

# 130 years of professional plant protection in Bulgaria

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*Traditionally, on 16 January the Faculty of Plant Protection and Agroecology at the Agricultural University in Plovdiv hosts the Plant Protection Specialist's Day. This year is special, as it marks the 130th anniversary of the beginning of organised plant protection activities in Bulgaria. A history filled with challenges and difficulties, whose main mission remains the protection and preservation of the diversity of plant species in conditions of an unstable and highly dynamic climatic and phytosanitary environment.*

*The celebration under the motto "Protect plants – preserve life" will take place in the renovated and modernly equipped Lecture Hall 7 of the Agricultural University in Plovdiv, which bears the name of the first Dean of the Faculty – Prof. Dobri Burov, PhD.*

Plant protection is a key factor for the development of modern and sustainable agriculture, competitive in the dynamic environment of continuous climatic, economic and social changes. Over the years its functions have evolved and, from a regulated solution for combating a specific pest on vines, it has gradually assumed the responsible task of addressing global challenges such as climate change, loss of biodiversity and, above all, maintaining the health status of plants, which form the basis of all life, the functioning of ecosystems and food security.

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

In the distant year 1884 phylloxera – the “vine plague” – the most devastating calamity ever to befall our viticulture, appeared in Bulgaria. 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 then south across the Balkan Mountains 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 appearance of phylloxera necessitated urgent measures: the adoption of the “Law on Measures against Phylloxera Infection (Vine Plague) and on 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 of the fight against plant pests and plant protection activities in our country was laid.

### **Regulation of plant protection activities in Bulgaria**

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

- Law on the Improvement of Agricultural Production and Protection of Arable Property – 1925, which regulates quarantine measures for the import of agricultural products;
- In 1930 the first stand-alone 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 centralised 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 virtue of Council of Ministers Decree No. 131 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 act of 2001 confirm and institutionalise the Service as the sole official state authority for exercising control and regulatory functions in the field of plant protection. As an external phytosanitary border of the EU, the NPPS has made efforts to harmonise 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 Control of Pesticides and regional laboratories for pest control.

In 2021 the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency (BFSA) was established as a single authority for control of food safety and quality in the Republic of Bulgaria. Its main function is to monitor 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.

### **The concept of plant health as the future of plant protection**

Over the past decade we have witnessed a profound transformation in the understanding of plant protection. Achieving a high health status of crop production in an unstable and highly dynamic climatic and phytosanitary environment requires a different perspective on plant protection and a shift of its focus from the era of exclusively chemical control to Integrated Pest Management (IPM). This is a comprehensive and environmentally sound approach to pest management in agricultural systems, which involves the strategic integration of multiple control methods – cultural, biological and chemical practices – to keep pest populations below the economic damage threshold. As a result, risks to the environment and human health are minimised. IPM places particular emphasis on preventive measures, monitoring and decision-making based on established damage thresholds.

The real risk of reduction of agricultural land, climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution of the planet, as well as the unsuccessful climate policy pursued at global level, confront farmers with new choices.

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## The Soil Monitoring Directive – for healthier and more resilient soils in Europe

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Plant protection is becoming a component of the broader concept of plant health, which encompasses soil health where the seed is sown, the complex of microorganisms and nutrients in that soil, the characteristics of the seed, including resistance or tolerance to economically important diseases and pests, the application of new farming practices in crop cultivation such as intercropping, trap crops, strips of flowering plants, mulching and others, which promote beneficial organisms and have a repellent or suppressive effect on harmful ones.

Modern plant protection is part of precision agriculture, which enables remote monitoring methods, innovative tools for managing pest and disease pressure, biological control agents and maximum care for the environment.

The development of the necessary expert capacity of well-trained specialists, who work in close cooperation with scientists, university education and branch organisations of producers, processors and traders, is an important step in implementing the transformation of plant protection in our country.

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On the occasion of the professional holiday of plant protection specialists and the commemoration of 130 years of plant protection activities in Bulgaria, on 16 January 2026 at the Agricultural University – Plovdiv, a celebration will be held under the motto **“Protect plants – preserve life”**

according to the following PROGRAMME:

13:00 - 13:30 Registration and coffee

13:30 - 14:00 Official opening and welcome addresses

14:00 - 14.20 “130 years of plant protection in Bulgaria – a brief historical overview and current trends”, Prof. Olya Karadjova, PhD, Deputy Executive Director of BFSA

14:20 -14:40 “Competitiveness of agriculture and provision of food of Bulgarian origin – the role of plant protection”, Neli Yordanova, Director General of the Bulgarian Crop Protection Industry Association (ARIB)

14:40 - 15:00 “130 years of plant protection science in Bulgaria”, Prof. Rumen Tomov, Dean of the Faculty of Agronomy, University of Forestry, Sofia

15:00 - 15:20 "Urea with inhibitors – an alternative for reduced nitrogen fertilisation rates and without alternative for environmental protection", Tatyana Mihaylova, Executive Director of Ekofol AD and member of BARZ

15:20 - 15:40 "Integrated and biological methods in plant protection", Assoc. Prof. Yordanka Kartalska, PhD, Dean of the Faculty of Plant Protection and Agroecology at the Agricultural University, Plovdiv

15:40 - 15:50 Presentation by BARZ with speaker Milko Yanev

15:50 - 16:10 "Prevention of the flat-headed root-borer (*Capnodis tenebrionis* L.) in organic and conventional orchards", Bozhidar Petkov, Chair of the National Association for Biological Plant Protection, Organic Fertilisers and Innovative Technologies, and Kristina Murdzhova, Executive Director

16:10 - 16:30 Presentation by ARIB

16:30 - 17:00 Discussion

19:30 Official dinner at the restaurant of the Radisson Hotel, Plovdiv

Cover charge – 50 euro, dress code: formal attire

Confirmations of attendance are accepted until 15.01.2026 at the following e-mail addresses:

[anna\\_petrova@bfsa.bg](mailto:anna_petrova@bfsa.bg) or [bulgariancpa@gmail.com](mailto:bulgariancpa@gmail.com)

Those of you who wish to stay overnight at the Radisson Hotel may make a reservation personally, indicating that they will be guests of the event, in order to benefit from the agreed preferential accommodation rates for the date of its holding.

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*The organiser of the event is the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency (BFSA). Co-organisers – Agricultural University – Plovdiv, Bulgarian Crop Protection Industry Association (ARIB), Bulgarian Association for Crop Protection (BARZ) and the National Association for Biological Plant Protection, Organic Fertilisers and Innovative Technologies (NABRPOT).*