightmanual

² Refer to International Standards of Phytosanitary Measure 5 (ISPM 5).

6. SPC-LRD coordinated responses to CRB(G) in Melanesia (Solomon Islands) and CRB(S) in Vanuatu supported both an improved phytosanitation and Biological Control Systems that demonstrated a reduction of impacts of the beetle.
7. Improvement of early warning systems through the allocation of resources to capacity building using the Plant Health Clinic approach, that builds countries' early detection capability, increase plant health knowledge of farmers, including women and students, and the support of economic development of smallholder farmers, is an example of the successful implementation of an integrated pest management system.

Pacific Community and National Activities

8. Welcoming the support of various donors in responding to pest and diseases, improving biosecurity and responding to emergencies, the Land Resources Division of the Pacific Community is seeking for coordinated support in the development and implementation of a regional program to:
 - 8.1 Increase awareness that targets policy makers, farmers, researchers, development practitioners', teachers, and the general public on Pest Risk Pathways and modalities to effectively detect and respond.
 - 8.2 Build on the achievements of the Pacific Plant Protection Organisation (3PO) and communication methods such as the Pacific Pests and Pathogens app, plant health clinics and PESTNET to diffuse existing knowledge and effective response methods.
 - 8.3 Improve early warning systems through the allocation of additional resources to capacity building using the Plant Health Clinic approach, increase plant health knowledge of women and students, and support economic development of smallholder farmers.
 - 8.4 Invest in long-term response strategies of biocontrol development, plant breeding, virus testing and economic analysis to decrease food security risks.
 - 8.5 Appraise the effectiveness of a potential regional reserve of funding to support member countries' emergency response funding for plant pest outbreaks to underwrite systemic responses.

Recommendations

9. The Heads of Agriculture and Forestry are invited to:
 - i. Seek recognition and participation in a Pacific response to the declaration of 2020 as the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH),
 - ii. Support the Land Resources Division of the Pacific Community to act as the platform for longer-term integrated plant health response;
 - iii. Urge Members and Partners to collaborate with the Land Resources Division of the Pacific Community on program consultations, and coordination of action to respond to pests in a sustainable, integrated manner.