

Africa faces Shs7.6trillions in maize deficit

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The Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) has confirmed that the fall armyworm has infested a total 28 African countries including Uganda since 2016. This is said to be presenting a now permanent agricultural challenge for the continent.

Fall armyworm feeds on more than 80 crops, but prefers maize. The pest can cut yields by up to 60 per cent.

In research funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), CABI now estimates the pest will cost 10 of the continent's major maize producing economies in Africa a total of \$2.2b (Shs7.6t) to \$5.5b (Shs18trillions) a year in lost maize harvests - if the pest is not properly managed.

"Enabling our agricultural communities with quick and coordinated responses is now essential, to ensure the continent stays ahead of the plague," said Dr. Joseph DeVries, vice president - Programme Development and Innovation at AGRA.

As countries turn to pesticides to reduce the damage, farmers face the risk of the pest developing resistance to treatment, which has become a widespread problem in The Americas.

Bio pesticides are a lower risk control



Agronomists spraying a garden of maize infested by fall armyworm. COURTESY PHOTO

option, but few of the pesticides used in the Americas are yet to be approved for use in Africa, raising the need for urgent local trials, registration and the development of local production.

"Maize can recover from some damage to the leaves. So, when farmers see damaged leaves, it does not necessarily mean they need to control. Research is urgently needed, and awareness and education effort is required so that farmers monitor

their fields, and can make decisions on whether and how to control the pest," said Dr Roger Day, CABI's Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) coordinator.

"There are natural ways farmers can reduce impact, including squashing the eggs or caterpillars when they see them, and maintaining crop diversity in the farm, which encourages natural predators," Dr Day explains.