

Feedback on Qualitative Mapping Ambitions/gaps/specific situation on FNS in MALTA

The present situation

Plant Protection

One of the major contributory factors to low productivity is crop loss due to plant health problems. Limiting or preventing the introduction and spread of pests that harm plants is crucial to ensuring stable availability of and economic and physical access to food. Each year, up to 16% of the global harvest is lost due to plant pests. International travel and trade has increased exponentially with a similar increase in the associated pests and diseases. Smallholder farmers and producers are highly vulnerable to foreign pests that infest and damage their crops. Having available healthy plant material enhances food security, facilitates safe trade and safe use by the farming community.

High quality seeds for sowing and other plant reproductive material

Seeds are the primary basis for human sustenance. They are the repository of the genetic potential of crop species and their varieties resulting from the continuous improvement and selection over time. Crop improvement and the delivery of high quality seed/propagation & planting material of selected varieties to farmers and growers is necessary for ensuring improved crop production, higher yields, pest/disease resistance and meeting growing environmental challenges. Food security therefore is dependent on the seed security of farming communities. Farmers' access to good quality and affordable seed/plant material of appropriate varieties is of high importance. In addition, understanding and enhancing the role of biodiversity and the genetic resources and ecosystem functions it conveys is essential. Biodiversity underpins to food security, sustainable livelihoods, ecosystem resilience, coping strategies for climate change, adequate nutritional requirements, etc..

Quality of soil and irrigation water

Local farmers produce the food that the Maltese people use every day. Soil is a critical part of successful agriculture and is the original source of the nutrients that one uses to grow crops. The nutrients move from the soil into plants that one eat like tomatoes. Nutrients are also a part of the food animals (for example cows) eat. In the end, humans benefit from healthy soil. The healthiest soils produce the healthiest and most abundant food supplies. In addition, soil supports biodiversity. Such biodiversity reflects the variability among living organisms ranging from micro-organisms, larger meso-fauna and macro-fauna. The quality of the irrigation water may affect both crop yields and soil physical conditions, even if all other conditions and cultural practices are favourable or optimal.

Public Health

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Poor diets and sedentary behaviours among the Maltese people are contributing to an increase of obesity with lower socio-economic groups bearing the biggest burden. The results of the Health Behaviour Study in school Children identified Maltese adolescents as being amongst the heaviest

both within Europe as well as globally (HBSC, 2014). The prevalence of overweight and obesity in children and adults is also very high.

The aim of Malta's Food and Nutrition Policy and Action Plan (2015-2020) (FNAP) is to address its major diet related non-communicable diseases that are affecting its population and to address the economic implications of poor nutrition.

Although Malta is not a country with a low-income food-deficit (as per the 2016 LIFDC list, FAO) yet, food insecurity is a problem facing vulnerable groups (FNAP, 2014).

It is important that public health objectives are considered and need to become more aligned with objectives in the agriculture and fisheries sector.

Planning Authority

"agriculture land accounts for almost half of Malta's land area whilst woodlands account for less than 1% according to latest statistics. In this scenario the SPED draws attention to the fact that "agriculture dominates the rural environment yet abandonment, loss and fragmentation of agricultural land remain critical issues for the future sustainability of Malta's rural areas. The present situation of Maltese agriculture where it finds difficulties competing because of the uneven public support enjoyed by foreign products is considered to be economically unsustainable. Consequently, the agricultural industry has partly become intensive and specialised with concentrations of greenhouses, large farm buildings and small-scale agricultural structures that generate a significant cumulative impact on the quality of the landscape, as do the use of unsuitable design and materials. Intensive arable farming has increased demand for water for irrigation and the use of agro-chemicals (e.g. fertilisers and pesticides) which resulted in adverse impacts on biodiversity and water resources. User conflicts through the inappropriate siting and design of livestock farm buildings and the lack of proper waste management have also arisen. The reduction in full time employment in agriculture and the continuing process of land fragmentation have shifted people's interest in the use of agricultural land and buildings for gardening as a hobby and/or for their exclusive enjoyment of the countryside as a weekend retreat. This has increased pressure for new structures in the rural area, sometimes under the pretext of agriculture, or for conversion of existing structures to non agricultural uses. Therefore, the promotion and support of a sustainable and modernised agricultural industry is also crucial to safeguarding the countryside for present and future generations. The challenges of modernisation of arable and livestock farming require an appreciative understanding of the spatial context within which they occur.

Ambitions

Plant Protection:

- More research to be done at local level on the monitoring and control of harmful organisms;

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- Continuation of the prevention on the introduction and spread of harmful organism in the Maltese territory;
- Continuation of surveys at national and EU level on specific harmful organisms;
- Development of more contingency plans on specific plant pests and diseases especially those that pose particular risks to Malta;
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- Continuation of assurance that plant propagation material is marketed according to the required standards and the availability of high quality propagation material on the local market;

- Promotion of the availability and sustainable use of Maltese local varieties and landraces of agricultural plants on the local market; and holding of more awareness raising campaigns on general and specific issues related to plant health and biodiversity.

Public health

Maltese people have the 'human right' to adequate food at all times, that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. In our view, Maltese farmers and fishermen need to be supported and incentivised so that our local agriculture and fishing is in a position to provide a degree of self-sufficiency in nutritious, cheap and tasty food for the Maltese population, especially among its lower socio-economic groups.

Planning Authority: As its vision for the rural area the Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED) states that "the Rural Area shall sustain the livelihood of farming communities through modernisation of agricultural practices and diversification of compatible rural activities; shall remain a place where people can escape from daily urban life, visually pleasant and rich in biodiversity; and shall become better green lungs with less buildings and dereliction, more accessible and more resilient to the impacts of climate change". In order to achieve its vision for the rural area the SPED states that its main objective in this area is "To facilitate sustainable rural development and the diversification of activities within the Rural Area to sustain agriculture and safeguard its distinctiveness".

This is to be achieved by:

1. Protecting good quality agricultural land from development.
2. Supporting the modernisation of existing animal and arable farms located away from sensitive areas.
3. Guiding new animal and intensive arable farms to intensive agriculture zones identified in subsidiary plans.
4. Safeguarding San Niklaw area (Siggiewi) for the relocation of livestock farms from the Urban Area.
5. Integrating renewable energy, waste management infrastructure and sustainable water management for efficient resource use in intensive agriculture.

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6. Broadening the range of acceptable activities such as rural tourism initiatives by farmers in rural areas on agricultural holdings.
7. Controlling the cumulative effect of rural development.

Gaps to be filled

Plant Protection:

More collaboration and cooperation between relevant Ministries, entities within the same Ministries, conservationists, nurseries and traders in order for activities to be done at national level following a more holistic approach.

Public Health

There are many conflicting interests in the area of Food and Nutrition Security due to the different interests from areas such as trade, production, health protection, and sustainable use of resources including water.

Farming families in Malta have been and are still facing many challenges; such as: no leverage and/or insurance coverage for farmers; competition from imported fruit and vegetables; part-time rather than full time farmers who need to secure another source of income to sustain farming; and selling of arable land to developers – due to lack of profit-making. Land management problems exist with its associated ecological threat to biodiversity.

The issue of climate change also has an impact on agriculture especially on the long-term effect on soil and plant acclimatisation/resilience, desertification and salination of the water aquifer.

In particular, we feel that there is a need to ensure that the maltese population has access to a healthy diet produce at a good price and enhance the local production of fruit, vegetables, whole grains, potatoes, nuts, herbs and spices and to ensure sustainability.

Specific situation on FNS in your country.

Plant Protection

The PPD has the obligation to carry out official controls at local level on the health status of plants including planting material, reproductive material, etc. within the context of the presence of harmful organisms. This material is produced locally and/or moved in the Maltese territory, introduced, imported or exported as per national law. In addition, the PPD carries out health testing of plant material for the determination of the presence or absence of harmful organisms especially those which are regulated at EU and international level.

High quality seeds for sowing and other plant reproductive material

The PPD has the obligation to monitor at local level the quality of seeds/propagation & planting material that is either locally produced with a view to marketing and/or introduced/imported/exported as per national law. In addition, the PPD carries out health testing of plant material and also, seed quality testing in view of seed certification. The PPD is the national body that primarily deals with genetic resources that are covered by the national law on access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilisation and so, it carries out various work on local genetic resources.

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The PPD also provides a service to clients and that consists of laboratory testing of soil and irrigation water for the determination of the quality of such elements. The test reports given to farmers by the PPD laboratory are used by the Farm Advisory Service in the establishment of fertiliser plans to such farmers. Therefore, by offering the above mentioned service, the local farming community will be able to devise better its cultivation intentions and plans in accordance to the soil and irrigation water characteristics and quality.

Public Health

The Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate within the Ministry for Health makes every effort to promote healthy eating and living via the dissemination of its food based dietary guidelines for Maltese population based on the traditional Mediterranean Diet, which is a mainly, but not exclusively, plant-based balanced diet that is associated with a lower risk to a myriad of chronic diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, cancer and type II diabetes.

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