

DETECTION OF A FOCUS OF THE *HUANGLONGBING* BACTERIUM

Communication from Costa Rica

The following communication, received on 11 March 2011, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Costa Rica.

1. The authorities of the State Phytosanitary Service have confirmed the presence of the bacterium that causes *Huanglongbing* (HLB), a disease which affects citrus trees and is also known as Yellow Dragon disease. The bacterium was detected on four citrus trees in the north of Alajuela province, thanks to intensive country-wide surveillance of citrus farms and backyard citrus trees (urban areas and roadsides).
2. The diagnosis was made using the real-time PCR testing method, whereby samples can be processed and the disease very swiftly detected, within an average of four hours, in both the plant and the vector insect.
3. The authorities are increasing surveillance, particularly in the northern part of the country, in order to ascertain whether there are further foci. Trees that present symptoms and are diagnosed with the disease will be destroyed. The fact that four trees are infected with HLB does not mean that the pest has spread to the country as a whole, because this might be a single focus that could be eradicated by taking the appropriate measures. Nonetheless, efforts are being stepped up and a team has been established to deal with the situation on a full-time basis.
4. The State Phytosanitary Service, working jointly two of the country's largest citrus businesses, has drawn up a plan of action to apply the phytosanitary measures provided for in Decree No. 35397-MAG of 17 July 2009, so as to prevent the disease from spreading beyond the focus detected to date.
5. In accordance with the action plan and the protocol applicable in such cases, a phytosanitary safety cordon 4 km. in diameter has been established around the HLB focus, in order to increase the number of samples taken in this area and thus check on the progress of the disease, which is helping to keep the situation under control.
6. HLB disease is caused by the bacterium *Candidatus Liberibacter asiaticus*, which is vectored by an insect called *Diaphorina citri*.
7. Preventive measures:
 - Since 2009, Costa Rica has been taking preventive HLB control measures pursuant to Decree No. 35397-MAG, because of the clear threat posed by the emergence of HLB

in areas close to Costa Rican territory. Both technical staff and producers have received training and the country as a whole has been under constant surveillance since then;

- according to the Executive Secretariat for Sectoral Planning in Agriculture (SEPSA), 25,000 hectares are planted to citrus in Costa Rica. In 2010, production reached 132,000 tonnes, with exports amounting to some US\$50 million.
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