



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



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ONE HEALTH AND
TRANSBOUNDARY
PESTS AND DISEASES

Plant health/ managing the red palm weevil

Initiative to eradicate the red palm weevil
in the Near East and North Africa

The issue

The red palm weevil (RPW, or *Rhynchophorus ferrugineus*) is a major transboundary pest that originated in South Asia and is rapidly spreading around the world. In the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region, the weevil is causing devastating damage to date palms, affecting production, the environment and the livelihoods of nearly 50 million farmers. Despite an urgent call for action to address the RPW, it continues to spread rapidly throughout the NENA region. The main challenges to effective and sustainable management of the RPW are the complexity of detecting infection at an early stage and weak plant quarantine regulations. These issues are compounded by inadequate regional collaboration and limited awareness among farmers.

The action

FAO, with key international and national stakeholders, is promoting a national and regional programme for RPW management in the NENA region. The programme facilitates the coordination of regional efforts to ensure an integrated and sustainable approach to controlling the RPW and reducing its devastating effects on date palm production, the food and income security of rural communities, and the ecology of affected areas. The programme focuses on three interrelated elements:

Research

- Ensuring the biological control of RPW moves from research to application;
- Evaluating the socio-economic impact; and
- Applying innovative surveillance methods.

Capacity development

- Implementing national RPW management programmes;
- Enhancing the exchange of expertise;
- Leading national and regional technical assistance;
- Building the capacities of extension services;
- Introducing innovative platforms to address RPW; and
- Producing technical guidelines on the management of RPW.

Transfer of knowledge and technology

- Promoting integrated approaches to RPW management;
- Improving phytosanitary systems;
- Promoting date-palm genetic resources in NENA; and
- Facilitating the exchange of certified propagation materials free from RPW.

The issue in numbers



Around **90%**
of the world's dates are grown in
the NENA region



Nearly **50 million**
farmers' livelihoods
affected by the RPW



EUR **480 million**
worth of date palms destroyed
in the Mediterranean countries

Programme targets



60 trainings
10 regional training-of-trainer courses
and 50 national training courses



3.2 million
farmers to train and reach through
extension services



Over **50%**
of date palms to manage using RPW
integrated pest management

The budget



USD 20 million



5 years



More
than **15**
countries

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Expected results

- Policies and regulations in place, including for phytosanitary and quarantine management practices: integrated pest-management strategies, biotechnology, semiochemicals, pesticides and biological control;
- Monitoring, early-warning and RPW risk-assessment systems implemented and functioning;
- Scientific research and innovation strengthened with a view to securing long-term solutions;
- Stakeholders' capacity improved, including through Farmer Field School training for municipalities, extension services and farmers;
- RPW control response coordinated across countries in the NENA region.

Geographic focus

The programme is regional in scope, encompassing, but not limited to, the 15 countries of the NENA region (Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen). At national level, the focus will be on countries that have submitted specific requests to FAO and/or benefitted from previous FAO support in similar areas.

In partnership with

FAO coordinates and manages the programme and contributes to its implementation together with wide range of partner organizations, including the Khalifa International Award for Date Palm and Agricultural Innovation, the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, the Near East Plant Protection Organization and the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari.



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SDG contribution

This initiative contributes to the following sustainable development goals (SDGs):



Controlling RPW in Mauritania

Thanks to an immediate and well-structured response to the RPW in Mauritania, the pest was contained at the site of origin within one year, resulting in no further spread. An integrated pest-management approach was followed, which included the active participation and strong commitment of farmers and their cooperatives. In addition, preventive measures were applied, underpinned by systematic coordination, planning and monitoring by all stakeholders. This resulted in the swift eradication of the pest and the declaration of Tidjikja as a potentially RPW-free area.



Why invest?

Greater investment is required to provide a comprehensive and sustainable approach to controlling the RPW in the NENA region. The RPW has already infested or destroyed palms worth EUR 483 million in Mediterranean countries alone. The date palm is a major export crop for the NENA region and is an important source of income, supporting both local livelihoods and national economies. It is estimated that the region supplies around 90 percent of global date production. Action is required now if we are to completely eradicate the RPW and protect this valuable crop.

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