

Italian olive tree disease stumps EU

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EU member states are divided on how to stop the spread of a disease affecting olive trees in Italy that could result in around a million being cut down, officials said Friday.

Experts from the 28 European Union nations gathered in Brussels this week to discuss steps to stop the outbreak of the xylella fastidiosa

bacteria, but "no decision was taken" due to a lack of consensus, one official said.

Italy is the second biggest producer of [olive oil](#) in the EU after Spain.

"Negotiations and reflection and discussion are needed" before reaching a common position, the official told journalists on condition of anonymity.

France and Spain want a hard line, fearing for their own [olive groves](#) as well as vines and [citrus trees](#), which can also be infected by the insect-transmitted bacteria, officials said.

But Italy is less willing to take drastic measures as growers mount increasing resistance to the destruction of age-old olive groves.

"Italy alone cannot block the way forward" as voting is by majority, the official said.

Italy has marked off an emergency area of 241,000 hectares (593,000 acres) in the southern Puglia region that is affected by the disease, which causes the trees to wither away and for which there is so far no remedy.

The EU says studies showed at least 10 percent of some 11 million [olive trees](#) in the worst-affected Lecce area of Puglia had the bacteria.

A new EU meeting is planned for April.

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