

Lower residues and higher savings for farmers in Egypt through Pesticides Application Teams

In 2011 the concept of certifying and licensing pesticide applicators and operators was introduced in Egypt by CropLife Africa Middle East and the Agricultural Cooperative Development International / Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance (ACDI/VOCA) under a tripartite partnership involving the Ministry of Agriculture. ACDI/VOCA is a private, nonprofit organization that operates several projects in Egypt and the region, mainly funded by USAID. The first evaluation of the program shows very encouraging results.

The main concept of the programme is to establish licensed application units that employ pesticide operators and applicators as staff. An applicator is a farmer who has received special training to apply pesticides and who then hires out his/her services to fellow farmers to apply pesticides to their lands via an operator, who supervises all activities. The objective is that untrained farmers will no longer handle pesticides and application is only be done by those who are properly trained and certified. For the moment the focus of the project is on tomato farmers.

The benefits of using professional applicators are multiple. According to an evaluation carried out by ACDI/VOCA in the middle of 2012, 50% of tested tomato samples had no detected pesticide residues, while the rest had residues below the maximum residue limits (MRLs). Tests show that farmers are utilizing pesticides that are registered for use on the crop and appropriate for the disease/pest. Farmers report savings of up to 50% on the purchase of pesticides. In addition, survey results show increased awareness of safety and health issues related to pesticide use as well as practical application of knowledge. For example, women encourage their husbands to utilize personal protection equipment and they ensure agrochemicals are stored out of reach of children.

The implementation of the project including the training activities is driven and monitored by a project task force constituted of representatives from the three partners. Last year, the project task force has trained 56 Master Trainers on pesticides and application, using training materials of CropLife Africa Middle East and ACDI/VOCA. The trainers were selected based on strict criteria, including a university degree and a good technical knowledge of pest control and pesticides; availability; training skills; and age (maximum 35 years). The Master Trainers trained more than 400 applicators to prepare them to sell their services in the application of pesticides. Each applicator purchased spraying and protective equipment.

The price for spraying is negotiated between the farmer and the applicator. At the moment the farmer who is using the services of a professional applicator can buy his or her own pesticides to be applied. However, in the future it might be that the applicators will be responsible for the whole service including buying the pesticides. This will ensure the proper tracking of products and may reduce the use of counterfeit and illegal products.

At the moment, operators and applicators have to pass a written and practical exam on all aspects of pesticides and application to ensure that they have the basic knowledge and skills to work as a

professional applicator. The project is currently conducting an evaluation of all participants. In the near future, applicators will also be tested by the Agricultural Pesticide Committee under the Ministry of Agriculture. If successful in passing the evaluation, they will be officially certified and licensed to work as professional applicator. The project team is discussing the requirements for certification with the Agricultural Pesticide Committee. In addition, a data bank with questions for exams in the future is being developed. The idea is to run exams at specific times at several locations throughout Egypt, for example once every six months in every governorate. Licence renewal should be required after a period of maximum 5 years. It is proposed that the initial scheme consists of two types of licences: a basic licence that covers handling of pesticides of category II, III and IV; and an additional licence for handling of pesticides of category Ia and Ib (highly toxic pesticides).

The project also has a communication component to create awareness among farmers who export their crops. A documentary was developed to promote the application services, and it also contains information on the safe and responsible use of pesticides and on Integrated Pest Management (IPM). The video will be shown in the field during field activities and on the Egyptian agricultural television channel that will be launched shortly. In addition, 3,000 farmers, female members of farming families and greenhouse workers received training in the basics of IPM; the responsible use of pesticides; the handling, storage and disposal of pesticides; and personal safety in pesticide application.

At the moment, the project is only focused on agricultural pesticides. At this stage, it would be complicated to include other pesticide uses, such as public health, due to cross-Ministerial responsibilities. However, the project could be expanded at a later time to include other pesticide uses. The project may also be expanded to other countries of North Africa and the Middle East in the near future.



The first class of Master Trainers, trained by CropLife Egypt



Theoretical and practical sessions to train operators and applicators



Applicator in action