



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA RELEASE

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CURRENT STATUS OF *SPODOPTERA FRUGIPERDA* (FALL ARMYWORM) IN SOUTH AFRICA

Fall Armyworm (FAW) is a quarantine pest for South Africa, with an internationally documented wide host range.

The presence of FAW in South Africa was confirmed on 3 February 2017 with positive morphological and molecular identification of caterpillars and adult moths. The presence of the pest was announced on the International Plant Protection Convention's portal in terms of South Africa's international pest reporting obligations. SADC member countries were also notified and regional control measures were discussed.

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) initiated a Fall Armyworm Steering Committee (FAWSC) which is a technical group investigating the best possible solutions to combat the FAW. The FAWSC membership includes representatives from the North West University (NWU), Agricultural Research Council (ARC), Croplife, Grain SA, South African national Seed Organisation (SANSOR), South African Biological Control Organisation (SABO), Insecticide Resistance Action Committee (IRAC), Provincial Departments of Agriculture and is chaired by DAFF. The FAWSC is responsible for discussing and evaluating, among others, the surveillance programme, scouting methods, diagnostics, management practices, intervention by provincial Departments of Agriculture and relevant stakeholders, damage/loss assessment and future research on FAW.

FAW was detected mainly in Limpopo, Gauteng, North West, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal Free State and the Eastern Cape provinces. In the Northern Cape, it was detected only in the Hartswater area. It has not been detected in the Western Cape yet. Reports from each new area and reports for each host are verified by laboratory analysis.

Most of the scouting reports for FAW were from maize, sweetcorn and sorghum plants in South Africa. FAW preferentially attacks maize, but it may target other crops in the vicinity if its populations are already high in maize. Groundnuts, soya and potato appear to be minimally affected. Although losses were reported by farmers in some areas, especially on maize produced for the fresh market, the bulk of the maize harvest remains unaffected and there are predictions of an over 79% increase in harvest over the 2015/16 season, when production was reduced by drought.

Early detection remains the best defense. The moth stage of this pest is a good flyer so it cannot be contained in a specific area. However, with effective integrated pest management practices, pest numbers can be reduced. Farmers are encouraged to continue with scouting (regularly), especially in the warmer areas. The use of a male pheromone trapping system is very effective in determining the presence of the moths in an area. The importation of pheromones is permitted by DAFF, and over 40 agricultural chemicals with 10 different modes of action have been registered for use against FAW. It is best to start spraying while the caterpillars are smaller than one centimeter long. Bigger caterpillars crawl deep into the leaf whorls of maize plants and that makes it difficult to reach them with agro-chemical sprays.

FAW is a migratory pest which may not overwinter in some parts of South Africa. Long term interventions include, among others, capacity building, resource mobilisation and research programmes to determine the areas and hosts where it may survive during winter in South Africa. This will ensure better preparedness for future seasons. To date, all the interventions made by the FAWSC proved to be of crucial assistance in containing the FAW, registering relevant agrochemicals and bridging the knowledge gap on management practices.

Crop producers are encouraged to report suspected detections of FAW to DAFF through Jan Hendrik Venter at: 012 319 6384, 072 348 8431 or JanhendrikV@daff.gov.za
Contact a chemical representative for advice on agrochemical control options.

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