

**SOME EXPERIENCES OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO IN THE APPLICATION  
OF THE SPS AGREEMENT**

Communication from Trinidad and Tobago

The following communication, received on 30 March 2006, is being circulated at the request of the Delegation of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Application of Article 6 on Regionalization and Article 9 on Technical Assistance.**

Background

1. This report concerns Trinidad and Tobago's experience in its efforts to facilitate Argentina's request to export fresh apples, grapes and pears directly to the country. It illustrates the positive outcome of efforts of two developing countries to apply the SPS Agreement, i.e. Article 6 on Recognition of Regional Conditions including Pest and Diseases Free Areas and Article 9 on Technical Assistance (to facilitate trade).

2. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources initiated a pest risk analysis (PRA) to determine the risks associated with direct importation of fresh fruits from Argentina and measures that could be taken to mitigate against any such risks. The PRA determined that the main risk was introduction of the Mediterranean fruitfly (*Ceratitidis capitata*) and that cold treatment was the most effective post-harvest quarantine treatment against the med-fly. The literature also pointed to med-fly free production areas in Argentina.

3. Trinidad and Tobago had no expertise in the application of cold treatment and there was insufficient information to determine the pest-free status of fruit production areas in Argentina according to several relevant International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) i.e.:

- ISPM No 4 - Requirements for the establishment of Pest Free Areas
- ISPM No 8 – Determine of Pest Status in an Area and
- ISPM No 10 – Requirements for the Establishment of Pest Free Places of Production and pest free production sites.

4. Trinidad and Tobago, in its efforts to facilitate trade, requested technical assistance from Argentina to:

- Gain first-hand knowledge of the pest-free status of areas from which fruit destined for Trinidad and Tobago are cultivated.
- Evaluate data to ascertain the pest-free status of the region.

- Evaluate the quality of harvested fruits and their pest status.
- Be trained in the use of Cold Treatment as a Quarantine Measure.

#### Outcome of the Technical Assistance Request

5. The Argentinean Government responded by sponsoring an Argentine scientist visit to Trinidad and Tobago and sponsoring two Crop Protection Officers from Trinidad and Tobago to visit Argentina from 23 February to 3 March 2006. While in Argentina the officers observed and evaluated the systems that were instituted to monitor and maintain pest-free status in the fruit production areas of the Patagonian Valley region. They

- Visited production areas and observed fruit production systems (including Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)) in the Patagonian Valley Region where natural barriers help to protect the production areas from invasion by fruitflies;
- Undertook fruit cutting in the field;
- Observed fruitfly trapping in urban and rural areas;
- Examined fruitfly trapping records for the Patagonian Valley Area;
- Observed breeding and release of sterile male flies and temperature sensitive lethal methods to kill female medfly eggs;
- Visited quarantine check points and observed physical checks of vehicles and luggage by quarantine officer;
- Visited a packing house to observe preparation, packing and storage of fruits for export;
- Visited a freight inspection facility and observed on-site fruit inspection (including fruit cutting) by inspectors from importing countries who oversaw the sampling of fruits (destined for export), for fruit pests; and
- Observed a demonstration of cold treatment procedures.

6. The officers verified objectively that the rigid systems Argentina has put in place were effective in maintaining the medfly free status of the Patagonian Region and the likelihood that the area would remain medfly-free (Article 6.3).

#### Recommendations

7. The following recommendations were made following Argentina's demonstration of the medfly-free status of Patagonia:

- Argentina should be permitted to export apples, grapes and pears directly to Trinidad and Tobago, but fruits should come from the Patagonia Valley Region only. Although the Mendoza Region is reported to be medfly free, Crop Protection Personnel from Trinidad and Tobago should also verify the pest-free status and certify that region for direct trade in fresh fruit.
- Fruits for Trinidad and Tobago should be shipped from the Patagonia Valley Region through Port San Antonio only.
- Shipments of fruits from Argentina must be accompanied by a valid phytosanitary certificate indicating adherence to conditions outlined by Trinidad and Tobago, including a declaration that the fruits were grown in the Patagonia Valley Region.
- Since the Patagonia Valley Region has been declared free from medfly and *Anastrepha* fruitflies (Federal Register-USDA/APHIS, Vol. 70, No. 235; December 2005), consignments of fruits can be imported into Trinidad and Tobago without cold treatment as outlined in ISPM No. 4 – Pest Surveillance Requirements For The Establishment of Pest Free Areas (PFA) which states that: "*The establishment and use of a PFA by a (NPPO) provides for the export of plants, plant*

*products and other regulated articles from the country in which the area is situated (exporting country) to another country (importing country) without the need for application of additional phytosanitary measures when certain requirements are met. Thus, the pest free status of an area may be used as the basis for the phytosanitary certification...".*

- Trade should be initiated, based upon the understanding that an annual audit of the programme by Crop Protection Personnel of Trinidad and Tobago must take place during the harvesting season. This is consistent with ISPM No. 10, which states that "*Review and audit procedures undertaken by the NPPO are essential to support assurance of pest freedom and for system appraisal.*" Bilateral arrangements will be needed to facilitate annual certification visits at Argentina's expense.

#### Follow-up action

- Trinidad and Tobago is legally required to issue import permits framing conditions for import of agricultural commodities, based on scientific evaluation of risks associated with such imports. In doing so, the country is also committed to applying the relevant ISPMs to facilitate trade.
- The Plant Protection Committee, at the next meeting in April 2006, would consider the aforementioned recommendations which will undoubtedly be given favourable consideration and endorsed with few modifications.
- Arrangements should be finalized subject to bilateral negotiations with Argentina, e.g for annual audit visits sponsored by Argentina.
- It is expected soon that the Plant Quarantine Department will receive applications for Import Permits to import apples, grapes and pears directly from Argentina. Having concluded the PRA with this mission, we are now better able to frame the conditions for import of fruits from Argentina, without much delay.

### **Some General Experiences in Conducting Pest Risk Analyses (PRAs)**

#### Timelines for completion of PRAs

8. Although timelines have been established for completion of PRAs, the PRA in the case described above was concluded well in excess of the seven months deadline. In Trinidad and Tobago's experience, several factors mitigate against rapid completion of PRAs. Among them are:

- (a) **Staffing** - There is need for a cadre of dedicated officers to conduct PRA, in order to remain current and to clear up the existing backlog. We hope to improve this situation by hiring staff to work on PRAs as a projectized activity under a development project.
- (b) **More computers with greater direct Internet access.** This is being addressed.
- (c) **Information for completion of PRAs** - Applicants for Import Permits are requested to provide information to complete PRAs. Invariably they do not provide information in a timely manner. Sometimes they provide inadequate information or no information at all. This frustrates all stages of the PRA process and can be avoided if applicants provide the required information promptly.
- (d) **Literature sources** - The PRA Unit relies heavily on the CABI Pest Compendium, information from free websites and library texts for information to complete PRAs and these are not always adequate. We intend to expand our information sources by

subscribing to relevant databases on the web and purchasing additional literature and databases on CD-ROM. We will also make more direct contact with exporting countries for information.

- (e) **Prioritization of PRAs** - Prioritization of PRAs remains difficult to resolve. Work according to a planned work schedule is often sidelined to accommodate "urgent" PRAs that are needed to address or facilitate some situation, e.g. to avoid returning a shipment of agricultural commodities entering the country without the required import permit. A system of prioritization still needs to be agreed for a smooth workflow.
- (f) **Volume of work** - Sometimes the sheer volume of work involved means that a PRA cannot be completed within the timelines and extended periods are required. The time taken to complete a PRA may be determined by the number of commodities and the number of pests to be evaluated for each commodity in an application.

#### Acknowledgements

9. I wish to thank:

- The Government of Argentina and the Argentinean Mission in Trinidad for sponsoring the Technical Mission from Trinidad and Tobago to determine the pest free status for importing fruits into Trinidad and Tobago.
- Argentina should be complimented for its transparency in providing information and allowing field visits by our nationals to areas of relevance to the Mission.
- Personnel in the MALMR for patiently pursuing the project to ensure its realization.
- Mr Joseph Seales, Entomologist, and Mr Aldwyn Wellington, Plant Quarantine Officer, for undertaking the Mission, conducting an objective evaluation and reporting promptly, giving recommendations that can be used for scientific decision-making to facilitate trade between Trinidad and Tobago and Argentina.

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