

Foreign donors help small ACP growers meet European standards

Without the help of foreign donors small-scale growers in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries would no longer be able to export their produce because of their inability to meet the costs of complying with commercial standards requested by European importers. The Pesticide Initiative Programme reports here on its activities to give ACP smallholders a fairer chance in European markets.

European retailers are increasingly demanding that ACP growers abide by food safety commercial standards such as EurepGAP. For many ACP growers this is technically and economically very difficult without outside intervention. (see PN71 pp 10-11 and 14).

One programme involved in ACP fresh produce issues is the Pesticides Initiative Programme (PIP) of the Europe/Africa-Caribbean-Pacific Liaison Committee for the promotion of ACP horticultural exports, known as COLEACP. PIP is a five year programme financed by the European Union (EU) with the remit to help ACP growers comply with food safety regulations imposed on all companies producing for the European market. But growers now face more than just EU regulatory requirements, such as Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs). They are confronted with additional demands imposed on them by retailers which go above and beyond these regulatory requirements, including traceability and many aspects of quality control.

PIP faced a dilemma when it started in 2001 as it realised that without help many ACP growers – especially small growers – would not be able to meet the costs of

complying with all these legal and market requirements. Many would simply withdraw from the fruit and vegetable export sector. The socio-economic impact on the millions of small growers and their families would be disastrous. Their participation in the export sector greatly contributes to the redistribution of export income, alleviates rural poverty and limits rural depopulation.

The PIP team could not ignore the plight of small ACP growers. So they decided to finance a number of actions to help ACP growers meet these standards and maintain their market share in the process.

Added benefit of commercial standards?

Many ACP growers are under the misconception that when they are asked to become accredited against the EurepGAP standard they are, in fact, asked to comply with an additional regulatory requirement. The confusion between EU regulations and commercial standards has exacerbated an already precarious situation.

With no less than a dozen commercial standards on the market, it is hardly surprising that ACP growers are confused. These standards range from industry-wide standards such as EurepGAP to others belonging to individual retailers who have drawn up their own standard. The presence of so many standards contradicts the objective of EurepGAP as a unifying standard to be used by the entire industry. Some retailers go as far as requiring EurepGAP in



Training aimed to reach 1000 growers through field days and other appropriate means. Photo: PIP-MU

addition to their own standard while others tack on additional requirements arbitrarily, such as slashing authorised MRLs in half.

Large retailers in Europe control such a sizeable share of produce sales in Europe that ACP growers have little choice but to comply with these standards if they wish to continue exploiting the lucrative export market. The trend is also spreading, with some smaller European wholesalers now asking for EurepGAP certification.

The usefulness of these commercial standards is widely debated. Some argue that they do not add clear benefits in terms of food safety. 'There is a definite incoherence between the cost of complying and the real impact of these standards,' says Guy Stinglhamber, PIP project manager. Organisations like the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) claim that many cultural values are concealed in the standards and that their environmental obligations do not address off-farm issues such as the degradation of resources.

The standards have also created an imbalance in the fruit and vegetable sector of ACP countries. They strengthen the comparative advantage of larger and more cash intensive producers and exporters. This skews the balance in favour of larger producers to the detriment of small and medium-sized operations. Attempts by EurepGAP to open to small growers through the group certification process for small and medium scale farmers organised in associations remains unconvincing at best. For widespread certification of small growers with commercial standards to occur foreign donors will have to coordinate their approach with the participation of ACP countries.

Reaching small-scale growers

Small growers continue to comprise an important part of fresh fruit and vegetable



Certificate received attending the golden bean training.

Photo: PIP-MU

exports originating from ACP countries. The small holdings they operate on (usually under 5 ha) do not give them the sort of volumes necessary to be able to export directly to outside markets. They therefore rely on larger producers/exporters to take their produce destined for export.

Since the start of the programme PIP has carried out specific actions targeted at small growers. PIP began by channelling resources through the larger producers and exporters. Under the 'due diligence' principle required by EU member state governments to ensure food safety in the food chain, all exporting companies must show that they control their entire production chain, including those of their suppliers. PIP originally worked with larger producers/exporters as natural conduits to reach a large number of small growers specifically producing for export. The production managers of these companies were given appropriate technical training which they in turn shared with the small growers supplying them.

In 2004 PIP decided to diversify its means of reaching small producers. In each country PIP sought out organisations that provided training in horticulture. Some of these then received PIP assistance to integrate the food safety requirements of the European market in their training programmes. The idea was to use these organisations as 'relays' to reach all small growers, regardless of whether they produced for export or of their affiliation with exporting companies.

One such action using relay structures took place in Senegal in February and March 2006. 'The aim of Operation *Golden Bean* was to reach more than 1,000 small growers of green beans,' says Mr Stinglhamber. PIP teamed up with the national Senegalese agricultural and rural agency, PAN Africa and other partners to increase these growers' awareness of food safety and good agricultural practices, using educational methods such as theatre and practical experimentation. Box 1 details the activities and partners in one of these field days.

Reaching small growers through relay structures is important in that it gets through to a large number of small growers and decreases their dependence on any single exporter. PIP has now initiated relay training in some 10 ACP countries. The end of 2006 and 2007 will see the launching of a full set of animation tools which have been created as a support material to collective training sessions. These tools (such as flipcharts, billboards, puzzles, brochures) are user-friendly and have been specially designed for small-holders training.

The PIP team can be contacted via valerie.deoliveira@coleacp.org or guy.stinglhamber@coleacp.org and www.coleacp.org/pip

Golden Bean field training in Senegal

PAN Africa requested PIP support for awareness-raising of horticulture producers in the community of Diamniadio, near Dakar, on issues of food safety and pesticide hazards. Activities were carried out in February 2006 with men and women horticulture growers, some of whom had been trained in vegetable IPM through Farmer Field School methodology by PAN Africa during 2001-2003. A PIP awareness-raising field day was organised for green beans, under the title of 'Golden Bean', in collaboration with NGOs PAN Africa and ENDA, and ANCAR the government agricultural extension service. A total of 99 growers, mainly women, participated from this rural community in Senegal's main horticulture production zone.

The day was opened by the representative of the Mayor of Diamniadio and in the presence of the President of the local Women's Union, Madame Kene Ndiaye. One activity involved mapping the producers present, via attendance sheets, to enable PIP and other export programmes to identify each farmer's location and so help them link better with Senegalese exporters and European importers. Farmers welcomed the mapping exercise as it would allow more direct links between the farmer groups and exporters, without having to pass through intermediaries who are renowned for offering low prices to farmers.

The group activities started with a facilitation game via sketches which enabled the farmers to understand the main ways that pesticides can enter the human body, through the skin, the mouth and the respiratory tract. According to the facilitators, 85% of pesticide exposure is through the hands. The facilitators discussed scientific findings and made use of these to enable farmers to understand that pesticides which come into direct contact with the body can be absorbed and that just washing with soap does not completely remove them and this is why adapted and appropriate personal protection equipment is absolutely vital.

Demonstrations were given of the method and order of dressing and undressing in protective clothing and how to avoid pesticide contamination of the skin; preparing pesticide mixtures, application in the field, always taking into account wind direction, speed of walking and the position of the operator. The facilitators also stressed the dangers of using pesticides without labels, overdosing pesticides, and the use of an assistant in spraying operations. In order to evaluate the participants' understanding, the facilitators asked participants to create a role play in which they would demonstrate the good practices learnt. After each sketch the audience was invited to comment on possible errors and omissions by the

actors from pesticide treatment to use of protective clothing, handling mixtures and cleaning protective equipment.

The other topic was field hygiene. The facilitators explained about importers' demands on fruit and vegetable quality, particularly green bean, and the protocol requirements of EurepGAP and the MRLs authorised for each pesticide. They highlighted the importance of respecting pre-harvest intervals for each pesticide used to avoid exceeding residue limits, hygiene rules to be taken when handling harvested produce (such as keeping bare hands away from produce and preventing harvested produce from touching the soil or dirty containers).

The dangers of residues in produce for consumers was highlighted and the need for rational use of pesticides. PIP brochures were distributed confirming good agricultural practices and different techniques that could be used to adapt harvesting methods in conformity with European demands on traceability of marketed produce.

PAN Africa distributed hazard awareness-raising materials including posters in French and the local language Wolof on the health risks linked to using empty pesticide containers for domestic purposes and calendars about the issue of obsolete pesticide stocks. Each participant received a certificate of training.

Ms Julienne Kuseu of PAN Africa was very happy with the strong mobilisation of farmers and urged them to make good use of the techniques learnt and to rise to the challenge of making sure that European perceptions about smallholders and food quality were positive. She also highlighted the importance of being able to produce safe fruit and vegetables and quality produce for the local market as Senegalese consumers have an equal right to food safety. In the name of the farmers, Kene Ndiaye thanked the initiative for having considered the specific needs of smallholders and highlighted that one of the principal constraints to their horticulture livelihoods was access to water and urged the organisers to help them identify funds to purchase drip irrigation equipment and motor pumps.

Madame Ndiaye has since taken part in the farmer exchange to Europe organized by PAN UK's Food and Fairness project, to help smallholders explain their situation to European farmers, consumers and food chain stakeholders and to gain a better understanding of how European farmers cope with pesticide restrictions and marketing problems.

Details of the farmer exchange can be found via the Food & Fairness project pages <http://www.pan-uk.org/new%20site/Projects/Fairness/index.htm>. A full report will be included in the December 2006 Pesticides News.