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Launch of GAP-VF Certification Scheme

A Certification Scheme on Good Agricultural Practice for Vegetable Farming (GAP-VF), was launched on 6 Feb 04 by Senior Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of National Development, Associate Professor Koo Tsai Kee, to certify local vegetable farms. These farms have adopted the safe and quality farm production system introduced by AVA. The launch of the GAP-VF Certification scheme gives recognition to the certified quality farms and promotes awareness for National standard guidelines in vegetable cultivation.

The GAP-VF, comprises a code of practice for safe and quality vegetable production applying the Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points (HACCP) and quality management principles. It emphasises the following six elements of farm production system:

- Farm location
- Farm structure
- Farm environment (soil and water)
- Farm maintenance (hygiene and cleanliness)
- Farming practices, pesticide and fertilizer usage, pest management and post harvest handling)
- Farm management (farm records, traceability, staff training)

Farms that follow the GAP-VF system in its production can apply for

certification with AVA. Certification involves a thorough on-site evaluation and farm audits by AVA on farm records, assessment of farming and post-harvest procedures, interviews with the farmers and soil and nutrient analysis of farm produce.

The ten GAP-VF Certified vegetable farms are:

- Tropical Aeroponics Pte. Ltd.
- Ho Ka Clean Vegetable Farm
- Oh Chin Huat Hydroponic Farms Pte. Ltd.
- Yili Vegetation & Trading Pte. Ltd.
- Wong Kiow
- Oh Cheong Yeow
- Wong Joon Tay
- Wong Kok Fah
- Yong Teck Khen
- Hon Fo Hing



Farm produce of these ten farms carries the GAP certification mark to distinguish them from the produce of farms without GAP-VF Certification. Such GAP produce are marketed by NTUC Fair Price, Cold Storage, Sheng Shiong and wet markets in Choa Chu Kang and Hougang areas.

For more information on this, please contact our AVA officer at Tel: 6751 9820. or refer to AVA website: <http://www.ava.gov.sg>



Potting Mix For Container Plants

Container gardening is becoming popular amongst residents of our land-scarce Garden City. A good potting medium is necessary for plants to take root, establish and thrive within the confines of a pot. Ordinary garden soil is not ideal

as it is too dense for container use and may contain unwanted weed seeds.

Potting mixes, which provide good aeration, drainage and moisture retention are recommended for container plants. Such mixes may contain soil, mineral matter and organic material in varying proportions. The mineral matter in the mix comes in the form of perlite, vermiculite, pumice and granite or builder's sand. The organic component makes up one or a combination of peat moss, chipped, shredded or ground bark of fir, pine, or hardwood, sawdust and shavings.

Although ready-made potting mixes are available in nurseries, some gardeners prefer to experiment with their own recipes. A common soil mix formula is made up of 2 parts sandy loam soil, 1 part sphagnum moss and 1 part perlite or builder's sand. An example of a soil-less mix would be 1 part peat moss and 1 part vermiculite or perlite. Dolomite limestone at 15g/gallon and 5g Triple Super-phosphate for every 4 litre mix is added. Different plants prefer different proportions of the components involved, based on their needs. Limestone are frequently added to balance the acidity of peat moss and other organic materials.

When the mix is ready, it is then lightly moistened and left overnight before being used for planting. Frequent application of a diluted fertiliser solution is advised as container plants will need a constant supply of small but regular doses of nutrients.

It is also advisable to periodically loosen the mix in the pots to improve aeration and drainage and to replenish or top up the containers with fresh mix as the organic matter would have rotted away over time.



Import Restrictions On Wood Packaging Materials To India

The Indian Ministry of Agriculture has notified through its Plant Quarantine (Regulation of Import into India) Order 2003, effective 1 June 2004, the intension to prohibit and regulate agricultural articles into India. The order stipulates that all consignments if contained with packaging materials imported into India by air or sea would require a phytosanitary certificate with an endorsement of the treatment details from the country of origin or should be marked accordingly with the International Standards on Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM) Guideline 15. Packaging material means any material of plant origin used for packing. These include hay, straw, wood shavings, wood chips, saw dust, wood waste, wooden pallets, dunnage mats, coir pith, peat or sphagnum moss etc.

This clause shall also be applicable to packaging materials with respect to passenger goods of non-plant and plant products. If no phytosanitary certificate is furnished or without the ISPM-15 mark in respect of said packaging material, a penalty is payable to the Indian Customs. The Indian authority also informed that the procedure for obtaining permission and clearance from Customs or the local quarantine authorities is extremely expensive, cumbersome and lengthy. Such consignments will also accrue demurrage or detention charge which will be at the cost of the shippers or importers.

In addition to the above, consignments of timber shall not be permitted import unless the following conditions and requirements are met with :

- The timber shall be stripped of its bark, either be squared or rounded and accompanied with an official statement that the wood has been appropriately fumigated or treated.

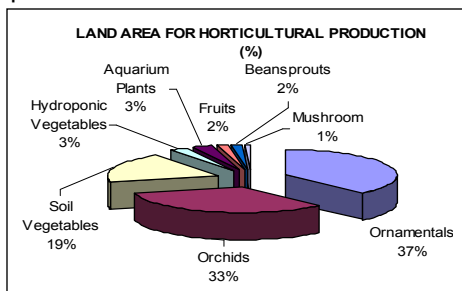
- Such treatment shall be endorsed in the phytosanitary certificate issued at the country of origin or re-export, whichever the case may be.

For more information on the above restriction, kindly visit the website, <http://www.plantquarantineindia.org>.

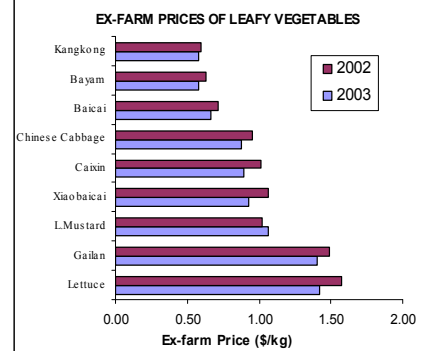
In this context, AVA is accrediting pest control agencies to carry out the pre-departure treatment on behalf of AVA. The list of accredited pest control agencies can be viewed at our web site <http://www.ava.gov.sg> under "Circulars" and "Updated List of Pest Control Agencies". Alternatively you may call 67519842 or 843 for clarification.

Vegetable And Orchid Production, 2003

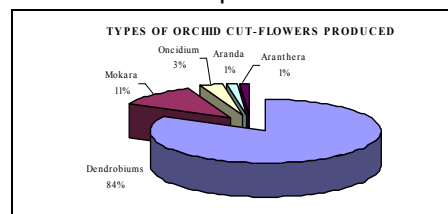
As of 2003, there are 149 farms occupying 435.24 ha. that are licensed for horticulture activities in Singapore. Of this, 114.46 ha are for the production of vegetables and food crops while 320.78 ha are for the production of orchids and ornamental plants.



In 2003, 16,563 tonnes of vegetables and food crops with a total value of \$13.99 million were produced. These consisted of 8,891 tonnes of bean sprouts (54%) and 7,429 tonnes of leafy vegetables (45%). Caixin, bayam, xiaobaicai, and kangkong accounted for 79% of the total quantity of leafy vegetables produced. The ex-farm prices of leafy vegetables were lower in year 2003 than for year 2002.



Orchid farms produced 12.5 million stalks of orchid flowers with an ex-farm value of \$3.75 million. About 1.9 million ornamental plants valued at \$14.02 million and 23.4 million aquarium plants valued at \$3.22 million were also produced.



Insect Control : The Organic Way

Continuing our feature on plant protection from everyday materials from the last issue, we suggest here a home remedy for your reference.

Nicotine Spray

If you are a smoker and wish to quit smoking and treat gardening as a form of exercise, here is a good way to kill two birds with one stone! Turn your discarded cigarettes into a nicotine spray for pest control.

Many soft bodied pests such as aphids, mites, mealybugs and thrips hate tobacco. To concoct the spray, soak an old broken up cigarette in a litre of water for 48 hours. Strain off the tobacco and use the filtrate. If this "tobacco tea" is very dark, dilute this with a bit more water. Wear protection during application as it may cause irritation or allergies to some people and wash thoroughly after spraying.



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The aim of this bulletin is to disseminate horticulture and plant health information to plant growers, exporters and importers in Singapore. If you have any suggestions, comments or enquiries, please contact us at :

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