

Panic as caterpillars destroy farms

A deadly caterpillar has invaded eastern Uganda, leaving several potato gardens destroyed, writes Yazid Yolisigira

Farmers in the sub-counties of Nakalama, Bulamagi, Makutu, Nakigo and Nawandala in Iganga District are counting losses after their sweet potato gardens were destroyed by marauding caterpillars which invaded the area in August.

The District Production Officer, Joseph Dhikusoka, has confirmed the caterpillar invasion: "This pest is a caterpillar which comes from a moth and it is not new. It was as a result of the short dry spells."

Dhikusoka added: "Almost all chemicals on the market like Trycell, Tysamecylin and Lava can kill this pest. The farmers can save what has not been eaten by applying the pesticides immediately."

He asked the affected farmers to reach their nearby extension workers who will guide them on how to use the pesticides.

Abdu Lwabi, one of the farmers whose garden has been ravaged by the deadly caterpillars in Bukyaye village, Nakalama Sub-county, said the pest started by forming a layer on the plant.

"After forming a layer, it started eating up the leaves and spreading to the entire garden," he recounted, adding that he has lost three acres of potatoes that have been destroyed by the caterpillars and his hopes for a better harvest this season have been dashed.

James Isiko, a resident of Nakalama village, said several plantations of sweet potatoes have been destroyed within the village. "We lack pesticides and if Government fails to intervene, we are most likely to face a food shortage," he said.

The Nakalama Sub-county LCIII

Remedy

Pesticides such as Trycell, Tysamecylin and Lava can kill this pest



Caterpillars eating potato leaves. FILE PHOTOS

Chairman, Mubarak Salumin, conceded that most villages were invaded by this pest and asked the district to step up its efforts to combat the pest.

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SUB-COUNTIES THAT HAVE REPORTED CATERPILLAR ATTACK



How to deal with the lethal caterpillar

A farmer may choose any one, or a combination of these methods for dealing with threats to their crop:

1. Non-Chemical

Crop rotation (changing the crops grown every year). This helps to prevent pests which may target one particular crop.

Cover crops: Planting between a crop to suppress weeds or offer an environment that is not desirable to

insects or diseases (e.g. planting clover between rows of fruit trees).

Pest-resistant seeds such as the biotechnology products.

Farmers can also unleash beneficial insects commonly known as predators that attack pests.

2. Mechanical

Field vacuums, screens or barriers, sticky boards, tilling weeds.

3. Chemical

Insecticides (target insects and caterpillars), herbicides (target weeds), fungicides (targets diseases), and rodenticides (target rodents). There are both natural chemicals and synthetic chemicals available for use. A farmer will choose the option which meets the needs of his or her farm and production choice (e.g. organic or conventional).