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CIHEAM POLICY IN PLANT HEALTH TO ENHANCE FOOD SECURITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

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Most of pests and diseases affecting Mediterranean crops are seriously compromising food security and, consequently, the sustainability of rural populations in several countries in the Mediterranean region and Middle East. In occasion of the 40th Session of the FAO Conference, that has declared the 2020 as the International Year of Plant Health, several delegations stated that plant health is an indispensable tool to reach several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Especially the global objective to reach zero hunger (SDG2) was identified as being correlated to good plant health situations. But also the global economic development and poverty alleviation were thought to be positively influenced by plant health and its effects on safe international trade.

CIHEAM has gained a long experience in plant health, implementing and financing numerous *international research* initiatives in the Mediterranean region and neighboring countries (e.g. Iran, Sultanate of Oman, Iraq). The Bari Institute of CIHEAM is also engaged in several initiatives funded by the Italian Cooperation addressing plant health both in Italy and in other Mediterranean countries (e.g. Lebanon, Egypt, Kosovo). These initiatives have delivered institutional capacity building and technical assistance to hundreds of officials of national and local entities. Furthermore, in line with the statutory mission of CIHEAM Bari (higher education, research and development cooperation), since 1962 the Institute has delivered post-graduate diplomas on Integrated Pest Management to thousands of trainees coming from over 100 countries.

Plant health is therefore one of the main pillars of the CIHEAM Strategic Agenda 2025 – adopted in 2016 by the Ministries of Agriculture of CIHEAM Member States - and it is approached through: *training* of researchers, officers, professionals; *applied research* linking local scientists with the international research communities; *participatory governance* that means encouraging discussions and interactions among scientific, institutional and private stakeholders; and *cooperational* developing programmes enhancing country capacity building and awareness raising. Particular attention of CIHEAM is posed on early surveillance and detection of transboundary pests and diseases which may seriously threaten crops, environment and sustainability of rural populations.

The achieved results have demonstrated that it is possible to ensure the shift towards sustainable production if quarantine measures are strengthened and a comprehensive phytosanitary management is applied. CIHEAM initiatives are therefore focusing on harmonizing national rules with the EU technical/Phytosanitary/legal standards, in order to promote improvement in domestic and export trading of safer food in conformity with Governments' strategic plans.

In recent years, a dedicated research, training and cooperation through an integrated approach was successfully conducted by CIHEAM of Bari in developing a precise surveillance system for early monitoring and detection of *Xylella fastidiosa* in Apulia region (Italy), supporting scientifically and technically the official programme against this worldwide threat. Jointly with other international organizations (FAO, IPPC, IOC, EPPO, NEPP, EFSA etc.) CIHEAM has promoted several initiatives for combating invasive pests and diseases ensuring a coherent strategy for setting priorities and avoiding overlaps among projects funded under different mechanisms.

The whole experience gained by CIHEAM Bari on food security in the Mediterranean, Middle East, Balkan and Central Africa through such integrated approach represents also one of the core issues of the EXPO Milan 2015 “Feeding Knowledge” programme (www.feedingknowledge.net) as “innovative technological ecosystem” shortening the knowledge chain and reverting its usual orientation, starting from real problems to develop and share knowledge (more than 700 researchers involved) on food security, to meet the needs and challenges of Mediterranean countries through the sharing of best practices.