



PROTECTING PLANTS,
PROTECTING LIFE

In December 2018, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared the year 2020 as the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH) to raise global awareness on how protecting plant health can help end hunger, reduce poverty, protect the environment, and boost economic development.

Why is plant health important?

Plants are the basis of life on earth, providing 98% of the oxygen we breathe and most of the food we consume. To ensure sustainable agriculture and food systems, plant health is critical. Healthy plants mean healthier people. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that up to 40% of food crops are lost to plant pests and diseases annually, leaving millions of people without food to eat.

Plant health is under increasing threats from climate change and human activities, altering ecosystems and creating niches where pests can thrive. Increased international travel and trade has also been a contributing factor in spreading pests and diseases globally, causing considerable damage to native plants and the environment.

As the National Plant Protection Organization of the country, The Bahamas Agricultural Health and Food Safety Authority (BAHFSA) is pleased to partner with the United Nations and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) in raising awareness to promote plant health and facilitate the safe trade of agricultural products. Prevention is critical to avoiding the devastating impact of pests and diseases on agriculture, livelihoods and food security and we all have a role to play.

What can we all do?

If you are a **farmer or work in agribusiness**, you have a direct influence on plants, and the management of our natural resources.

- Prevent the spread of pests by using only certified pest-free seeds and seedlings.
- Regularly monitor and report the occurrence of pests on your farms and at your plant establishments.
- Adopt environmentally friendly pest-management practices – including those based on biological approaches that do not kill pollinators, and beneficial insects and organisms.
- Take advantage of modern digital technology, mobile apps and software to access information about how to prevent and manage plant pests and diseases and to report outbreaks.

Private sector businesses have a key role in plant health as they can contribute to the development of global plant health standards and help implement them.

- Promote environmentally friendly products and practices for preventing and managing pests.
- Make trading and transporting plants and plant products safer by complying with international plant health standards and legislation.
- Inform clients that transporting plants and plant products may spread plant pests and diseases – sometimes with devastating results.
- Sustain innovative plant-health practices and the use of new technologies to facilitate market access in line with international standards.

As an **individual**, note that plant health regulations are in place to protect agriculture, forestry and the environment. Many plants and plant products (e.g. seeds, vegetables, fruits, cut-flowers and soil) cannot be transported without official authorization. If you intend to transport any of these, ensure that you are not infringing the plant protection laws by contacting BAHFSA beforehand.

- When travelling internationally or inter-island, avoid taking plants and plant products with you.
- Declare all agricultural products and food stored in your baggage and in mail with Customs upon entry into the country.
- People in the transportation industries should ensure that trucks, trailers, mailboats and airplanes are thoroughly cleaned after transporting plants and plant products to prevent the spread of pests and diseases.
- Be cautious when ordering plants and plant products online or through postal services as small packages can easily bypass regular phytosanitary controls.
- Spread the word about #PlantHealth on social media and in your community throughout 2020 and beyond.
- Take daily actions to reduce your environmental footprint and actively engage in initiatives to protect and manage natural resources.

For further information on what you can do to “Protect Plants and Protect Life”, contact the Plant Protection Division of BAHFSA at (242) 604-7000, email: bahfsa@bahamas.gov.bs; yasminjohnson@bahamas.gov.bs