

Fresh produce importation and risks to UK plant health



PROJECT SUMMARY

SCIENTISTS at Harper Adams University College have embarked on a project to see whether an increase in importation of fresh produce grown outside the EU will lead to increased probability of introduction of non-indigenous pests and diseases. These may pose significant risks to UK plant health.

Suppliers of fresh produce to UK retailers are under pressure to reduce costs of production. Lower costs, predominantly for labour and water, coupled with low levels of availability in Europe are causing retailers to explore new growing areas for winter supply. As production areas expand, concern is raised regarding the effectiveness of prevention and control measures for plant pests and diseases, as countries may differ in their ability to incorporate International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) recommendations. In the first period of study at Harper Adams a baseline data will be established and a summary of sources of field vegetable imports will be produced. This will involve collation and analysis of data regarding the volume and values of trade over time of the total market and the proportion accounted for by internal EU trade and external EU trade over the previous 5-10 years. During this time, a summary and contrast of the policy requirements for pesticide use in current and new procurement countries will be assessed and the requirement of different retailers will also be considered.

In the second period of study data will be collected, by questionnaire, on the probable changes in future imports of field vegetables from non-EU countries. This will establish non-EU countries of procurement for a range of field vegetables and the anticipated volumes of trade and seasons of supply. The data will be analysed and subsequently used to develop a predictive econometric model. This will be created with the aim of determining statistically significant variables. Additionally, links will be established between Harper Adams and the regional plant protection organisations for the countries identified. The proposed model will be developed and run using data collected from the questionnaires and visits on future procurement options to predict changes in the probability of introduction of alien pest and disease species. A range of scenarios will be run through the model; including the response to changes in plant health policy (both in UK and exporting countries) and volume of trade and/or extension of seasons. The outputs from the model will need to be interpreted and will allow further refinement. The final outputs will be used to develop policy recommendations for UK and European decision makers.

Photo One - Spinach in front of Mt Kenya
Photo Two - Lettuce in Morocco

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KEY FACTS:

Lead Group: Crops

Key Theme: Food Chain Safety

Contract Value: £65,000

Project Team: Dr Jim Monaghan, Paul Mwebaze, Dr Martin Hare, Dr Nicola Spence

Project Duration: Three Years

Sponsor/Client: DEFRA, CSL York



Centre for Rural Innovation

at Harper Adams University College

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- the provision of technical research services and business consultancy
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- supporting business networking
- the development of new technologies
- providing training programmes and work-based qualifications to businesses and individuals

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- Food Chain Safety
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General enquiries

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