



Global pest control

Delegates from more than 150 countries met in Rome from 3-7 April 2006 for the first session of FAO's new Commission on Phytosanitary Measures. What it is, what it does...

As the governing body of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), FAO's Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) has a crucial mission: to set standards designed to prevent plant pests being spread through international trade, while ensuring that countries do not use plant protection regulations to protect, instead, their domestic producers.

The commission came into existence in October last year, by which time two-thirds of the IPPC's contracting parties - currently 145 countries - had ratified a revised text of the convention approved by the FAO Conference in 1997. That revision equips the IPPC with the "formal standard-setting machinery" - the CPM - needed to fulfil its role under the WTO's Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures.

"Important pests." Every crop species hosts an estimated 200 to 500 pests, including birds, rats, insects, viruses, fungi and bacteria. Thousands of them are considered "important pests" in many countries, and the economic damage they cause to agriculture annually runs into billions of dollars worldwide. With the enormous increase in the global movement of people and commodities, natural and national borders that were once effective barriers to the spread of unwanted pests are now under intense pressure.

In response, countries importing farm products have drawn up lists of "regulated pests" - those for which quarantine or other phytosanitary measures may be taken - that often run to hundreds of species. Despite the measures, however, outbreaks of transboundary plants pests are increasing.

How will the new CPM deal with the challenge of global pest control? Richard Ives, the IPPC coordinator, took **Agriculture 21** on a "guided tour" of the IPPC and the role of its new Commission on Phytosanitary measures...



► How has the revision changed the IPPC?

"What the revision does is strengthen the IPPC by giving it mechanisms for oversight and for developing and adopting International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures [ISPMs], which become the basis for harmonizing plant protection legislation, regulations and procedures throughout the world. The new CPM replaces an interim commission created in 1997, which functioned under delegated authority from the FAO Conference - one major implication of the revision is that while the interim body was open to all FAO members, now only IPPC contracting parties can participate in CPM deliberations. The revision further identifies a shared responsibility of helping contracting parties - especially those that are developing countries - to implement the convention, and clarifies that the IPPC also covers the protection of forests, wild flora, habitats and ecosystems."

► How does the IPPC help in regulating international trade?

"A contracting party can refuse entry to plants and plant products that don't comply with its phytosanitary standards. But it can only put in place measures that are technically justified and consistent with the risk involved. It also has to ensure that measures are the least restrictive available and cause the minimum impediment

to trade. Once a country adopts a phytosanitary measure, it must immediately transmit the requirements to other parties that might be directly affected, and on request provide the rationale behind it. Furthermore, phytosanitary measures can only be aimed at "regulated pests" - which means that if a particular pest is already in your country and you have no programme of eradication, there is no justification to take action against imported produce that might contain that pest."

▶ **How does the CPM set international standards?** "The priority attached to a standard under development is decided by the commission. For each standard, the CPM has established a Working Group of Experts responsible for drafting it. The draft goes to our Standards Committee for review, after which it is discussed through consultations with contracting parties and regional plant protection organizations. Their comments are incorporated - if appropriate - in the draft standard before it goes to the annual meeting of the CPM, for adoption."

▶ **Are ISPMs that are approved by the commission binding on the contracting parties?** "No, ISPMs are not binding under the IPPC. But under the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, members of the WTO shall base their phytosanitary measures on international standards, which are set by the convention. Members may deviate from ISPMs, but they have to fully justify their measures."

▶ **How are disputes settled?** "The IPPC dispute settlement procedures have not yet been used. But if a contracting party questions or challenges the phytosanitary requirements of another, the parties are encouraged to consult bilaterally to resolve the problem. If further action is necessary, the disputing parties can request that FAO form an expert panel to recommend a course of action. Although the IPPC's dispute settlement process is non-binding, the issue may be taken later to the WTO under the SPS Agreement - and once a dispute is brought to the WTO, the decision becomes

legally binding and can have serious economic and political consequences. That's why the IPPC encourages governments to pursue 'dispute avoidance', before considering more formal procedures."

▶ **What challenges lie ahead for the IPPC and the CPM?** "Over the past few years there's been a rapid expansion of international trade and with it an ever increasing range of product/country combinations, which increases the risk of pests being introduced into new regions. It is not just expansion of trade, which could be considered a 'controlled pathway', that is problematic. New pathways for pest introduction include the rapidly expanding tourist trade, packaging materials, used cars and machinery, movement of commercial vehicles, to name a few. All of them need to be controlled by the national plant protection organisations.

"In addition, 'regionalization' is currently demanding a great deal of attention in the WTO's SPS Committee. There are differing views on how to recognize exporting regions, rather than a whole country, as being free from disease or pests. To implement this very important measure, countries are considering whether a system for international recognition and standards for specific pests will need to be developed."

▶ **World agricultural trade is valued at something like \$600 billion a year. How easy is it to balance the needs of your contracting parties?** "There is a perception that ISPMs impose new obligations and generally make life more difficult for exporters and importers. Nothing could be further from the truth. The concept of harmonization was developed to assure that phytosanitary measures of countries are based on science, while reducing the burden of scientific proof. ISPMs expedite trade by ensuring that products, when they leave the country of export, comply with the requirements of the importing trading partner. That system reduces the need for expensive treatments and costly delays on arrival, and it enables importers to more accurately plan distribution. It should be seen as a 'win-win' situation."