OPTIMA

Redefining Pest Management - a Holistic Approach

Practice Abstract Nº 14

Focus Group and end user assessment of OPTIMA IPM strategy in apple orchards (Spain)

During OPTIMA, regular meetings with selected apple orchard growers and advisers, a Focus Group (FG), were held in order to agree on the project developments, so to achieve tangible results applicable in the field on a broad scale. This regarding: 1) timing of application using the OPTIMA Decision Support System (DSS); 2) management of application using OPTIMA Early Detection System (EDS): 3) selection of crop protection strategy and PPP/bio-PPP; 4) use and set up of smart sprayers.

Three sessions of FG meetings were held from February 2020 to June 2021 and a questionnaire was submitted to further end users and advisers who took part in field demonstrations at the OPTIMA experimental apple orchard plots. The feedback received, both from FG and end users, indicated that OPTIMA DSS was considered useful and well structured, even if still to be improved especially concerning info on the spray volume suggested. EDS was considered an interesting option for the future, but at the moment it was rated still not sufficiently affordable to be trusted on its apple scab diagnosis and to improve in smartness for use in the field. The introduction of alternative PPPs and bio-PPPs with respect to those typically applied was moderately appreciated, especially more evidence of their biological efficacy was required, as bio-PPPs are still not used at all in the apple orchard area of Epila. The OPTIMA smart sprayer for apple orchard was very appreciated, as it demonstrated to enable the reduction of spray volumes and PPP consumption, therefore mitigating the environmental impact. Some concerns were however pointed out about the cost of such advanced equipment, which could considerably affect its profitability.

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