

PRESS RELEASE

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Europe must improve its response to the threat of plant pests and diseases

Latest EASAC report on “Risks to Plant Health” recommends urgent coordinated action to avoid damage to food security and the environment.

Potentially devastating plant pests and diseases are highlighted in a new report from EASAC, the European Academies' Science Advisory Council, the leading provider of independent scientific advice to Europe's policy-makers. In the detailed EU-wide study of emerging plant pests and diseases, EASAC describes their combined threat to crops and forests and wider ecosystems, with implications for human health. In economic terms, as admitted by the EU Commission, billions of euros could be at stake and the environmental impact may be irreversible. Prof. Anne Glover, Chief Scientific Advisor to EU Commission President Barroso welcomed the report and promised to study the recommendations as a matter of urgency.

The European Commission has already acknowledged the problem by upgrading certain existing protective measures against plant pests and diseases. However, EASAC wants to see these accompanied by broader policy development and strategic action across:

- Improved surveillance systems - for example, new forms of monitoring, collection and sharing of standardised data, and extension of surveillance systems to natural habitats.

- Stronger research push - including fundamental research to understand mechanisms of disease and disease resistance.
- Innovative thinking – addressing the limitations of current crop protection chemical approaches, breeding improved crops and using sound science to inform regulation.

“Despite the scale of the problem highlighted in the “Risks to Plant Health” report, we firmly believe that science and technology can provide answers,” says Professor Jos van der Meer, President of EASAC. “However, we need a coordinated approach. In particular, the report describes how research advances can bring new opportunities within reach regarding procedures for pest control and breeding improved plant varieties with resistance to biotic stresses.”

Finally, In line with previous reports on controversial scientific issues, EASAC stresses that public awareness of the associated scientific, environmental, economic and strategic issues is crucial. “This awareness will inform future individual choices, national political debate and EU priority-setting. EASAC stands ready to continue playing its part in this debate,” concludes van der Meer.

The full report and an executive summary can be downloaded from the EASAC website www.easac.eu from 10 March 2014. The report will be launched during an official event at Edelman The Centre in Brussels, at 15:00 on 10 March 2014.

EASAC is formed by the national science academies of the EU Member States, to collaborate in giving advice to European policy-makers. EASAC provides a means for the collective voice of European Science to be heard. Through EASAC, the academies work together to provide independent expert, evidence-based advice about the scientific aspects of European policies to those who make or influence policy within the European institutions.

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