



EA and EPPO agree to closer cooperation for accreditation of plant pest diagnostic laboratories

The development of robust quality management systems and the provision for accreditation are becoming increasingly important for laboratories around the world. Laboratories performing official diagnostics for regulated pests (insects, diseases etc.) need to achieve high quality standards because of the impact of their diagnosis on international trade, on the agricultural sector, and on the environment. Many laboratories within EPPO are already accredited and there is an increase in applications for accreditation among plant pest diagnostic laboratories. Accreditation of plant pest diagnostic laboratories is based on ISO/IEC 17025 *General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories*. Accreditation is given by national accreditation bodies.

One of the principal aims of the European Co-operation for Accreditation (EA)¹ consists of defining, harmonizing and building consistency in accreditation as a service in Europe by ensuring common interpretation of the standards used by its members notably ISO/IEC 17025.

The European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO)² is an intergovernmental organization responsible for European cooperation in plant protection in the European and Mediterranean region. Under the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), EPPO is the regional plant protection organization (RPPO) for Europe. One of EPPO's fundamental roles is to encourage harmonization in all areas of official plant protection action. In this framework, since 1998, EPPO has established a work programme in the area of diagnostics which aims to harmonize procedures across the region by development of standards. These standards are developed by involving many national experts and they are approved through a rigorous review and consultation process. The first programme to be initiated was the preparation of diagnostic protocols for regulated pests. In addition a programme on quality assurance and accreditation has started. A standard focussing on accreditation requirements for plant pest diagnostic laboratories is being prepared and is based on the ISO/IEC 17025 Standard.

Cooperation between EA and EPPO started in September 2007 on the question of accreditation of plant pest diagnostic laboratories. EA experts attended EPPO meetings (Workshop on Quality Assurance in December 2007, the Panel on Technical requirements of diagnostic laboratories, in January 2007 and July 2008) and helped develop a scheme for accreditation of plant pest diagnostic laboratories. EPPO experts have since participated in the EA laboratory Committee meetings.

As a result of this collaboration, at the last EA Laboratory Committee meeting, it was agreed that:

- *EA and EPPO will further collaborate in order to promote and harmonize implementation of ISO/IEC 17025 in plant pest diagnostic laboratories.*
- *EA will recommend that assessors from Accreditation Bodies take note of EPPO documents when evaluating plant pest diagnostic laboratories, EPPO being a reputable technical organization working for the development of tests to be used in plant pest diagnostics*
- *EA will recommend that the EPPO expertise network will be used by accreditation bodies to achieve their missions.*

The parties have further agreed to evaluate the effectiveness of the cooperation between the parties by end 2010 with the purpose of considering options for further strengthening and formalising the relations between the two parties.

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¹ The European Co-operation for Accreditation (EA) is the European network of nationally recognised accreditation bodies located in the European geographical area (www.european-accreditation.org)

² The European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO) (www.eppo.org)