

# Soil Management Sustainability Project 2021 - 2024

Pedro Juan, Certis Europe writes



# Down to earth - new approaches to soil management

Certis Europe's Pedro Juan, Leader of *Growing For the Future* Strategic Project, describes the company's soil management sustainability project in Spain 2021-2024 and how it looks to provide solutions to a reduction in permitted soil fumigants.



**'Growing for the Future' is the core focus of Certis Spain's sustainability strategy, built over a number of years to create a "competitive advantage" for its customers and for growers, but also for the benefit of consumers in particular.**

**I**ts successes in supporting the production of safe and healthy food already align well with the aims of the European Union's Green Deal and its 'From Farm to Fork' strategy and the company continues its work to develop products and programmes to meet the new challenges.

### **Soil management**

New approaches to soil management are showing promising results and a consortium has been created, including two renowned Spanish Agricultural Institutes, Instituto Murciano de Investigación y Desarrollo Agrario y Alimentario (IMIDA) and Instituto de Investigación y Formación Agraria y Pesquera (IFAPA) in Andalucía, with Certis Spain, to develop an ambitious 'Soil Management Sustainability' project in line with the requirements of the European Union's Green Deal.

The project is currently being evaluated by a committee of experts, appointed by the European Commission. If successful, grants will allow the consortium to work with several important cooperatives, for the benefit of



producers and growers, in a four-year project, to find integrated solutions for the control of soil problems.

Its aim is to be at the forefront of achieving integrated solutions for the control of soil problems, based on strategies that include a reduction in the use of fumigants, the incorporation of biosolarization practices and the application of biorational products via irrigation, which together allows the effective control of pests and diseases, through a more sustainable use of plant protection products.

### **Fumigant restrictions**

Fruit and vegetable production is facing the challenge of a severe restriction in the use of soil fumigants, which will generate a loss of production yield, due to the increase in the problem of soil diseases such as Phytophthora, Verticillium, Fusarium, Macrophomina, as well as the increase of nematodes Meloidogyne, Pratylenchus, etc. The persistence of soil diseases and nematodes forces the use of conventional plant protection products, such as soil fumigants, and at the same time the new

European regulations, which recommend the reduction of conventional plant protection products and fertilizers, mean that we must implement new strategies for the future, to be developed by the industry and growers together to create new solutions.



plant protection products, due to its experience in this segment and the availability of a portfolio that ranges from the use of fumigants to natural "biorational" products registered by the Ministry of Agriculture in Spain for the application in drip irrigation.

The use of biostimulants, and biorationals based on microorganisms that have the dual function of achieving the bioavailability of nutrients to the root system will help to achieve a reduction in the use of conventional fertilizers. Certis is well positioned to lead this trend in the market of

### **Role for IPM**

In Spain, the ***Growing for the Future*** project, working with major grower cooperatives, combine the use of auxiliary insects (in greenhouse crops), with some registered conventional products in those crops (Mospilan Max or Takumi) and a battery of registered

biorationals (Amylo -X, Armicarb, Delfin). In some crop programs, like pepper or cucumber, this already represents 70% use of Biorationals with 30% conventional products obtaining, in most cases, fruit free of residues. Programs are also being developed in open field as well as greenhouse crops.

### **Extending to Italy**

The project is now being extended to other European countries and growers. In Italy, for example, growers have already started to work with the protocols and programs of ***Growing for the Future*** after visiting their Spanish counterparts to see the programs in operation.

In southeast Sicily, the most important area in Italy for vegetable production in protected conditions, the project involves 13 important farms specializing in tomato, courgette, melon, watermelon and pepper production under plastic. Now in the second year of the project, they benefit from the combination of a technical presence in the field and the adoption of a specific defence protocol to protect the crop and provide low residue production in terms of the



**The *Growing for the Future* project includes pepper production.**

number of pesticides used and levels of individual active ingredients detected on the fruits.

At the end of the first year of the project good results were obtained in terms of quality and quantity of production, food safety and sustainability for growers and the environment. The adoption of Growing for the Future protocols, including the use of biorational products such as Eradicoat, Karma, and Costar in a program to manage crop protection, achieved production of courgettes with zero residues and a reduction of 80% in the number of residues compared to the farm reference on tomato production, satisfying all the most stringent requirements of large-scale retailers.

The project includes a full residue analysis service for the farms involved, conducted by a reference laboratory in Italy for large-scale retailers in Europe. This activity provides a clear picture of active ingredient residues and validates the strategy adopted. Sicilian growers using the protocols are delighted with the support they have received, and the results

achieved, as mentioned by one of the tomato growers from Vittoria: “The Growing for the Future project has allowed us to have professional technical support that you can trust to manage our crops.”

For another grower the value of the residue profile and analysis was a key part of the support. “Now we have more knowledge on the residue profile of active ingredients and we are able to read the residue analysis report and its valuation for the large-scale retailers. I appreciated the training provided to help me manage the residue report and interpretation of the results”, he explained.

According to a courgette grower from Ispica, Sicily, the analysis brings a major commercial advantage to the business. He commented: “The residue analysis allows me to respond to any request from the large-scale retailers to monitor our production continuously. Even if supply is high on the market, it is always possible to sell our produce now.” ●

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Courgette grower in Ispica, Sicily.