

Dear Friends,

I have the honour as the former Chairperson of the International Steering Committee for the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH) to congratulate you for your efforts in involving young minds in activities and initiatives linked to the IYPH. Your organization joined forces with the many hundreds that have been organising similar initiatives globally, raising awareness on the importance of plant health, especially during this period of COVID-19 pandemic.

I would especially like to thank the young pupils and artists for such an inspirational and creative approach to plant health. The participation of pupils from over 50 schools in the Lombardy region to produce wonderful products such as drawings, memory puzzles, videos and e-books is a testament to the engagement of the organizers of the initiatives as well of the originality and inspiration of the pupils involved.

During a time when the world is in the deadly grip of a human respiratory virus, the SARS-CoV-2, many may ask why there is a need to focus on plant health when all attention and focus is needed to concentrate on measures to save the lives of potentially millions of people worldwide. The life and health of plants appear utterly insignificant in comparison to human health or live threats and yet they are intricately interwoven. Plants are enabling us to live and to exist on this planet.

Plants produce the oxygen we need to breathe. We rely on plants for food, since almost all our food is directly or indirectly plant based. We need plants for medical reasons, since medicinal characteristics of many plant species are either directly used for human medication or serve as a blueprint to produce pharmaceutical drugs. Plants are providing us with building materials for shelter and supplying us with energy for heat and transportation. The existence and diversity of plants are the cornerstone of all life on earth – *plants are life!*

Pests and diseases threaten our plant resources and consequently cause hunger, poverty and the loss of biodiversity. The pupils of the participating schools were very apt in capturing these threats to plants posed by pests.

Youth plays a crucial role in carrying this message beyond present times and I sincerely hope that the pupils in Lombardy make the message of protecting plants against pests their own, and maybe even choose a career in plant health. Once again, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Plant Protection Service of the Lombardy region, the schools involved and the pupils creating these incredible products. I wish you every success in your endeavours sustaining the IYPH messages into the future. I would like to congratulate the winners for their outstanding works! To all the young pupils I have this message: *Plants are the basis of life on earth. Protect them and our biodiversity to sustain your and future generations well-being on this world!*

Best regards,

Ralf Lopian

Former Chair of the International Steering Committee for the IYPH 2020



Maa- ja metsätalousministeriö
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Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry



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