

EU action against the spread of olive tree disease

A plant pathogen called *Xylella fastidiosa* has already devastated close to 30 000 hectares of olive groves in the Italian region of Apulia, with major economic and social consequences for the olive production sector. Following notification of the *Xylella* outbreak by the Italian authorities in October 2013, the EU has adopted a series of emergency measures, which are now to be further tightened by stringent prevention and eradication actions aimed at curbing the epidemic.

A devastating and resistant pest

Xylella fastidiosa is a harmful bacterium that causes a number of deadly plant diseases, such as 'Pierce's disease', killing grapevines in the United States, or 'Citrus variegated chlorosis' which attacks orange groves in Brazil. The bacterium can be harboured by around 300 host species, including many common plants, and is spread by insects. It was first detected in the EU in 2013, in the Lecce province of Apulia (South-East Italy), taking hold in olive trees. Infected trees developed a disease called 'olive quick decline syndrome', which causes drying and, ultimately, death of the trees, with no known treatment to protect plants.

Disastrous consequences for the olive sector in Apulia

Olive production is one of the main agricultural activities in the Apulia region, which accounts for around one third of the Italian production. In the Lecce province alone, there are about 67 700 olive farms on a total production area of 92 500 ha. *Xylella fastidiosa* has already infected over 10 % of the 11 million olive trees in Lecce, causing vast economic losses for growers and the entire production chain. According to the European Commission's [Food and Veterinary Office](#) (FVO), the situation deteriorated dramatically between February and November 2014, and there is a significant risk of further spreading of the bacterium. A new outbreak was reported at the beginning of 2015 in the Brindisi province.

EU measures against further introduction and spread of the bacterium

The EU adopted a first set of emergency measures in February 2014, replaced by enhanced measures in July 2014. However, the scale of the epidemic and the risk that the disease may spread to neighbouring Member States and affect other crops (notably citrus, grapevine, stone fruit) prompted the Commission to table further drastic measures in April 2015. The latter, based on the [scientific opinion](#) of the [European Food Safety Authority](#), published in January 2015, and on audits conducted by the Food and Veterinary Office in 2014, were endorsed by Member States on 28 April 2015.

According to the new [measures](#), Italy must establish a demarcated area comprising the infested zone (the whole province of Lecce), where containment measures may be applied, and an adjacent buffer zone of 20 km where all infected plants must be removed. Strict conditions must be applied on imports and transport within the EU of plants susceptible to *Xylella fastidiosa*, as well as a ban on the import into the Union of coffee plants from Honduras and Costa Rica. Member States are further required to report any outbreak, conduct official surveys, demarcate infested areas and apply strict eradication measures.

Follow-up of the *Xylella* outbreak by the European Parliament

Members of Parliament have been following the situation closely throughout the outbreak, addressing numerous written questions and a [question for oral answer](#) to the Commission. During the May 2015 part-session, the EP adopted a [resolution](#) on *Xylella fastidiosa*, which seeks compensation for olive growers for eradication measures and loss of revenue, as well as support to foster the economic recovery of affected areas. It welcomes the restrictions on plant imports but calls for even stricter measures. The Commission is urged to review the EU phytosanitary control system and to intensify research on *Xylella fastidiosa*. Lastly, it highlights the need for information campaigns in potentially affected areas of the EU.