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COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

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International Year of Plant Health

Executive Summary

Plant health is usually considered the discipline that is related to the prevention and control of pests¹ affecting plants and plant products, including the regulation of imports and exports through a range of measures to prevent and control pests spreading into new areas, especially through international trade, tourism and food aid. It is a key factor in any strategy to eliminate hunger and rural poverty, and to ensure livelihoods. The vast increase in the international agricultural trade, plus the effects of climate change, embodies a dramatic increase in the risk of pest introductions and does present formidable new challenges to plant health. To address these concerns, in 2016 Finland officially requested FAO to pursue the declaration of an International Year of Plant Health (IYPH) in the year 2020.

The proposal to establish an IYPH was discussed by the IPPC governing body (the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures – CPM) in 2015 and 2016, and was strongly supported by consensus. At the 39th Session of the FAO Conference, Finland reported on the IPPC discussions and the intention of Finland to take this forward, and received wide support from many delegations (C 2015/REP, para.60).

An IYPH will raise the awareness of the importance and impacts of plant health issues of global importance, including hunger, poverty, threats to the environment and economic development. It especially aims to addressing new and emerging plant health challenges, including climate change impacts, the significant increase in international trade, the rapid loss of biological diversity and new pest pathways such as e-commerce by developing more efficient national, regional and global policies, structures and mechanisms.

While least developed and developing countries would benefit most from an International Year of Plant Health because of their apparent phytosanitary deficiencies, benefits are attributable to all countries including agricultural to industrialized societies.

¹ The term pest in the IPPC refers to "any species, strain or biotype of plant, animal or pathogenic agent injurious to plants or plant products." This includes all insects, pathogens and weeds that are injurious to plants.

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Suggested action by the Committee

The Committee is invited to:

- 1) Review the proposal by the Government of Finland to establish observance by the UN system 2020 as an International Year of Plant Health (IYPH), and provide guidance as deemed appropriate;
- 2) Taken into account the FAO Policy on Proclamation and Implementation of International Years (C 2013/LIM/15) make a recommendation on the Draft Conference Resolution, as contained in Appendix A, and to submit the proposal for the consideration of the 155th Session of Council (December 2016) and the 40th Session of the FAO Conference (July 2017).

Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:

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I. Introduction

1. A key factor in any strategy to eliminate hunger and rural poverty must be the protection of plant health from pests of plants. Productivity of crops grown for human consumption is increasingly at risk due to the increased incidence of pests. In particular, pests which have been introduced into new ecosystems can have devastating effects on food security and the environment. Crop losses due to these pests can be substantial and estimates for potential losses caused by pests of plants can be as high as 50 percent, globally.
2. Since the beginning of the millennium, world trade of agricultural products has tripled and further growth is anticipated. This vast increase in the international trade of agricultural commodities as well as the effects of climate change epitomizes a dramatic increase in the risk of pest introductions. New pathways and disturbed ecological conditions set the perfect conditions for future major pest epidemics in plants.
3. While global pest risks increase, many national efforts to combat these risks are decreasing as a result of reduced committed plant health resources, often significantly. In particular national plant health research, taxonomical and diagnostic services are diminishing. Plant protection services worldwide are facing more and more pest risks with decreasing resources.
4. To address these concerns Finland proposed to the CPM of the IPPC to pursue the declaration of an IYPH in the year 2020 (IYPH 2020). It was reasoned that only a major international awareness raising effort may help to tackle current and future challenges presented by plant pests and their movement. In 2015, the CPM discussed the Finnish proposal and decided to pursue the declaration of an IYPH in 2020. In January 2016, the Finnish Minister of Agriculture and the Environment, Mr Kimmo Tiilikainen, officially requested the Director-General of FAO to place this proposal on the agenda of relevant FAO bodies with a view to adopt a resolution to this effect at the 40th FAO Conference in 2017.

II. Rational for the Declaration of the IYPH

5. At the 11th meeting of the CPM in April 2016, the CPM discussed and decided the objective of the IYPH *is to raise awareness of the importance and impacts of plant health in addressing issues of global importance, including hunger, poverty, threats to the environment and economic development*. Plant health is usually considered the discipline that is related to the prevention and control of pests¹ affecting plants and plant products, including the regulation of imports and exports through a range of measures to prevent and control pests spreading into new areas, especially through international trade, tourism and food aid.
6. In April 2016, the 11th meeting of the CPM considered and adopted the IYPH specific objectives which are:
 - a) Raising the awareness of the public and political decision makers at the global, regional and national levels about plant health.
 - b) Promoting and strengthening of national, regional and global plant health efforts and their resources in light of increasing trade and new pest risks caused through climate change.
 - c) Educating the public and increasing its knowledge about plant health.
 - d) Enhancing dialogue and stakeholder involvement in plant health.
 - e) Increasing information about the state of plant protection in the world.
 - f) Facilitating the establishment of plant health partnerships at national, regional and global levels.
7. This would result in stronger public and political support for plant health, as well as improved coordination within the plant health community.

III. Expected Benefits

8. An IYPH will create enormous impetus for the realization of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and FAO's strategic objectives based on sustainable agricultural production, including the following objectives and expected outputs.

IYPH Objectives	Expected IYPH Outputs
<i>Increased awareness by the UN system, other key international organizations such as WTO, national governments, civil society and decision makers of the crucial role of plant health.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of plant health to ensure sustainable agriculture and forestry, balanced ecosystems, trade development and to contribute to the mitigation of plant health risks posed by climate change and the increase in world trade is effectively communicated. • The adoption and publication of the "Review of the Status of Plant Protection in the World" (Article 11, 2 (a) of IPPC).
<i>Development of improved plant health policies at national, regional and global levels.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of effective plant health legislation at a national level, (especially in developing and least developed countries). • Improved regional cooperation policies and developing a new global plant health strategic framework.
<i>Increased availability of sustainable financial and other resources to plant health at national, regional and global levels.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased public and political awareness on the benefits of plant health. • Increased resources for national, regional and global plant protection organizations. • An increased donor base, as well as the development of a new financial mechanism to evolve the activities of the IPPC.
<i>Improved linkages between national, regional and global plant health authorities and academia, research institutions and other professional stakeholders.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater reflection of plant health issues in national educational curricula. Ideally it would also lead to greater stakeholder involvement in the development of plant health policies and their integration into phytosanitary actions. • Private–public partnerships on national, regional and global levels would proliferate.
<i>Safer international trade and increased market access through intensified harmonization and better implementation of international standards.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The intensification of international phytosanitary harmonization by increased standard setting. • Boosted assistance of especially developing and least developed countries to implement these standards. • Identification of potential synergies by combining traditional capacity building activities with new implementation assistance strategies and the multidisciplinary plant protection approach.
<i>Increased linkages between environmentally relevant institutions, such as biodiversity and climate change, and plant health authorities.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of synergies between biodiversity related conventions and authorities. • Improved cooperation with biodiversity and climate change relevant organizations at national, regional and global levels.

IV. Implementation

9. The IYPH will be implemented by FAO overall under the technical authority of the IPPC in partnership with regional and national plant protection organizations. The CPM and its partners will play a pivotal role in the facilitation and implementation of the objectives proposed for this IYPH. To implement the IYPH, science, technology, academia, industry, farmers and other international organizations all have an important role to play.

V. Current and Potential partners for the IYPH

10. A number of unofficial consultations were conducted between the propagators of the IYPH and several international organizations and partners. Primarily the main partners for the IYPH are national governments and the nine existing regional plant protection organizations (Asia and Pacific Plant Protection Commission (APPPC), Comunidad Andina (CA), Comité de Sanidad Vegetal del Cono Sur (COSAVE), European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO), Inter-African Phytosanitary Council (IAPSC), Near East Plant Protection Organization (NEPPO), North American Plant Protection Organization (NAPPO), Organismo Internacional Regional de Sanidad Agropecuaria (OIRSA), Pacific Plant Protection Organization (PPPO)). Other international organizations within the UN system or closely affiliated to it are also potential partners. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) of UNEP, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) may be potential partners for the IYPH.

VI. Preliminary Programme Considerations

11. The planning of detailed activities for the IYPH has just commenced within the IPPC. Therefore, only preliminary programme considerations are available. The programme of the IYPH will attribute greatest efforts to activities where different plant health interest groups can be addressed and be included. Different interest groups, such as academia, researchers, trade, producers and regulatory authorities, but also the general public including children, should be equally attracted by the events carried out during the IYPH for sustainable and long-term awareness raising - plans foresee a number of global and regional or sub-regional events in addition to national efforts.

12. Possible major programme events for an IYPH include:

- a) A ministerial level CPM meeting;
- b) A donor Conference;
- c) Regional plant health conferences on regionally specific plant health issues, such as research and specific plant health risks for small island countries;
- d) Regional Ministerial conferences (with assistance from Regional Plant Protection Organizations - RPPOs);
- e) Patronage for specific national plant health events;
- f) Multi-agency conference on plant health and its impact on biodiversity and climate change, and on trade and plant health;
- g) International workshop on capacity building and implementation assistance for plant health.

13. More detailed programme activities, especially in the area of communication and awareness raising are currently being deliberated and will be available by the end of 2016.

VII. Compliance with FAO Policy on the Proclamation and Implementation of International Years

14. Plant health has significant impacts on the realization of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 1, 2, 8, 12, 13, 15 and 17, particularly SDGs 2, 13, 15 and 17.

15. Plant health is a truly global concern being of interest to all FAO countries and uniting the interest of countries from all development stages. The decision by the CPM to pursue the declaration of the IYPH was done by consensus.

16. The IYPH is advocating activities at national, regional and global levels. Substantial follow-up at all levels in the form of new activities or the strengthening of existing activities is planned.

17. Although an international programme exists, which addresses plant health, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), this is by no means sufficient to address future challenges. Climate change impacts, significant increase in international trade and the rapid deterioration of biological diversity present such challenges which require urgent international actions.

Appendix A

Draft Conference Resolution

Noting that healthy plants constitute the foundation for all life on Earth, ecosystem functions, food security and are key to sustaining life on Earth;

Recognizing that plant health is the key to the sustainable intensification of agriculture to feed the growing global population by 2050;

Affirming that plant health is critical to addressing the pressures of a growing population and that recognition, advocacy and support for the promotion of plant health is of paramount importance if the international community is to guarantee plant resources for a food secure world based on stable and sustainable ecosystems;

Recognizing that sustaining plant health protects the environment, forests and biodiversity from plant pests, issues of climate change and supports efforts to reduce hunger, malnutrition and poverty;

Recalling the urgent need to raise awareness and to promote and facilitate actions towards the management of plant health in order to contribute to the agreed United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030;

Trusting that such a celebration would establish a platform and encourage actions to promote and implement activities in favour of the preserving and sustaining global plant resources as well as raise awareness of the importance of plant health in addressing issues of global concern, including hunger, poverty and threats to the environment;

Affirming the urgent need of raising public awareness of the importance of healthy plants for food security and ecosystem functions;

Stressing that additional costs of activities arising from the implementation of the International Year of Plant Health be met through voluntary contributions, including from the private sector.

Requests the Director-General to transmit this Resolution to the Secretary-General of the United Nations with a view to having the General Assembly of the United Nations consider at its next session declaring the Year 2020 as the International Year of Plant Health.