



**NAPPO PRA Symposium**  
**Puerto Vallarta - Mexico - March 2002**

**NORTH AMERICAN PLANT PROTECTION ORGANIZATION**

**INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON PEST RISK ANALYSIS**  
**March 18-22, 2002**  
**Puerto Vallarta, Mexico**

**PEST RISK ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY APPLIED IN JAMAICA**  
**AND THE WIDER CARIBBEAN**

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# PEST RISK ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY APPLIED IN JAMAICA AND THE WIDER CARIBBEAN

## Introduction

Jamaica, and indeed most of the countries in the Caribbean, being members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is obligated to comply with the basic requirements of the various agreements, the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement being one of them. It calls for countries to establish SPS measures on the basis of appropriate assessment of the actual risks involved. This requires that countries have the institutional capability to carry out the studies that form the basis upon which domestic control measures are taken within the SPS agreement.

In Jamaica, the competent authority that handles Phytosanitary matters resides in the Plant Quarantine/Produce Inspection Division of the Ministry of Agriculture. It is this Division that is charged with the responsibility for conducting pest risk analyses, determining conditions of entry and generally regulating imports with a view to preventing the introduction and establishment of harmful plant pests and diseases. Other sections of the Ministry that provide technical support include the Plant Protection Division, Research and Development Division and the Rural Agricultural Development Authority, the extension arm of the Ministry.

## The Jamaica Situation

The approach used in Jamaica for conducting pest risk analysis (PRA) is an informal, qualitative approach. Information on the pest status, distribution and other relevant data is obtained from the exporting country. Usually, the Ministry of Agriculture in that country is contacted directly to supply the information. This is supplemented by data that is obtained independently. An assessment is then made and a decision taken. No formal documentation of the process is done and there is no PRA unit. Ad hoc meetings of persons with certain expertise are convened to discuss the cases, analyze the data and arrive at the appropriate course of action. A case in point was the outbreak of the Mediterranean fruit fly in Florida a few years ago. Information was gathered from USDA and the State Agriculture Department as to the extent of the outbreak and the measures that were being undertaken to contain it. The information received was discussed with the ad hoc group and based on the fact that most of the fruits and vegetables imported into Jamaica from the USA did not originate in the area of the outbreak or indeed in the state of Florida, it was decided that the risk of the introduction of the Mediterranean fruit fly was negligible and therefore the importation of these items from Florida could be allowed. The following additional declaration was required to be added to the Phytosanitary certificate accompanying each shipment: ***Fruits and vegetables are grown and stored in an area free of infestation by the Mediterranean fruit fly.***

A major consideration for Jamaica is the ability of the country to absorb certain levels of risk. With respect to crops of major economic importance such as coffee, citrus, banana and sugar cane, to name a few, the risk that the country is willing to take is minimal so the tolerance level for pest is very low.

With respect to other crops, entry is allowed with certain conditions such as the requirement of a Phytosanitary certificate from the exporting country certifying the conditions stated in the Import Permit. Entry conditions such as fumigation, other chemical treatments or the declaration that the produce is grown in an area free of certain pests or diseases may be required.

## **The Wider Caribbean**

The approach for conducting Pest Risk Analysis in the wider Caribbean is very similar to that in Jamaica in that an informal qualitative approach is taken. In some instances, the FAO International Standard for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM) 11 is used in the decision making process. Information is gathered from reference materials available within the local Plant Protection or Plant Quarantine Departments and further information is requested from the exporting country. The information is centred on the pests known to affect the particular commodity. The pros and cons of the importation as well as the necessary treatments to facilitate the importation are weighed and discussed. Usually there is some consultation between the heads of plant quarantine, plant protection and in some instances, other sections within the Ministry such as the Extension Division.

The introduction of the Pink Hibiscus Mealybug in the region in the mid 1990's forced many countries in the Caribbean to take a more serious look at conducting PRA's. This very important pest occurs in most of the islands of the eastern Caribbean. In some countries such as Barbados, although it is present, it is treated as a quarantine pest. The Ministry of Agriculture has in place an official programme of control using the release of beneficial insects and surveillance. Due to the significance of the inter-island trade in fresh produce in this sub-region of the Caribbean and in order to minimize trade disruptions in these commodities, systems wide equivalence agreements have been developed. In the case of Barbados, plant protection and plant quarantine staff visit the countries with which they wish to establish such protocols in order to evaluate the plant health systems.

Based on the information gathered and from recent studies conducted, with the exception of Trinidad and Tobago, which has a PRA Unit, there are no such Units in the other countries in the Caribbean. In Trinidad and Tobago a qualitative method of assessment based on the Argentinean system is used. About two years ago they received PRA training from an expert from that country. The method of analysis is conducted in four main parts: (1) initiating the analysis, (2) data collection, (3) risk assessment, where the risk is scored using specific criteria and (4) risk management, where appropriate action is decided upon.

The Unit has to date completed 270 data sheets of pests, 24 assessments and 4 risk management (completed PRA) operations. The Unit is staffed by 3 persons – a daily paid worker who has no formal training in agriculture or science but is good with computer work and database programmes, an agricultural officer (with a first degree) and a plant pathologist who heads the Unit. The Unit has no equipment of its own but shares a computer and copier with the Enquiry/Notification Point, which is housed in the same office. The head of the Unit is not full time in that he has other responsibilities within the Ministry and the other two staff members were only very recently assigned full time to the Unit.

## **Problems/Needs**

There are many problems faced by the countries in the Caribbean with respect to the proper conduction of Pest Risk Analyses. These are listed below.

- *Legislation that is not compliant with the WTO/SPS agreement.* In most instances, there is no real legislative framework to set up PRA units and to properly conduct assessments. In this regard, through a recent FAO TCP, the first draft of a prototype legislation for the Caribbean has been developed. It is expected that this will form the basis for updating existing legislation in the countries within the region.

- *Staff and training.* Some training in general PRA technique was conducted in the region about two or three years ago. This was sponsored by IICA and conducted by persons from USDA. Additional training is required however and further assistance is needed in setting up Units in each country. In addition, consideration must be given by the respective Governments to provide staff to adequately man these Units.
- Computers and other basic office needs, reference materials, books and databases are just a few of the equipment and infrastructure needs that exist.
- Another major area of need rests in the inability to conduct ongoing surveys and surveillance in order to properly document the pest status within the country. In many instances, surveys are conducted from time to time but due to lack of funds, equipment and manpower, on going surveillance and systematic surveys are not done. Such information is vital if PRAs are to be conducted properly.
- The availability or access to reliable information on the status of pests and diseases in the exporting country is another area of concern.
- The seemingly impossible, frustrating (and sometimes irrelevant?) information requested by some importing countries to countries within the Caribbean wishing to export is seen as a major problem. With limited or inadequate resources, in many instances these requests cannot be fully met which result in countries being essentially barred from exporting certain commodities.
- What is perceived as lack of understanding of the obligations under the WTO by policy makers is seen as a problem within the region. Matters such as the needs and requirements associated with conducting PRAs are not given high priority, as there is insufficient understanding and the absence of the political will on their part.
- In most of the countries in the Caribbean, the support systems are inadequate and therefore there is a reluctance to accept any risk that might result in the introduction of an exotic pest. Lack of financial resources to deal with outbreaks and to conduct on-going surveys, inadequate diagnostic capabilities and facilities, insufficient personnel to carry out inspections and man ports of entry, inadequate extension capabilities are just a few of the constraining factors which make it difficult for countries in the Caribbean to be able to accept the level of risk that a developed country, with all or most of its systems in place would be able to handle.

## **Conclusion**

The technical personnel within the Caribbean are aware, to varying extents, of the obligations with regards to PRA, the difficulty arises however when one considers that with budgetary constraints, high competing demands for support from various areas within the public sector, coupled with the lack of understanding and political will by the policy makers, issues relating to PRA in particular and other obligations under the WTO/SPS agreement in general will not be given the high priority they deserve on the list of items for Government support.

Issues such as these are areas that would benefit significantly from technical assistance from developed countries, since it is obvious that even if the political will exists, the means are non-existent. Technical assistance needs will vary from country to country but assistance can be given on a regional basis

(such as training, developing manuals and guidelines and access to technical information) in some instances and in others it would have to be based on individual country needs.

### **Acknowledgements**

I wish to express appreciation to the executive and members of NAPPO for extending the invitation to participate in this symposium, enabling me to discuss the Caribbean perspective on this very important issue. I am confident that I will learn much from being here, which will be of benefit to Jamaica and the wider Caribbean.

I also must extend appreciation to my colleagues in the other Caribbean islands who contributed to this paper by sharing with me the situation in their particular country.

We in the Caribbean look forward to further meaningful contact and interaction with NAPPO as we work together to promote trade and at the same time protect our agriculture from the introduction of harmful plant pest and diseases.

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# Topics discussed

- The situation in Jamaica
- The situation in the wider Caribbean
- Problems and some areas of needs
- Conclusion and recommendations

# THE JAMAICA SITUATION

- The Plant Quarantine/Produce Inspection Division of the Ministry of Agriculture handles phytosanitary matters and is responsible for conducting PRAs
- This Division regulates imports with respect to the prevention of the introduction of harmful plant pests and diseases
- Other departments of the Ministry of Agriculture provide technical support. These include the Plant Protection Division, the Research and Development Division and the Extension Service

# Jamaica Situation

- Jamaica uses an informal, qualitative approach for conducting PRAs
- Information is requested from the exporting country and information is also obtained independently
- Ad hoc meetings of persons with certain expertise are convened to discuss the requests
- The data is reviewed and a decision is taken
- There is no formal documentation of the process
- The incidence of Mediterranean Fruit fly in Florida a few years ago is an example of how we arrive at an appropriate course of action

# Jamaica Situation

- Jamaica does not have a PRA Unit
- There are concerns about our ability to absorb certain levels of risks.
- For crops such as coffee, citrus, banana and sugar cane, which are of major economic importance, the position taken is to accept as little risk as possible
- Phytosanitary certificate from the exporting country certifying the conditions for entry is a standard requirement.

# The situation in the rest of the Caribbean

- The approach taken is similar to that described for Jamaica.
- In some instances ISPM 11 is used
- The introduction of the Pink Hibiscus Mealybug in the region in the mid 1990's forced many countries to take a more serious look at PRA's
- Barbados for example has taken the approach of entering into systems wide equivalence agreements with other islands that have the mealybug that wish to export to them

# The rest of the Caribbean

- With the exception of Trinidad and Tobago, there are no PRA units in the other countries
- Trinidad and Tobago uses a qualitative method of analysis based on the Argentinean system
- They received training about two years ago
- The Unit has completed to date, 270 data sheets of pests, 24 assessments and 4 risk management operations
- The Unit is staffed by three persons.

# Problems/Needs

- Legislation that is not compliant with the WTO/SPS Agreement. Recently a draft model legislation for the Caribbean was developed through assistance from FAO
- Staff for PRA Unit
- Training in PRA methods
- Inadequate infrastructure, materials, equipment
- Insufficient surveys and surveillance
- The availability and access to reliable information
- Difficulty in meeting the PRA requirements of importing countries

# Problems/Needs

- Lack of understanding of the obligations by the region's policy makers
- Inadequate support systems
- Lack of financial resources to deal with outbreaks

# Conclusion

- There is general agreement and awareness among the technical personnel within the region as to the importance of PRA
- Budgetary constraints and high competing demands for public funds are factors that prevent us from making much advance in this area
- Lack of understanding of the issues among policy makers is an important factor
- PRA in the Caribbean is an area that could benefit from technical assistance from developed countries.

# THANK YOU

- I wish to express appreciation to the executive and members of NAPPO for affording me the privilege of participating in this symposium.
- I also must thank my colleagues in the other Caribbean islands who contributed to this paper by sharing with me the situation in their particular country.