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**November 2018**

To: organisations on the attached list

Dear Sir/Madam,

## **Pepino mosaic virus**

I am writing to seek your views on a UK policy position regarding Pepino mosaic virus (PepMV).

This follows an earlier consultation in 2013 when the current policy approach was developed and the aim is identify the most appropriate approach for the future in light of subsequent developments. The earlier consultation supported ongoing regulation under plant health legislation, with requirements focused on ensuring that tomato seeds remain free, to help ensure the production of healthy material further down the propagation/production chain. At the same time, there was recognition of the fact that Pepino mosaic virus is present in the UK and having detrimental impacts on the tomato industry. Respondents therefore also supported the prospect of having access to products which could be used to vaccinate healthy plants with a mild isolate of Pepino mosaic virus, to protect against more damaging and aggressive isolates of the same strain. Such products are now available and there is a need to review the policy position as a result.

### **Background**

PepMV mainly affects tomato plants and fruit, and is not currently regulated in EU Directive 2000/29/EC. However, it has been subject to an EU Emergency decision since 2001 (Commission Decision 2001/536/EC replaced by Commission Decision 2003/64/EC, and later replaced by Commission Decision 2004/200/EC). This requires actions to ensure freedom of seed from PepMV and provides for action against findings on other premises. A Pest Risk Analysis (PRA) was finalised in 2010 within the EU-project PEPEIRA. A link to the Pest Risk Analysis can be found below:  
<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/phiw/riskRegister/downloadExternalPra.cfm?id=3900>

The PRA mentions uncertainty over the distribution of the virus, although it was considered likely to be present in all countries with tomato production areas and has been found in at

least 21 EU member states including the UK. In the UK PepMV is present in many (but not all) fruit production nurseries. PepMV is highly infectious and is therefore difficult, if not impossible to eradicate once it is established on a fruit production site.

Recent crop protection products have been approved to control PepMV. These involve the use of 'cross protection': the inoculation of young plants with a mild isolate of PepMV, to protect the crop and to avoid damage caused by a subsequent infection with a more aggressive isolate of the same strain. The practice of cross protection requires the seeds and young plants to be free from aggressive strains of PepMV because mixed infections may cause severe symptoms. Plants which have been subject to cross protection may exhibit mild symptoms in early growth but will grow away from this.

There are currently three products approved at an EU level:

- PepMV CH2 isolate 1906
- Mild Pepino mosaic virus isolate VX1
- Mild Pepino mosaic virus isolate VC1

Only PepMV CH2 isolate 1906, which protects against the Chile 2 strain of PepMV, is currently approved for use in the UK. EU approval is also pending for 2 further products.

## **Next steps**

We are seeking your views on a change of policy regarding the action taken against PepMV to reflect its current regulatory status, the distribution of the virus within the UK and the availability of the cross protection products. The possible future courses of action are as follows:

### **1. Continue with the current policy of taking action on all sites including fruit production sites, which for the latter includes:**

- Restrictions on movement of fruit, allowed only to wholesale or retail and not to other production sites unless hygiene measures are in place.  
Restrictions on the disposal of haulm at the end of the growing season (disposal by composting, landfill or incineration).

The benefits of retaining these measures against PepMV are that it is highly contagious and these restrictions may prevent spread to other sites and reduce the risk of carry over to subsequent seasons. However, this action may now be disproportionate given how widespread PepMV is within both the UK and the wider EU. This distribution would mean that PepMV no longer meets the criteria of a quarantine organism making action on fruit production sites inappropriate. Additionally action on fruit production may no longer be appropriate as growers have the option to control PepMV using cross protection. Also it should be noted that it is not possible to distinguish in tests between cross protection strains and outbreak strains. However symptoms would be limited in cross protected plants and more severe in plants which are infected with an outbreak strain, therefore action would be taken based on the presence of symptoms.

### **2. Action taken on infected seeds lots and infected plants at propagation sites**

- Action on infected seed and plants would continue
- Requirements for hygiene measures at propagators could be introduced to reduce the risk that PepMV enters sites. However these requirements are

likely to be no more stringent than measures already practiced by UK propagators, so would not require statutory intervention.

It should be noted that it is unlikely that symptoms would be visible until plants have already left propagation sites, making action against findings at propagation sites impossible without testing. The testing of plants at propagation sites would have to be very intensive to give a reasonable degree of assurance of disease freedom. In practice, the only statutory action that could be taken would be destruction in the event of findings.

### 3. Action only taken on seed

- Action against infected seed would be retained, which would be destruction of the seed lot, other than where testing gives a weak positive and contamination is suspected rather than infection. In this case, treatment with Sodium hypochlorite or TSOP is permitted. No action would be taken on growing plants.

Continued action on tomato seed would help to ensure that seed imported from third countries and other EU member states is free from PepMV, in line with the EU Decision. While statutory action would no longer be taken at propagating or fruit production sites, hygiene measures could continue to be applied by industry, to minimise the risk of infection and spread.

On balance, we believe that option 3 represents the most appropriate approach, balancing the regulatory position, the distribution of the virus, the availability of control products, and the objective to keep seed free.

We welcome your views and comments on the proposed recommendation. If there is any other organisation that you think would like to contribute then please make them aware of the letter and ask them to contact Defra using the details below.

Responses should be received by **10<sup>th</sup> December 2018**.

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be made available to the public on request, in accordance with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

If you do not wish your response, including your name, contact details and any other personal information, to be publicly available, please say so clearly in writing when you send your response to the consultation. Please note that if your computer automatically includes a confidentiality disclaimer, this will not count as a confidentiality request. Please explain why you need to keep details confidential. We will take your reasons into account if someone asks for this information under freedom of information legislation. However, we cannot guarantee that we will always be able to keep those details confidential.

Yours faithfully,



Richard McIntosh

Assistant Chief Plant Health Officer