

Phytosanitary Measures Awareness Empowering Regional Farmers

Thirty-five farmers and agro-food product exporters from SADC Member States attended the second Regional Economic Integration Support (REIS) Programme Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) awareness raising workshop held in Ezulwini, Swaziland from 20 – 22 May 2014.

The Workshop was the second of a series of SPS awareness events to be held in a Member State as the REIS Programme moves to create SPS awareness with actual practitioners at grass roots level.

Holding these events in a Member State with the assistance of local agri-business associations allows for participation of many local stakeholders at reduced cost. Of the total delegates who attended the Swaziland workshop, ten were local farmers and business people.

The objective of the workshop was to broaden the understanding of phytosanitary issues by stakeholders, so as to enhance their participation in the identification, formulation and implementation of phytosanitary measures which are harmonised with International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs).

The workshop programme included technical presentations on global and regional agro-food trade topics. Delegates were informed about the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the WTO SPS agreement with emphasis on how these global systems impact on their operations. Delegates were also updated on the status of implementation of the SPS Annex to the SADC Protocol on Trade and particular attention was paid to “Pest Risk Analysis (PRA) for market access”, an important requirement of the SPS Annex which has not been adequately implemented in all SADC Member States and will require serious attention. Participants were also given information on the standard setting process so that they get to understand how the process works and why it is important to participate in national, regional and international standard setting processes. More practical presentations were made on biosecurity in sugarcane production and a field trip to a citrus fruit packing operation and a sugar plantation really put matters into perspective.

At the end of the workshop in Ezulwini delegates agreed to a set of recommendations including:

- Continued awareness creation on SPS to consumers/ producers/ traders especially at Member State level so that the message reaches more farmers. This should be conducted by the regulatory agencies working in collaboration with consumer associations and regional experts;
- Facilitation of SPS ‘Training of Trainers’ in order to expand the pool of regional experts who will then be available to create more awareness on SPS within the region;

- Facilitation of closer collaboration between stakeholders and their National SPS Coordinating Committees;
- Harmonization of national pesticides regulations through the use of SADC Regional Guidelines on the Use of Plant Protection Chemicals, updating of the regional quarantine pest list for specified commodities, and identification and prioritization of commodities on which PRA should be conducted; and
- The conduct of SPS audits in Member States in order to identify areas that require attention.

Future workshops will focus on animal and animal products sanitary issues as well as food safety.

Motivated by the exchanges during the workshop and recognising the need to collaborate on various SPS issues, several delegates met on the sidelines of the workshop to consult on the possibility of forming an informal regional horticultural network. Delegates also indicated that they would not only be applying what they had learnt when they get back home, but they would be passing on the information to their colleagues through their farmers' unions.

The REIS Programme is funded by the European Union and one of its aims is to empower regional entrepreneurs in the agro-food sector with knowledge of SPS standards and their implementation. The REIS programme is keen to see tangible outcomes arising out of the standards awareness interventions being supported.