

# NATIONAL BIOSECURITY HUB



Figure 2: National Biosecurity Hub. Joint venture between the former Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), now DoA, the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) and Innovation Africa @ University of Pretoria.

As one of the key priorities of DoA, the Minister of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen, has stated that, "Biosecurity is everybody's responsibility". The minister calls on all South Africans to make biosecurity our responsibility. In doing so, we will ensure our agricultural products are of the highest quality and optimum health allowing the country international market access for our produce and therefore economic growth. This priority resonates with the theme of the IDPH, "Plant Health, Safe Trade and Digital Technology".

## Way forward

The Department of Agriculture calls on the public, its partners and the private sector to observe and celebrate International Day of Plant Health on 12 May. This day is of significance in our agricultural sector both locally and internationally. Through this, we can start making inroads in obtaining the highest level of biosecurity for our agricultural products.

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# International Day of Plant Health



agriculture

Department:  
Agriculture  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



## International Day of Plant Health

The United Nations (UN) designated 12 May as the International Day of Plant Health (IDPH). The day was unanimously adopted by the UN General Assembly in a resolution (A/RES/76/256) in March 2022. The declaration of IDPH was to commemorate the International Year of Plant Health held in 2020, facilitated by the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) in which South Africa is ratified. The IPPC, established in 1951, aims to promote the protection of the world's plants, agricultural products and natural resources from plant pests through collaboration in the development, adoption and promotion of International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs). IDPH, on the other hand, seeks to raise global awareness on how protecting and promoting plant health can help end hunger, reduce poverty, protect biodiversity and the environment, and boost economic growth and development.

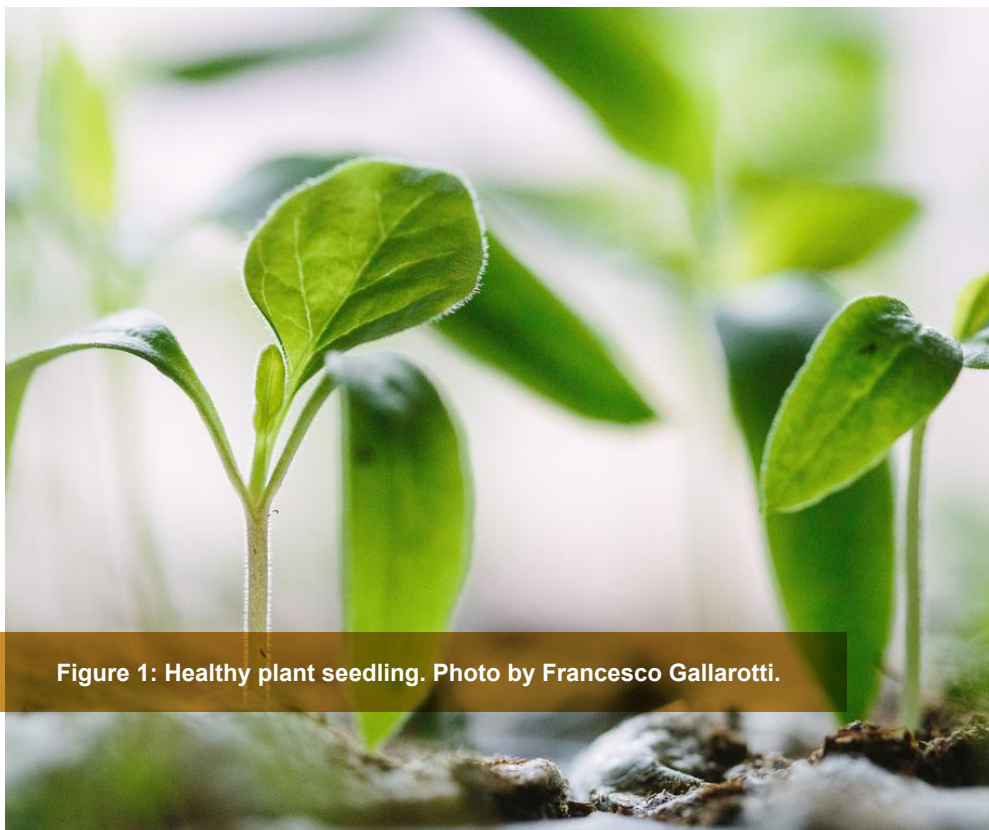


Figure 1: Healthy plant seedling. Photo by Francesco Gallarotti.

## What is plant health and protection

Plant health and protection refers to holistic, ecological and environmentally sound research and management interventions of maintaining optimum health in economically important plant species as well as maintaining healthy natural plant communities for continued provision of ecosystem services. It encompasses identifying risks such as existing and emerging pests, diseases and invasive alien plants that are harmful to agricultural crops and products as well as the natural vegetation. Once these threats have been identified, the following steps involves developing cutting edge integrated pest management interventions informed by research. The end goal is to achieve long-term sustainability in natural and agricultural plants and their products across the economic, social and environmental levels.

## The importance of plant health and protection in the agricultural sector

South Africa's agricultural land is estimated to be around 96 million hectares (ha), where 80% can be considered rangeland and it is used primarily for livestock production, game farming or conservation areas. However, only 12,5% of this land is considered to be arable, leaving a small percentage of land suitable for cultivation. Cognisant of the relatively small arable land suitable for crop production and securing food security for the country in the face of climate change and land degradation, it is of vital importance to promote and adopt innovative plant health and protection strategies and frameworks. In South Africa, this is achieved through innovative research conducted by the Agricultural Research Council's (ARC) Plant Health and Protection unit (ARC-PHP) in collaboration with the National Department of Agriculture (DoA). The ARC-PHP unit has six divisions, namely, biosystematics, plant microbiology, weeds research, insect ecology, pesticide science and farmer-support training. ARC through the support from DoA is mandated in developing ecologically sound management strategies for agricultural pests, plant diseases and invasive plants as well as to strengthen agricultural production through research, technology development and technology transfer. Plant Health and Protection contributes to our country's biosecurity priorities.