

Armyworm not linked to NAADS – govt

By Moses Walubiri, Henry Ssekanjako and Joshua Katamba

Little is known about the cause of outbreak of the armyworm among ordinary Ugandans, save for the fact that the ruinous caterpillars are 'natives' of Latin America.

Yesterday, the Government Chief Whip, Ruth Nankibirwa, stridently knocked back insinuations by a section of lawmakers linking the outbreak of armyworms to seedlings being supplied countrywide by the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) under Operation Wealth Creation (OWC).

OWC is a presidential initiative to haul the majority of Ugandan households from the abyss of poverty through helping them join the money economy through gainful agricultural activities.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ The armyworm is an African moth. It is a deleterious pest, capable of destroying entire crops in a matter of weeks. The larvae feed on all types of grasses and the early stages of cereal crops.

Over the last 12 months, the armyworm has wreaked havoc in different parts of the country, putting Uganda's reputation as a regional food basket at stake.

"A lot has been said about the issue of armyworms and NAADS seedlings, but there is nothing conclusive. We need a scientific explanation, which I am not competent to give right now," Nankibirwa said in response to Reagan Okumu's assertion that armyworms are only attacking crops grown out of hybrid NAADS seedlings.

"What our scientists have so far been able to ascertain is that the farmers who planted the crops early have not been affected by the armyworm, whether the seedlings were indigenous or hybrid," Nankibirwa said.

The response by lawmakers, although in murmurs, was indicative of the fact that the issue of armyworms is a matter of concern in almost all regions of the country.

Elijah Okupa, a lawmaker hailing from a cereal growing region of Teso, demanded that the Government gives an explanation on what it is doing to combat the outbreak.

Deputy Speaker Jacob Oulanyah did not allow debate on the matter, but ordered the Executive to proffer a statement on an issue that is threatening the country's food security.

dollars