## VIROLOGY

# Main Causes of Potato Spindle Tuber Viroid Distribution in Seed Potato in Russia in 1990s

### K.A. Mozhaeva, N. V. Girsova & T.B. Kastalyeva

Russian Research Institute of Phytopathology, Bolshie Vyaziomy, Moscow region, Russia, 143050 E-mail: mozhaeva@vniif.rosmail.com

#### **ABSTRACT**

Intensive application of the technologies for the virus-free potato production, which did not protect from viroid infection, was the reason of drastic outbreak of potato spindle tuber viroid disease that took place in Russia in 1990's.

Key words: potato diseases, viroids, spindle tuber disease.

Можаева К.А., Гирсова Н.В., Кастальева Т.Б. Распространение вироида веретеновидности клубней картофеля в 90-х годах XX в. в России.

Интенсивное использование в России технологий получения безвирусного картофеля, не защищающих от вироидной инфекции, привело к широкому распространению вироидной болезни веретеновидности клубней картофеля в 90-х годах.

#### INTRODUCTION

Potato spindle tuber viroid (PSTVd) is the smallest autonomously replicating disease-causing agent. It consists of the low molecular weight single-stranded circular RNA of 356 – 360 nucleotides and causes disease in higher plants only. It retains the infectivity after incubation at high temperature (more than 100°C). PSTVd forming a part of total low molecular RNA was shown to save its infective properties in solution frozen and stored at –20°C for more than twenty years and in dried plant tissues for more than ten years (Girsova et al., 2002).

PSTVd is highly contagious. It is transmitted through mechanical contact, sap inoculation, infected tools and farm machinery. Viroid is also transmitted through pollen and true seeds. PSTVd causes stunting, upright growth, and some leaf distortion in the foliage of potato and reduces size and number of tubers (Fig. 1). Reduction in leaf size and a slate (gray) color are also observed. Tubers are elongated or deformed, they may become very spindly and small and show growth cracks (Fig. 2). Yield reduction depends on the PSTVd strain, growing conditions, and type of cultivar. The danger of the disease caused by PSTVd forced West European countries to consider this pathogen as a quarantine object (EPPO, 1992).

As much as 40–90% reduction in yield of tuber production caused by PSTVd was observed in field experiments using artificial inoculation (Mozhaeva et al., 1998).

#### **METHODS**

Bioassay on indicator hosts *Lycopersicon* esculentum (var. Rutgers) and *Scopolia sinensis*, electrophoresis in polyacrilamide gel (PAGE) and molecular hybridization on nitrocellulose filters were used for

the routine detection of PSTVd (Mozhaeva et al., 1989). Fraction of low molecular nucleic acid enriched with viroid RNA was used in electrophoresis and bioassay (Kastalyeva & Mozhaeva, 1988).

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A potato disease named "Gothic" has been known in the former USSR since the 1930s. Based on typical symptoms an assumption was made that PSTVd was the cause of the disease (Leontyeva, 1971). The disease usually occurred in the Volga region of European Russia. Sporadic incidences of the disease were observed in other Russian regions and in Ukraine. However, the disease was of limited economic importance in Russia because of its low incidence.

At the end of 1970s we isolated the low molecular RNA containing PSTVd from potato plants having symp-

toms of "Gothic"-disease and were succeed in infecting tomato plants and *S. sinensis* using this RNA (Mozhaeva et al., 1978).

Drastic decrease in yields and quality of seed potato as well as quality some cultivars as a whole was found in various regions of Russia between the 1980's and 1990's. We supposed that seeds and *in vitro* potato plants were infected with PSTVd. It was confirmed by analysis of samples from different farms producing potato seeds (Table 1).

In the early 1990's PSTVd was shown to be a cause of potato degradation in Moscow region (Kastalyeva et al.,

TABLE 1

Diagnostics of PSTV in potato between 1991 – 1998

Regions In vitro potato plants Tubers Plants Plants Tubers Tubers Plants Tubers tested infected infected tested infected infected (No.) (No.) (%) (No.) (No.) (%) The Far East: Vladivostok 16 10 62 6 4 67 The Ussuriisk Territory 20 12 60 Moskovskaja province: Korenevo 12 10 83 14 12 85 Zelenograd 46 35 76 72 Others 18 13 Leningradskaja province 19 13 68 Samarskaja province 8 8 100 Tverskaja province 4 2 50 Penzenskaja province 10 7 70 Brjanskaja province 33

<sup>-</sup> Seedlings were analyzed.



Fig. 1. Healthy (left) and PSTVd-infected (right) potato plants.

1992). Later, PSTVd was detected in potato plants from other Russian regions such as the Northwestern, Central, Volga-Vyatskyi, North Caucasian, Volga, Ural, West Siberian and Far Eastern ones.

PSTVd was detected in 69 % of the *in vitro* potato plants and in 71 % of the tuber samples from different regions of Russia that were analyzed (Table 1). In 1992 it became obvious that the *in vitro* germoplasm collection of Russian Scientific Research Institute of Potato (RSRIP) was infected with PSTVd. Right up to 1997 infected samples was still found among the healthy ones (Table 2).

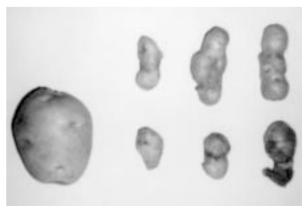


Fig. 2. Healthy (left) and PSTVd-infected (right) potato tubers.

Regions

TABLE 2

Diagnostics of PSTVd in potato between 1997–1999\* In vitro potato plants Tubers\* Plants Plants Plants Tubers Tubers Tubers tested infected infected tested infected infected (No.) (No.) (%) (No.) (No.) (%) Moskovskaja province: Pustchino 1997 8 4 50 22 12 55 2 50 10 Pustchino 1999 4 30 3 10 50 17 Korenevo (RSRIP) 20 36 47

15

2

13

Belousovskoe

Kaluzhskaja province:

The main cause of such a situation was a wide application of meristemic-tip culture technology to produce virusfree potato in the former USSR since 1972. The technology did not provide for a possibility of PSTVd infection. As a result, plants were never tested for PSTVd presence before they were used for virus eliminating. Another reason was favorable conditions for pathogen replication and transmission (thermo-therapy, high temperature in greenhouses, non-satisfaction of phytosanitation etc.). Moreover, hydroponics was widely employed for virusfree potato growing that promoted PSTVd spreading through the nutrient solution (Mozhaeva et al., 1996).

Distribution of non-tested potato seeds resulted in a large-scale distribution of PSTVd all over Russia. High degree of in vitro potato plant and seed infectivity posed a threat to seed growing and breeding of potato. To solve the problem, the following steps are being realized for the PSTVd control in Russia presently (Drygin, et al., 2000; Baranov & Dynnik, 2000):

1) the procedure of identification of PSTVd is included to the scheme for production of virus-free potatoes by meristem-tip culture;

2) regional laboratories for certification of seed potato are being founded;

3) virus/viroid-free samples of potato are being produced for the Russian germplasm bank;

4) the clone selection together with the meristem-tip culture is recommended for the production of healthy seed tubers

#### CONCLUSIONS

Underestimation of the danger of PSTVd spreading, as well as the absence of control for the PSTVd presence in the plant material that was used as a parental in breeding and meristem tips preparation led to spread of the disease in Russia. Urgent strong measures were recently applied to prevent further expansion of PSTVd and to save the potato germplasm.

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<sup>\* -</sup> Results published by Baranov and Dynnik in 2000

<sup>\*\* -</sup> Seedlings were analyzed