

# 128 years – professional plant protection

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*Today, in keeping with tradition, we mark 128 years of plant protection activities in Bulgaria, a history filled with challenges and difficulties, whose main mission remains the preservation of the diversity of plant species. Plant protection is a key factor for the development of modern and sustainable agriculture, competitive in the dynamic environment of continuous climatic and economic changes. The celebration under the motto “Protect plants – preserve life” will take place on 16 January in the Aula of the Agricultural University in Plovdiv.*

*Happy holiday to all the “doctors” of plants who make the correct diagnoses and prescribe the appropriate treatments and plant protection products!*

**In the beginning was the vine...**

In the distant year 1884, phylloxera – the "vine plague" – appeared in Bulgaria, the most severe calamity that has ever befallen our viticulture. Within a few years, a large part of the vineyards in the Vidin, Lom, Vratsa regions and others were destroyed. The path of phylloxera from west to east and from there south across the Balkan Range was marked with strips of red cloth raised high above the diseased vineyard. This "front" swept across the whole of Bulgaria and from 1,150,000 decares of vineyards in 1897, the area decreased to 434,000 decares in 1919. The emergence of phylloxera necessitated urgent measures: the adoption of the "Law on Measures Against Phylloxera Infection (Vine Plague) and the Restoration of Vineyards Devastated by It" by Decree of Tsar Ferdinand of 16 January 1896. It is precisely with this law that the official beginning is laid of the fight against harmful organisms to plants and plant protection activities in our country. Thus, 16 January was adopted as the professional holiday of plant protection specialists in Bulgaria.

### **A brief history of plant protection activities in Bulgaria**

A series of laws followed, which legally regulate plant protection activities in the country:

- The Law on the Improvement of Agricultural Production and the Protection of Field Properties – 1925, which regulates quarantine measures for the import of agricultural products;
- In 1930, the first independent law governing the protection of plants from diseases and pests was adopted, and by Decree No. 21 of Tsar Boris III of 10.04.1933, the International Convention for the Protection of Plants of Rome 1929 was ratified.

Over the years there was no centralized structure to carry out all plant protection activities in the country. In accordance with the requirements laid down in the International Plant Protection Convention of Rome 1951, in 1991 the Grand National Assembly ratified the International Convention and with this act enabled the establishment of a service in line with international standards.

By Decree No. 131 of the Council of Ministers of 15 July 1992 and the subsequent Order of the Minister of Agriculture and Food Industry of 14 October of the same year, the National Plant Protection Service (NPPS) was established.

The adoption of the Plant Protection Act of 1997 and the supplementary one in 2001 confirmed and institutionalised the Service as the sole official state authority for exercising control and regulatory functions in the field of plant protection. As an external EU phytosanitary border, the NPPS made efforts to harmonise the legislation with that of the Community in areas such as biological testing and authorisation of plant protection

products, organic farming, phytosanitary control, the central laboratory for pesticide control, and regional laboratories for pest control.

In 2021 the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency (BFSA) was established as a single authority for the control of food safety and quality in the Republic of Bulgaria. The structure of the Agency unites the three main and independent services in the field of agriculture: the National Veterinary Service, the National Plant Protection Service, as well as the National Grain and Feed Service.

Its main function is to control compliance with national and European control requirements in the field of:

- food safety and quality, food supplements and beverages;
- veterinary medicine and animal welfare;
- plant protection and fertilisers;
- phytosanitary control;
- feed control;
- border control of raw materials and products of plant and animal origin, and others.

## **Plant protection as a component of the broader concept of plant health**

Over the past decade, humanity has acutely felt the threat of climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution of the planet. The global need to achieve a high health status of crop production in an unstable and highly dynamic climatic and phytosanitary environment also necessitates substantial changes in our understanding of plant protection.

The classical definition of plant protection as being solely aimed at the direct destruction of a given harmful organism is being replaced by plant protection in which this becomes the last resort.

Plant protection is becoming a component of the broader concept of plant health, which includes the health of the soil in which the seed is sown, the complex of microorganisms and nutrients in that soil, the characteristics of the seed, including resistance or at least tolerance to economically important diseases and pests, the application of new agricultural practices in crop cultivation, such as intercropping, trap crops, strips of flowering plants, mulching and others, which encourage beneficial organisms and have a repellent or suppressive effect on harmful ones. To this we can add the opportunities provided by the digitalisation of processes – the internet, remote monitoring methods, innovative means of managing pest and disease pressure without necessarily eradicating them.

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## **The discussion on the future of plant protection in the EU – part of the broader debate on the future of food production and the prevention of climate change**

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According to Prof. Vili Harizanova, Dean of the Faculty of Plant Protection and Agroecology at the Agricultural University in Plovdiv, it is only a matter of time before these new products and technologies are widely introduced into practice, but for this purpose much more intensive work is needed at national level to raise the awareness of farmers about the changes that will occur and about innovations in plant protection. Successful agriculture requires close cooperation in the knowledge triangle: science – education – business and public administration. The creation of the necessary expert capacity of well-trained specialists who will work in close cooperation with scientists, with university education and with sectoral organisations of producers, processors and traders is essential.

### **“Plant Protection” – a preferred and successful academic discipline**

The Day of the Plant Protection Specialist was solemnly celebrated for the first time on 16 January 2006 in the Aula of the Agricultural University – Plovdiv on the occasion of the 110th anniversary of the publication of the first Bulgarian regulatory act in the field of plant protection. Over the years, the higher education institution has proven to be the best place for teaching and developing the degree programmes “Plant Protection” and “Crop Science”.

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### **For the eighth consecutive year, the Agricultural University – Plovdiv wins first place with the degree programmes “Crop Science” and “Plant Protection”**

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On 12 January 2024, at a formal ceremony, awards were presented to the universities that rank first in their professional fields, according to the Bulgarian University Ranking System. The event, known as the “Academic Oscars”, brought together the academic elite and representatives of the business community. The Agricultural University – Plovdiv is, for the eighth consecutive year, the national leader in the fields of “Crop Science” and “Plant Protection”.

The professional holiday of the plant protection specialist and the celebration of 128 years of plant protection activities in Bulgaria will be held at the Agricultural University – Plovdiv on 16.01.2024, Hall 7, under the motto “Protect plants – preserve life”.

The organiser of the event is the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency (BFSA). Co-organisers – Agricultural University – Plovdiv, Crop Protection Industry Association of Bulgaria, Bulgarian Association for Plant Protection.

## PROGRAMME

13:30 Opening and welcome addresses in the building of the Faculty of Plant Protection and Agroecology, Hall 7, Agricultural University, Plovdiv

14:00 – 16:00 Plant Protection Forum: presentations in the building of the Agricultural University, Plovdiv

19:30 Plant Protection Specialists' Ball with a musical programme, at the restaurant of Hotel Imperial, Plovdiv