Belarus and FAO have been implementing a number of development programmes to encourage agro-industry growth, rural development and trade facilitation since 2005, when the country became a member of FAO. In providing assistance, FAO is and will be focusing on increasing efforts to prevent the African Swine Fever, to help eliminate obsolete pesticides, to harmonize the standards of quality for agricultural products with the European standards, to develop climate change projects and to provide training to the Belarusian agricultural specialists. The Organization is represented there through a National Correspondent.

**Providing assistance in controlling African Swine Fever outbreaks**

African swine fever (ASF) is a virus that causes haemorrhagic fever in pigs and often leads to the animals’ death. Despite efforts to contain it, the disease has managed to spread since 2007 from Georgia across the entire Caucasus, into Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, and most recently to the European Union. Its rapid spread across such a large geographic area demonstrates an alarming lack of awareness when it comes to proper handling of the disease.

FAO assistance in Belarus to help combat the disease started in 2013 under a US$420 000 project assisting veterinary services in timely and effectively response to ASF. By efficiently controlling the disease at the source, the project aims to prevent the spread of the disease in the country. FAO experts trained beneficiaries from both the capital and other regions on: ASF epidemiology, early warning and response to the swine fever; improvement of surveillance for ASF and other swine diseases; and ASF outbreak investigation and management.

Working meetings were held with the Department of Veterinary and Food Control of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food on harmonizing Belarusian legislation with international standards in early diagnosis, prevention and rapid response to ASF and other dangerous diseases that have significant economic consequences in the event of outbreaks. Furthermore, data was collected for the establishment of a GIS-based tool for the decision-support system for control of the disease to be used by epidemiologists both at national and district levels.

**Matching FAO’s expertise to Belarus’s development priorities**

FAO’s current field programme in the Republic of Belarus is guided by the Country Programming Framework (CPF) 2014-2016, which describes two main priority areas and five outcomes for FAO assistance in the country:

- **Conservation, management of natural resources and climate change adaptation** with outcomes that look at: preserving agricultural resources, such as land and water for future generations in a sustainable manner; strengthening safety along the food chain as a result of an updated system of monitoring and control of pest management; sustainably developing the forest areas to meet market driven demands; making agricultural production less volatile and preparing stakeholders to mitigate challenges related to the effects of climate change.

- **Agri-food chains and agri-food policy programming** that have the outcome of making agri-food chains more efficient and up-to-date, and developing standards and requirements to meet the needs of the sector.

Jointly developed with the Government, the CPF was prepared in close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and is the first programming framework signed between FAO and the Republic of Belarus. It reflects relevant national development plans and strategies in the field of agriculture and related sectors as well as FAO’s Strategic Objectives and regional priorities.

The priorities identified by the CPF have taken into account FAO’s contribution to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAD) Action Plan for Belarus for 2011-2015 as well as relevant strategies and priorities identified by FAO’s partner agencies, such as the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the EC.

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Reducing the risk of dangerous pesticides

FAO in cooperation with the European Union (EU) are helping Belarus to dispose of obsolete pesticides and reduce risks from pesticides used in agriculture. The agreement is a part of a FAO-EU partnership project on pesticide management launched in 2012 across the former Soviet Union. The EU is contributing €6 million to the initiative, and FAO, which acts as an implementing agency, has allocated €1 million in funding. With this agreement, a total of six countries have now joined the initiative: Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Ukraine. The project foresees disposal of over 1 000 tonnes of obsolete stocks from these countries until 2016.

Since 2014, FAO has been providing technical assistance to Belarus in managing its stocks of obsolete pesticides, building capacity to minimize the threats from hazardous waste to human health and the environment, as well as strengthening legislation and building capacity in the management of pesticide containers. Together with the Government of Belarus, FAO is identifying and assessing the most highly contaminated sites with the aim to mobilize resources for risk reduction; promote alternatives to the most hazardous chemicals in use; and develop communication strategies to raise awareness among farmers and the public.

FAO organized several workshops on: pesticide life cycle assessment; waste management; benchmarking to identify volumes and types of hazardous waste in the country and environmentally sound disposal options; measures for strengthening capacity for the management of pesticides; and a training on pesticide risk reduction.

Cooperating to boost the agriculture and rural development sectors

In 2012, FAO conducted a study on agriculture and rural development in the ENPARD (European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development) countries, which included Belarus, that focused on strengthening agricultural policy and boosting rural development. The recommendations derived from the study aimed five important areas for Belarus:

1. Increase competitiveness and economic efficiency of enterprises through training, education, extension and knowledge of “best practices” towards more effective production.
2. Implement good practices and sustainable agriculture, including the adoption of the “Law on Organic Agriculture” and a development programme with a system of measures to support organic production.
3. Implement measures to increase the attractiveness of rural areas for young people by increasing income levels and improving the social component.
4. Adopt measures to increase the attractiveness of investments and to attract skilled managers and professionals and increase their motivation.
5. Develop a programme to support small “green energy” as an additional resource to improve the sustainability of agricultural enterprises and rural communities.

“Awareness is key to stopping African swine fever in Eastern Europe.”
José Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General