

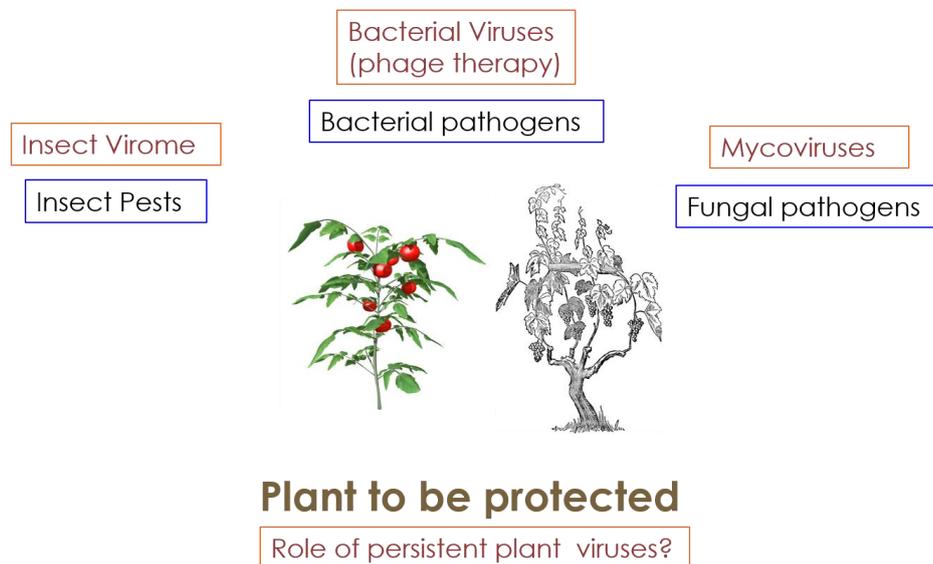
Can viruses help to protect crop plants from diseases and pests?

VIROPLANT Kick-off Meeting

Seventeen partners from 8 European countries will meet for the H2020-funded project VIROPLANT kick-off meeting on June 20-21 in Torino (Italy).

Viruses have a bad reputation due to the number of diseases and pandemics they cause. Nevertheless, the vast majority of viral species are completely harmless or even beneficial and play an essential role in the ecosystems.

VIROPLANT (Virome NGS analysis of pests and pathogens for plant protection) will develop new biocontrol agents based on viruses infecting phytopathogenic bacteria, fungi, insect pests and insect vectors to provide new tools to protect crop plants.



Bacterial diseases of kiwi, bean, stone fruit trees, tomato and cucumber, and fungal diseases of grapevine, tomato, lettuce and strawberry will be case studies in the project. Insect pests of horticultural importance and insect vectors of tomato, pepper and onion viral diseases and the grapevine Flavescence dorée phytoplasma are also included.

The project will propose integrated biocontrol strategies based on viruses to reduce fungicide and insecticide use and their well-described negative impacts on the environment and human health. Exploiting bacterial viruses (Phages) and mycoviruses for downy mildews could provide an efficient replacement for the use of copper in agriculture, a recent aim of EU policy.

VIROPLANT will also support an in-depth analysis of environmental risks, public acceptance, regulatory restrictions and business opportunities, in order to examine the likelihood to commercialize these novel products.

The project has a €3 million budget supporting a multi-actor approach, with different European universities, research centres and small and medium enterprises that register and produce biological control agents. Grower's associations and extension services are also partners.

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