

Plant Biosecurity Resources – increasing the accessibility of notifiable plant pest information for Professional Operators

Policy Summary



www.planthealthcentre.scot



Royal
Botanic Garden
Edinburgh



Plant Healthy

Full report is available [online](#)

Please cite this report as follows: M. Elliot & A. Yeomans (2024). Plant Biosecurity Resources – increasing the accessibility of notifiable plant pest information for Professional Operators: Policy Summary. PHC2022/08. Scotland's Centre of Expertise for Plant Health (PHC). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13889899>

Available online at: planthealthcentre.scot/publications

Dissemination status: Unrestricted

Copyright: All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, modified or stored in a retrieval system without the prior written permission of PHC management. While every effort is made to ensure that the information given here is accurate, no legal responsibility is accepted for any errors, omissions or misleading statements. All statements, views and opinions expressed in this paper are attributable to the author(s) who contribute to the activities of the PHC and do not necessarily represent those of the host institutions or funders.

1 Policy Summary

1.1 Background

Introduced plant pests and pathogens (henceforth “pests”) have a significant impact on businesses, organisations, landowners and the wider natural environment. A recent global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services carried out by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) states that introduced species are one of the five main drivers of biodiversity loss.

The current UK plant health regime relies heavily on the plant passporting system for plant movements within GB, and phytosanitary certificates for imported plants. One aspect of this system is to ensure traceability of plants in the event of a pest outbreak, enabling the relevant plant health authority to trace-back and trace-forward potentially infected stock and manage it in a timely fashion.

In order for this system to work, businesses moving plants (known as Professional Operators¹) issue plant passports and are required to demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge of the notifiable pests that could affect the plants and plant products that they grow, manage or handle. This is specified in the EU regulation 2016/2031, Article 89 “Authorisation of professional operators to issue plant passports”, which is part of the legislation that the UK Government has retained post-Brexit. In addition, Article 91 of EU regulation 2016/2031 “Pest risk management plans” indicates that Professional Operators may have in place pest risk management plans which are approved by a competent authority.

A previous study (PHC2021/01: Biosecurity practices to support plant health: a review of knowledge and practice) identified that stakeholders felt more definitive information/guidance would help them with risk assessments and adoption of tighter biosecurity measures. Pulling together more accessible, up-to-date, pest-relevant information for the plant species which they grow and/or move would support Professional Operators when assessing pest risks to their site and/or operations and also when presenting information for the purposes of being authorised to issue plant passports.

This research project aimed to help address this knowledge gap by producing 39 pest factsheets (22 GB Priority pests plus 17 from the UK Plant Health Risk Register (UKPHRR)) to support Professional Operators understand the pathways for each pest and identify relevant biosecurity measures to consider when carrying out pest risk plans for their sites. Going forward, it will be important to ensure that the factsheet information is kept updated and this could be done via an online webtool if resources were available. During this project a functional prototype webtool that supports pest risk analysis when issuing plant passports was developed which could be taken forward and made available to Professional Operators and other users.

1.2 Project outputs

To help improve biosecurity outcomes for individual horticultural sites, supply chains and the wider environment, this project:

- Produced a suite of 39 pest management information sheets providing crucial and need-to-know information for Professional Operators to help fulfil their obligations (the 22 GB Priority Pests plus the 17 pests that currently have a UK mitigated risk rating of 60 or above on the UKPHRR). The information presented includes key points on host species, pest identification, life cycles, movement pathways and management measures. These pest management sheets are in a uniform format and subsequent sheets can potentially be

¹ <https://planthealthportal.defra.gov.uk/plant-passports/am-i-a-professional-operator/>

added to the suite of 39 pests as and when further high-impact notifiable pests are identified.

- Developed a pest risk analysis information sheet detailing the main pathways by which pests spread and how the various Plant Health Management Standard (PHMS) requirements minimise pest risk (see section 4.2.2 of the main report). This provides Professional Operators with a quick overview of the management options for all 39 pests and how, by adopting a systems approach, they can mitigate risk on their site, something which is not currently available anywhere else (e.g., the UK Plant Health Risk Register).
- Cross-referenced the PHMS with Article 91 with a view to ensure that the PHMS is well-aligned with regulations and therefore provides the confidence for Government or other bodies to include the PHMS in their procurement policies or other policy requirements.
- Produced a prototype automatic webtool, based on a host plant search function, which could support Professional Operators compile information required to issue plant passports and conduct a Site and Operations Pest Risk Analysis (Section 4 of the PHMS). This webtool if taken forward would provide Professional Operators with up-to-date access to the need-to-know information easily so that they can focus on conducting the critical thinking required to integrate plant biosecurity measures within their operations and on their sites.
- Produced four case studies which provide real-world examples of how various organisations/businesses improved their biosecurity processes, using the PHMS as a framework. It is hoped that this will provide ideas and inspiration for other organisations/businesses as they strive to improve their biosecurity processes.

1.3 Main Findings

- Professional Operators require support when assessing pest risks to their site and/or operations. Information is currently diffuse which can lead to confusion.
- The pest fact sheets presented in this format have been welcomed by a test group of stakeholders but are only a start in terms of providing information on key regulated plant pests in the UK. This project demonstrated that pest information can be presented to Professional Operators automatically and in one place, however it is likely that the UK Plant Health Service are best placed to take this forward for all key regulated pests as they hold the data and have oversight of when the data has been updated. The data used in this project represents a snapshot and could become outdated over time which presents a risk.
- The prototype webtool would bring relevant pest management information into one place for a Professional Operator, which supports the pest risk analysis process for a horticultural site and its associated operations. This demonstrates that a webtool could improve the quality of information that Professional Operators compile and present as part of their authorisation process to issue plant passports and to conduct the PHMS's Site and Operational Pest Risk Analysis. The information on pests and diseases should also support a pest risk management plan based on the Article 91 sub requirements.
- The prototype webtool produced as part of this project could potentially be further developed by the relevant team in the UK Plant Health Service as part of the improvements planned for the UKPHRR and portal. This would ensure that future changes to the risk register (e.g., the addition of more pests) could be automatically linked to the pest risk webtool. Additionally, the team directly responsible for the UKPHRR would be well placed to inform the design of the database schema required to instantaneously share information and update a future version of the prototype webtool.

- The pest sheets provide Professional Operators with a potential training tool for their staff which is relevant to their business or organisation and host plants grown and traded.
- This work can feed into current Defra workstreams looking at how to improve the accessibility of information on the UKPHRR.
- Previous research by this group showed that many horticultural professionals struggled with plant health improvements because they found the subject area intimidating and that they struggled to know where to start. The four case studies were therefore developed to illustrate how plant health risks are managed across a range of businesses and organisations in an easily accessible format. This will hopefully lead to more Professional Operators being involved in improving biosecurity across the sector.

Plant Health Centre
c/o The James Hutton Institute
Invergowrie,
Dundee, DD2 5DA

Tel: +44 (0)1382 568905

Email: Info@PlantHealthCentre.scot
Website: www.planthealthcentre.scot
Twitter: [@PlantHealthScot](https://twitter.com/PlantHealthScot)

