Commission on Phytosanitary Measures

**STRATEGIC PLANNING GROUP**

**Update on the strategic Framework development agenda item Management of e-commerce and postal and courier pathways**

AGENDA ITEM 6.3

(*Prepared by the IPPC Secretariat with input from the IC Team on E-commerce Lead*)

1. Background
2. The management of e-commerce and the postal and courier pathways is one of eight development agenda items (DAIs) in the IPPC Strategic Framework 2020–2030. It is an important, yet relatively small DAI, with a work programme commenced following the adoption of the *Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) Recommendation-05 on Internet trade (e-commerce) in plants and other regulated articles*.
3. The IPPC work on e-commerce is under the oversight of the Implementation and Capacity Development Committee (IC), with input from the Standards Committee (SC), and coordinated by the Implementation and Facilitation Unit. An IC Team[[1]](#footnote-1) was established in 2021 to guide the work on e-commerce.
4. E-commerce activities have been carried out thanks to in-kind and financial contributions provided by Canada. Deep gratitude is expressed to Canada for their strong support of the activities related to the implementation of the e-commerce development agenda.
5. CPM-17 (2023) agreed to the overarching implementation plan for the IPPC Strategic Framework 2020–2030 development agenda items, including the proposed sequencing and budgets.[[2]](#footnote-2)
6. This paper provides an update on the progress of IPPC activities related to the e-commerce development agenda.
7. Value proposition / benefits
8. Effective management of e-commerce and postal and courier pathways will result in the following key outcomes:[[3]](#footnote-3)

* High-risk plants and plant products that are sold through e-commerce and shipped via postal or courier services will meet the phytosanitary import requirements of the destination country.
* National plant protection organizations will be aware of the pest risks associated with e-commerce trade, particularly by business-to-consumer and person-to-person transactions.
* Contracting parties will update their legislation and authorities to address e-commerce challenges, considering digital innovations, available technologies, and new business models.
* National plant protection organizations will prepare and maintain lists of regulated articles and make these lists available to all relevant e-commerce stakeholders, including other government departments and stakeholders in other countries.
* National plant protection organizations will identify key stakeholders and establish communication, education, and outreach programmes to make online buyers, sellers, e-commerce platforms and marketplaces, and others involved in the e-commerce supply chain aware of the regulatory requirements, risks and responsibilities associated with transactions involving regulated articles.
* Contracting parties will apply risk-management measures to identify and intercept e-commerce consignments that have an unacceptable risk of non-compliance, while facilitating legitimate e-commerce trade (e.g. by use of electronic advance data, screening methods and non-intrusive inspection methods).
* National plant protection organizations will share information, cooperate, and collaborate with their national customs administration, postal operators, and courier services to address pest risk associated with e-commerce trade.
* National plant protection organizations will gather data and monitor non-compliances, inspections, and regulatory activities in collaboration with their national customs administration and will be able to demonstrate a measurable reduction in non-compliance associated with postal and courier pathways.

1. Update on status of implementation
2. The Focus Group for the Strategic Frameworks DAI identified two phases of e-commerce activities, as illustrated in Figure 1. Delivery of Phase 1 of the e-commerce work programme is expected to continue until December 2025, by which time the IPPC Observatory e-commerce study will have been completed (see Figure 1). It is expected that the study will provide recommendations that may lead to a longer-term plan – Phase 2.

A diagram of a project

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Figure 1.** Revised timeline of activities for the e-commerce work programme (2023-2030).

3.1 E-commerce video and guide

1. The e-commerce infographic video, [*Managing the Pest Risk posed by E-commerce*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDEaNfAZ2sM), was launched in January 2024. The video highlights the importance of NPPOs, Customs, e-commerce platforms, postal and courier services, buyers and sellers working together to manage the pest risk associated with e-commerce trade. This video has been viewed 1825 times as of 6 October 2025.
2. [*E-commerce: A guide to managing the pest risk posed by goods ordered online and distributed through postal and courier pathways*](https://doi.org/10.4060/cc8209en) was published in October 2023. As of October 2025, the guide is also available in French and Spanish languages. It is one of the most popular IPPC guides, having been downloaded nearly 1300 times as of 6 October 2025.
3. The Spanish version of the E-commerce guide was published in November 2024, thanks to the Plant Protection Committee of the Southern Cone (COSAVE), who provided an in-kind translation of the guide. The French version of the E-commerce guide was published in June 2025, under the framework of the project “Strengthening Food Control and Phytosanitary Capacities and Governance (GCP/GLO/949/EC)”, funded by the European Union.

3.2 IPPC events

1. **E-commerce side-session:** The CPM-18 (2024) side-session on e-commerce was organized with support from the North American Plant Protection Organization (NAPPO), COSAVE and European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO). Speakers included a representative from the Universal Postal Union and five NPPOs (Argentina, Canada, New Zealand, The Netherlands, and the United States). The recording and presentations from the side-session are available on the IPP.[[4]](#footnote-4)
2. **International Day of Plant Health (IDPH):** E-commerce was a key focus of IDPH 2024, under the theme *Plant health, safe trade, and digital technology*. A high-level event was held at FAO Headquarters with opening remarks by Director-General Qu Dongyu and a presentation by Poste Italiane about e-commerce and the postal pathway.[[5]](#footnote-5) A display in the FAO atrium highlighted the importance of e-commerce trade as a pathway for pests.

3.3 External events

1. **Universal Postal Union (UPU):** The IPPC Secretariat participated as an observer in the UPU postal security group (PSG) meetings and as a member of their Illicit Goods Mitigation Expert Team (IGMET). The Secretariat made presentations about plant health and e-commerce to both groups in 2024.
2. **World Customs Organization (WCO):** The IPPC Secretariat participated as an observer in the WCO e-commerce working group and in their permanent technical committee (PTC). The IFU Team Lead attended the WCO-PTC in April 2024 and made a presentation highlighting collaboration on e-commerce, ePhyto and sea containers[[6]](#footnote-6).
3. **International Seed Federation (ISF):** The IPPC Secretariat was invited to participate in the ISF e-commerce workshop in Geneva in early November 2024 and delivered a presentation titled, *Overview of E-commerce: Trends and Implications*.
4. Further collaboration with the above listed institutions is dependent on the CPM recommendations for the Phase 2 of this DAI.
5. The 2024 e-commerce communications plan was reviewed and updated as needed and was integrated into the overall IFU and Secretariat communication plans.

3.5 Communications

1. The [e-commerce webpage](https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/capacity-development/e-commerce/) on the International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP) was redesigned in 2024.
2. The IPPC newsletter included the following news stories related to e-commerce:

* [New IPPC guide to protect plant health and reduce pest risk associated with e-commerce](https://www.ippc.int/en/news/revamped-ippc-webpage-to-serve-as-hub-for-resources-on-e-commerce-and-plant-health/) (November 2023)
* [Revamped IPPC webpage to serve as hub for resources on e-commerce and plant health](https://www.ippc.int/en/news/new-ippc-guide-to-protect-plant-health-and-reduce-pest-risk-associated-with-e-commerce/) (March 2024
* [Plant health and e-commerce: Countries share knowledge, experiences to protect plant resources and trade](https://www.ippc.int/en/news/plant-health-and-e-commerce-countries-share-knowledge-experiences-to-protect-plant-resources-and-trade/) (April 2024)
* [Director-General sets out several reasons for enhanced and coordinated work to protect plant health at International Day of Plant Health (IDPH) event](https://www.ippc.int/en/news/director-general-sets-out-several-reasons-for-enhanced-and-coordinated-work-to-protect-plant-health-at-international-day-of-plant-health-idph-event/) (May 2024)
* [Strengthening global partnerships: IPPC participates in World Customs Organization Round Table](https://www.ippc.int/en/news/strengthening-global-partnerships-ippc-participates-in-world-customs-organization-round-table/) (May 2024)
* [Cultivating compliance and raising awareness on risk of plant pest spread through e-commerce](https://www.ippc.int/en/news/spotlight-cultivating-compliance-and-raising-awareness-on-risk-of-plant-pest-spread-through-e-commerce/) (June 2024)
* [New IPPC Observatory Study to explore global phytosanitary impact of e-commerce - International Plant Protection Convention](https://www.ippc.int/en/news/new-ippc-observatory-study-to-explore-global-phytosanitary-impact-of-e-commerce/) (August 2024)
* [Spotlight: Thorwald Geuze, from the Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority of the Netherlands, speaks about the importance of e-commerce and IPPC Observatory surveys](https://www.ippc.int/en/news/spotlight-thorwald-geuze-from-the-food-and-consumer-product-safety-authority-of-the-netherlands-speaks-about-the-importance-of-e-commerce-and-ippc-observatory-surveys/) (October 2024)

3.5 IPPC Observatory study on e-commerce

1. The IPPC Observatory Study on E-commerce was launched in August 2024 . Members of the IC Team on E-commerce and the IC Subgroup on the IPPC Observatory contributed to the survey’s design, review, and testing, and supported the proofreading of its Arabic, French, Spanish, and Chinese versions.
2. All relevant materials—including the survey links, glossary, and questionnaire—were published on the International Phytosanitary Portal.[[7]](#footnote-7) The secretariat implemented a communications plan to raise awareness and promoted the survey through mass emails and major IPPC events, including the 2024 Regional Workshops and the Thirty-Sixth Technical Consultation among RPPOs (TC-RPPO).
3. The survey closed in December 2024, yielding 112 responses (76 valid), representing a 41% response rate and participation from all FAO regions (at least 24% in each). The results provide a strong basis for assessing phytosanitary risk management in e-commerce, highlighting key strengths and gaps.
4. The preliminary analysis and draft report were reviewed by the IC, the IC Team on E-commerce, and the IC Subgroup on the IPPC Observatory in 2025 and subsequently refined. The recommendations stemming from the draft report IPPC Observatory Study on E-commerce are presented in Appendix 1 of this paper.
5. The final report, including key recommendations, will be copy-edited, published, and presented to CPM-20 (2026).
6. Next steps

**4.1 Potential phase 2**

1. The results of the IPPC Observatory Study on E-commerce will be used to scope and plan a potential Phase 2 of work and needed resources, which will be presented to CPM-20 (2026) for decision. A second IPPC Observatory study is tentatively planned for 2029 to measure key e-commerce outcomes, as specified in the Strategic Framework (See Figure 1).

**4.2 Investment Prospectus**

1. One element of the overarching implementation plan for the Strategic Framework is an investment prospectus. The prospectus is intended to raise awareness of the implementation plan and to support resource mobilization.
2. During their June 2024 meeting CPM Bureau reviewed the progress made on e-commerce and noted that the prospectus flyer for e-commerce included outdated information ([CPM 2024/13\_01](https://assets.ippc.int/static/media/files/publication/en/2024/04/13_CPM_2024_01_DAIS_Flyers_29_03_2024.pdf)). They agreed that the flyer should be reviewed by the IC Team on E-commerce and presented to the CPM Bureau for approval through an e-decision once it has been finalized by the IC Team.
3. During their meeting in November 2024 the IC considered that most activities in the workplan for this DAI had either been completed or were well underway. They recommended that completion of the flyer should be delayed until the results of the e-commerce study are available, so that recommendations arising from the study can be considered and presented to CPM.

Recommendations

The SPG is invited to:

1. *note* the update on the IPPC development agenda on e-commerce.
2. *review* the set of recommendations from the draft IPPC Observatory Study on E-commerce report, as presented in Appendix 1.
3. *thank* Canada for their in-kind staff contribution and financial support of the e-commerce development agenda.

Annex 1: Recommendations from the draft IPPC Observatory Study on E-commerce

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The IPPC Observatory is a crucial system that monitors the implementation of the IPPC, its international standards for phytosanitary measures, and recommendations of the CPM. It plays a vital role in helping NPPOs identify challenges and best practices in implementing these measures, ultimately contributing to the creation of strategies and capacity and implementation resources to support NPPOs.

The objective of this *IPPC Observatory Study on E-commerce* is to understand the extent to which the CPM recommendation on internet trade has been implemented by IPPC Contracting Parties and to provide baseline data to understand whether the desired outcomes specified in the DAI have been reached.

Insights from this study have led to several key recommendations, derived through data analysis, provided by survey respondents and learned from the implementation of this study, aimed at strengthening phytosanitary measures in response to the escalating risks posed by e-commerce trade. These recommendations outline suggestions to address global priorities where challenges are widespread, pinpoint region-specific areas for targeted improvements based on performance variations, and enhance IPPC support to NPPOs. Furthermore, conducting this study for the first time, while incorporating and testing innovative methodologies, has yielded valuable lessons for refining future assessments. These recommendations, if implemented, will contribute to improving data collection processes, strengthening analytical frameworks, and reinforcing the study’s role as a critical tool for evidence-based decision-making.

**GLOBAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

Three general recommendations are derived from the analysis of data and invite the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) to support NPPOs at the global level. While these recommendations stem from the *IPPC Observatory E-commerce Study*, their relevance extends beyond e-commerce and small parcels moving through postal and courier pathways. Therefore, they hold broader implications for strengthening national phytosanitary systems at the global level and improving border management. Addressing these recommendations is expected to enhance the regulation of online trade and contribute to the development of a more robust and efficient phytosanitary import system at national, regional, and global levels.

1. **Global recommendation 1: Increase awareness of key IPPC e-commerce resources**

The IPPC has developed a guide, recommendations, and an infographic video, along with a centralised hub that provides access to multiple resources designed to assist contracting parties and other stakeholders in tackling the phytosanitary challenges posed by e-commerce trade. However, findings from this study reveal gaps in awareness regarding some key support documents such as *CPM R-05* and the *E-Commerce Guide*. These gaps highlight the need for IPPC Secretariat to continue with outreach efforts and encouraging greater engagement with these essential tools.

To improve awareness and encourage greater engagement with IPPC study documents relevant to e-commerce trade, the following actions could be considered:

* Expanding accessibility through multilingual translations**:** The E-commerce Guide is currently available in English and Spanish. Translating it into additional FAO languages (Arabic, Russian, and Chinese) would improve accessibility for contracting parties with different linguistic profiles. Ideally, future IPPC e-commerce resources should be published simultaneously in all FAO official languages to promote inclusivity and equal access from the outset as is done with the managing e-commerce pest risk video on the dedicate IPPC e-commerce website.
* Further integration into IPPC regional workshop agendas and other relevant IPPC events: Continuing to raise awareness about available IPPC e-commerce resources will promote use of these key resources among NPPO staff.

1. **Global recommendation 2: Encourage enhanced interagency collaboration on border risk management**

As e-commerce continues to grow, strengthening collaboration between customs, postal services, and other border agencies is crucial for effectively managing phytosanitary risks. Survey findings reveal gaps in mechanisms that facilitate direct communication and coordination between these agencies, highlighting the need for enhanced interagency cooperation. To address these challenges, the IPPC could consider implementing initiatives aimed at encouraging greater cooperation between customs, postal services, and other border agencies. For example, the IPPC could develop targeted documents or online training modules focused on fostering interagency collaboration, while also sharing success stories from contracting parties to demonstrate how challenges were overcome and showcase effective strategies for building stronger cooperation.

1. **Global recommendation 3: Enhance technical support on strengthening border risk management**

With the rapid growth of e-commerce, effective phytosanitary border risk management is more critical than ever. Study findings reveal significant gaps in risk profiling and inspection of high-risk small parcels, with all regions scoring below 61% on the at-border risk management indicator. Given the complexity of at-border risk management and the multiple entities involved, NPPOs are encouraged to assess existing mechanisms in their geographic areas, and if necessary, pinpoint priority areas for improvement and create action plans to address key gaps. IPPC resources could play a pivotal role in supporting the efforts of NPPOs by enhancing and disseminating technical guidance on risk profiling methods detailed in the *E-commerce Guide*. For example, the. IPPC could undertake an activity to review all its capacity-building and implementation support resources specific to inspections (e.g., e-learning courses, the Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation process) to assess the extent to which they address aspects specific to dealing with high-risk small parcels, update these resources accordingly if needed, and reshare.

**REGION-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

The regional disaggregation of indicators also offered valuable insights into areas that may require heightened regional focus to strengthen phytosanitary risk management in response to the challenges posed by e-commerce (Table 1). While not conclusive and exhaustive, these study insights highlight opportunities for targeted interventions either by national plant protection organizations (NPPOs) and regional plant protection organizations (RPPOs) to enhance compliance, enforcement, and monitoring mechanisms at the regional level.

**Table 1. Potential areas of regional focus on e-commerce capacity-building**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Region | Potential area of focus |
| Africa | * Regulatory and non-regulatory frameworks * At border risk management * Public awareness campaigns * Accessibility of lists or lists or databases of prohibited and regulated articles |
| Asia | * Design and implementation of advance information sharing systems |
| Europe | * At border risk management * Public awareness campaigns * Accessibility of lists or lists or databases of prohibited and regulated articles |
| Latin America and Caribbean | * At border risk management * Public awareness campaigns * Capacity building for key e-commerce stakeholders |
| Near East and North Africa | * At border risk management * Public awareness campaigns * Comprehensiveness of e-commerce governance frameworks |
| North America | * Training workshops or sessions to build capacity |
| South West Pacific | * Accessibility of lists or lists or databases of prohibited and regulated articles |

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO IPPC CONTRACTING PARTIES**

Survey respondents also emphasised several national-level recommendations to support NPPOs in addressing ongoing challenges in managing phytosanitary risks in e-commerce trade. These recommendations of support relate to: (i) updating of phytosanitary legislation, (ii) capacity building and training of NPPO staff, (iii) enhanced awareness campaign, (iv) improving data sharing, and (v) technical and financial support.

1. **Updating phytosanitary legislation**

Survey respondents called on the IPPC to assist countries in updating outdated phytosanitary legislation to align with modern e-commerce realities. A number of countries also pointed out the lack of harmonised international standards for managing pest risks associated with e-commerce, underscoring the importance of global cooperation in developing and implementing standardised regulations.

1. **Capacity building and training of NPPO staff**

Survey respondents expressed a strong need for training programs aimed at NPPO staff, inspectors, and stakeholders at both national and regional levels. Many NPPOs reported limitations in technical capacity related to non-intrusive inspection mechanisms. These gaps in training and resources were seen as barriers to the effective implementation of phytosanitary measures.

1. **Enhanced awareness campaign**

There was a clear call for enhanced awareness campaigns targeting e-commerce companies, customs officials, and the public. Several respondents suggested the development of harmonized awareness materials for NPPOs to use and improving communication channels between NPPOs and stakeholders to ensure better compliance with phytosanitary regulations.

1. **Improving data sharing**

The theme of data access and information sharing emerged as a critical area for improvement. Many NPPOs reported lacking direct access to customs and courier data related to plant-related parcels, which is essential for effective risk assessment. Respondents proposed the creation of a shared international database for phytosanitary interceptions and improving data-sharing mechanisms to streamline the process and enhance compliance monitoring.

1. **Technical and financial assistance**

Several countries also requested support from the IPPC, particularly in the form of technical and financial assistance. The most common requests included help with implementing electronic certification systems (ePhyto), reforming phytosanitary legislation, and acquiring inspection tools and systems.

1. IC Team on E-commerce membership list: <https://www.ippc.int/en/publications/92398/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. IPPC Strategic Framework 2020-2030 Development Agenda Items Implementation Plan: <https://www.ippc.int/en/publications/91889/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. DAIs implementation plan (pages 17-19). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. E-commerce side session recording and presentations: <https://www.ippc.int/en/commission/cpm/cpm-sessions/cpm-18/cpm-18-side-sessions-and-side-meetings/cpm-18-side-session-on-e-commerce/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 2024 International Day of Plant Health: <https://www.ippc.int/en/news/director-general-sets-out-several-reasons-for-enhanced-and-coordinated-work-to-protect-plant-health-at-international-day-of-plant-health-idph-event/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. WCO roundtable: <https://www.ippc.int/en/news/strengthening-global-partnerships-ippc-participates-in-world-customs-organization-round-table/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. IPPC Observatory Study on E-commerce: <https://www.ippc.int/en/resources/multimedia/online-tools/ippc-observatory/ippc-observatory-e-commerce-study/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)