



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
 DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Crisis management in food, animals and plants
Plant health

Brussels,
 SANTE/G1/PDR/ng (2018) 2935122

Dear Petitioner,

Subject: Your petition on *Xylella fastidiosa*

Thank you for your petition addressed to Commissioners Andriukaitis and Jourová in which you express your concerns about the EU legislation that obliges farmers to control *Xylella fastidiosa* and take measures against the vector. Your message was passed to me for replying on behalf of both Commissioners.

The situation of *X. fastidiosa* in the South of Apulia is very worrying for all Member States. Since the first outbreak notified in the very South of Apulia (Province of Lecce), the pest is today putting at serious risk the province of Bari, the heart of the olive production of Italy, after the infection of the provinces of Brindisi and Taranto. Strict measures are needed to prevent the further spread out of the current Apulian Demarcated Area, still surrounded by the sea along three sides, in the interest of the Italian and the rest of the European agriculture.

According to the Plant Health Panel of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), *X. fastidiosa* is considered to be one of the most dangerous plant bacteria known worldwide, for which no scientifically validated treatment solutions are available to cure diseased plants in open field.

In 2016, EFSA already informed the Commission that a broad variety of commercial products based on the activity of specific mineral elements is available and in use for disease control as well as plant fertilisers. Many of those compounds enhance plant resistance and have fungicidal and bactericidal effects. Copper and zinc, for instance, are beneficial to living organisms because they serve as stabilisers and catalysts in many enzymes; however, at high concentrations, they can become toxic. In agriculture, copper and zinc have been used for disease control for many decades. Several tests have been tried in other parts of the world to treat bacterial diseases, including *X. fastidiosa*. In many cases, such treatments prevented symptom expression over a number of years but did not eliminate the causal agent, *X. fastidiosa*, and in the following years disease symptoms reappeared.


This being said, the Commission welcomes field trials to experiment with possible treatment solutions against *X. fastidiosa*. In this respect, two specific projects “POnTE” and “XF-ACTORS” have been funded under the HORIZON 2020 framework, bringing together a number of research institutes from different EU and non-EU countries with the aim to find possible solutions for *X. fastidiosa*.

The Commission is following very closely the scientific developments and will not hesitate to update the EU measures if conclusive scientific activities lead to positive results. In the meantime, alternative treatment solutions aiming at reducing symptoms expressions can already be used in the very South of Apulia, where eradication is no longer possible and coexistence with the pest must be accepted. Nevertheless, the removal of infected plants in a system-based approach as proposed by Decision (EU) 2015/789, is the only approved option to prevent further spread of the pathogen to new areas.

Finally, as regards the insect vector control, Decision (EU) 2015/789 requires the implementation of phytosanitary treatments for the reduction of vector populations by application of chemical or biological means, mechanical treatments, or other sustainable methods, aiming at reducing the spreading of *X. fastidiosa* to other areas or prior to the removal of infected trees. However, the Decision does not detail the specific compounds to be used, which is a responsibility of the Member States, taking into account the local agronomic and climatic specificities.

The Commission is aware that a Ministerial Decree published in the Italian Official Journal on 6 April 2018 lists, among other active substances, imidacloprid, the use of which is severely restricted at EU level, as a potential insecticide that could be used against *Philaenus spumarius*, the vector of *X. fastidiosa*. Member States may derogate from these restrictions by granting emergency authorisations provided that the necessary conditions are fulfilled. However, according to information received from the Italian authorities, no application for an emergency authorisation to use imidacloprid against *Philaenus spumarius* in olives has been submitted and its use is therefore not authorised against *Philaenus spumarius*. Nevertheless, the list of active substances proposed under the Ministerial Decree foresees the use of other active substances and some of them can also be used in organic agriculture.

P.O. (YK)



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