Dominican Republic: Taking Action for Sustainable Development

For us, it became a trauma. I would go to sleep thinking of the fly, I would dream of the fly, and in the morning, I would wake up with the fly in my mind.

Ángel Estévez
Minister of Agriculture
Dominican Republic

What are the bold actions being taken by the Government to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals?

Strengthening sustainability in food and agriculture takes account of the context in each country, underpinned by the best available science, technology and innovation.

In the Dominican Republic, since March 2015, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have been assisting the Ministry of Agriculture and its partners in implementing an integrated pest eradication campaign against Mediterranean fruit flies, with the support of the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service of the USDA (USDA-APHIS), the International Regional Organization for Plant and Animal Health (OIRSA) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

The authorities have established an extensive network to cope with the pest control issue nationwide and tried to eliminate infested food, including almonds and guavas, sprayed agricultural products with insecticides, and imposed strict control of movement on quarantines at seaports and airports.

International entomologists work with the Ministry of Agriculture’s trap reviewers in Punta Cana. © L. Gil/IAEA

We’re impressed by the fast progress achieved in only a few months. [...] Our job now is to provide advice on how to optimize processes further to achieve full eradication.

Walther Enkerlin
Entomologist
Joint FAO/IAEA Division of Nuclear Techniques in Food and Agriculture

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To eradicate flies, the IAEA has been providing technical cooperation assistance for a nuclear-based birth control for insects, which is called the sterile insect technique (SIT). SIT involves mass-rearing male flies and sterilizing them with ionizing radiation. The sterile flies are then released in the pest-infested areas where they mate with wild female flies. As a result of this, they are not able to produce offspring.

**Why do the above actions matter to the people in DR?**

Mediterranean fruit flies were reported for the first time in March 2015 in Punta Cana, the eastern region of the Dominican Republic. Some analyses indicate that they entered the country via a tourist’s fruit bag. This incident, as a result, cost the country US$ 40 million in lost exports in 2015. As soon as the Government announced the presence of this pest, the United States of America banned import of 18 kinds of fruits and vegetables from the Dominican Republic.

Thanks to the above actions, the outbreak was contained in just 10 months. In January 2016, the US lifted the ban, but this has become a wake-up call for the Government to pest issues.

The Dominican Republic receives around five million international tourists every year via the Punta Cana airport, accounting for more than 60 per cent of the country’s annual entries, and the majority of tourists come from Europe. According to the Central Bank of the Dominican Republic, in 2014 and 2015, agricultural products, namely fruits and vegetables, represented approximately 30 per cent of food exports, earning the country around US$ 610 million per year. The agricultural sector is, moreover, the third largest source of employment, which is critically important for the country to maintain.

**What SDGs have been particularly advanced?**

The pest eradication campaign focuses on Goal 2 on Zero hunger.

[Image: Under a special UV light, technicians in DR can check if the flies collected are sterilized flies or wild flies. © L. Gil/IAEA]

[Image: Pupae of sterilized male Mediterranean fruit flies. © L. Gil/IAEA]