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By Michael Barker

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Defra opens plant biosecurity consultation



Xylella fastidiosa

Amid growing incidences of non-native pests and diseases, Defra is consulting over its plant biosecurity strategy

Farmers, nursery owners, landowners, keen gardeners and environmental groups are all being encouraged to help shape the nation's future plant biosecurity strategy, as a 10-week consultation is launched to protect the country from the threat of plant pests and diseases.

According to the government Great Britain already has some of the most robust biosecurity measures in the world, but the country's approach is kept under constant review to ensure these standards are maintained and plants are protected as new challenges emerge.

Rising temperatures increase the risk that non-native pests and diseases, which were previously unable to survive in the UK, will spread across parts of the country. Disease outbreaks can be hugely costly to businesses, government and the wider economy.

Plant diseases like Xylella – a disease

that affects over 560 different plant species and has devastated olive trees in Europe - have the potential to cost the UK taxpayer millions of pounds a year if they arrived on our shores, Defra stressed.

The joint Defra, Scottish and Welsh Government consultation sets out a new vision for plant health and potential measures to strengthen the existing biosecurity regime. Specifically, views are sought on:

- the effectiveness of the current plant and tree health regulations;
- ways industry and the government can work together to support a biosecure plant supply chain and ensures the safe sourcing of planting stock;
- how we enhance the nation's technical capability, using innovative science and technology to keep pace with emerging threats and ensure preparedness for the future; and

- tougher action to protect against biosecurity risks associated with trees susceptible to high-risk pests and diseases.

Growing threat

Launching the consultation at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show this week, minister for biosecurity Lord Benyon said: "The threat from plant pests and diseases is significant and growing due to globalisation and climate change. The risks to food production and our precious landscapes, trees, parks and gardens are all too real.

"We already have some of the highest biosecurity standards in Europe but as we look to build back greener from the pandemic, we want to consider any further safeguards needed to protect our natural world. That's why we're asking for views from all sectors, including horticulture, forestry and farming, to help us shape our future biosecurity strategy and ensure our trees and plants are protected for future generations."

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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UK chief plant health officer Nicola Spence added: "We take the nation's biosecurity very seriously and currently have some of the strongest measures in Europe. This consultation provides an opportunity for us to build on our current regulations and ensure our high plant health and biosecurity standards are maintained.

"I urge everyone working in the sector and the public to respond to this consultation so we can uphold our biosecurity standards for future generations."

The consultation closes on 30 November 2021 [and can be found here](#).

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