

ACTION PLAN

The agriculture ministry has dispatched teams to all regions in the country to monitor and equip farmers with information on how to fight the worms

By Vision Reporters

The deadly Fall armyworms that razed maize fields in 75 districts in the last season have resurfaced and are now ravaging the crop in the second season in various parts of the country.

The agriculture ministry yesterday said the toxic pests have been detected in several parts of the country, and that they are "trooping" from fields that were under maize in the previous season that closed in June to new gardens.

Unlike last season when the pests invaded some gardens with maize at various stages and could easily be saved from the deadly pests, this time round, the worms have attacked a few weeks after the opening of the second season.

"It is likely to be more severe because many are still planting. The worms are also moving from the previous fields (that were under maize in the previous season) to the new ones. The loss could be greater because its population is growing," the director of crop resources, Dr Opolot Okassai, said.

Afraid that the pest could cause greater damage since it has begun its invasion in the early days of the second season, the ministry has dispatched teams to all regions in the country to monitor and equip the farmers with relevant information on how to try to deal with the worms known for travelling and reproducing at a terrific speed.

According to researchers, the armyworms can travel 2,000km per year and the female pest can lay between 1,500 and 2,000 eggs in its lifetime.

Okassai said the teams deployed to various parts of the country have not yet established the number of affected districts and the level of destruction.

"We are collecting information and we are all out in the field this time. As I talk to you now (yesterday), I am in Busigu and we are heading to another region tomorrow (today)," he said. "In Mbale, the maize is six inches high and they are noticing the outbreak."

The teams comprised of pest and disease control experts and researchers, Okassai said, have been deployed in the eastern, northern, western and central regions.

"My team will be heading to Busia and Bulambuli (today) and then to Teso and Karamoja on Friday. The team in the northern region should have covered Acholi and Lango by Friday. There are also teams in Rwenzori, West Nile and southwestern Uganda," he stated.

The Government said in April that it was mobilising sh25b to contain the outbreak.

The worms were first detected in Uganda last year. The pest, which is said to have originated from South America, attacks over 80 species of plants, including cereals (maize, millet, sorghum, sugarcane, rice and wheat), legumes (cowpeas, groundnuts and soya bean) cotton and many types of pasture grasses.

By the close of last season, it was destroying cereal crop fields in 10 African countries, including neighbouring Kenya.

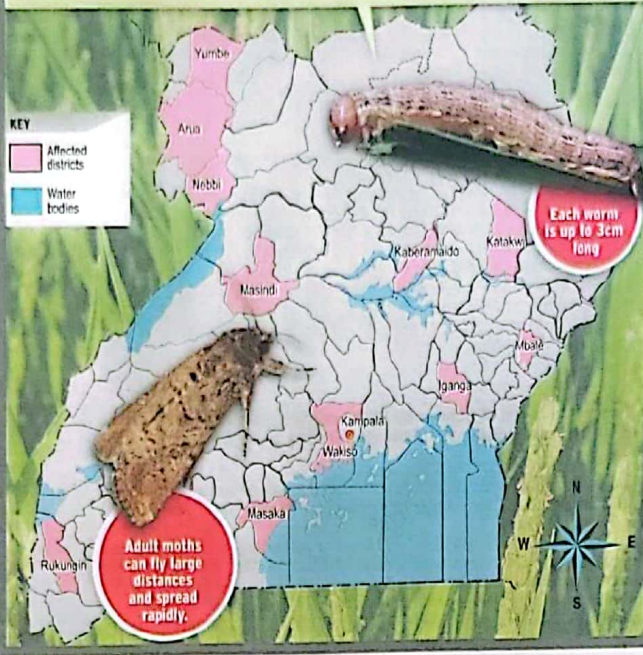
Spraying

The ministry is advising farmers to intensify monitoring of their crop, and spray three times - when the maize is three weeks old, at between one and two metres high and flowering stage. Just like in the last season,

Armyworm back

11 districts report armyworm cases

Armyworms (Larva of moth) got their name because they eat their way through most of the vegetation in their way. At densities of up to 1,000 caterpillars per square metre, they quickly destroy entire crops. The worst affected crops are cereals such as maize, wheat, sorghum, millet and rice. The worms also eat pasture grasses. The worms are native to North and South America and are believed to have arrived in Africa on imported plants.



RECOMMENDED PESTICIDES

Experts have recommended a combination of Striker and Rockett pesticides against the pest, like it was last season

the experts are recommending a combination of Striker and Rockett pesticides against the pest. However, the ministry is also recommending the rotational application of the pesticides.

"Ideally, a pesticide used in the eastern region should not be used in the northern region. This helps to monitor resistance," Okassai said.

Globally, there is no single pesticide known to kill armyworms, and experts recommend a combination of pesticides. The armyworms are known to be resistant to most of the pesticides on the market.

Two strains

Researchers at the ministry have established that there are two strains of the Fall armyworms in Uganda - rice and maize worms - but both types seem to be more attracted to maize.

"But there are some worms we have been finding dead in the fields and researchers are trying to find out if there are viruses that can kill them, so we develop a biological control," Okassai explained.

Iganga

Several maize gardens in Iganga district are already infested with the armyworms.

Tolofisa Nakagolo, the chairperson of Nawaningi village, said over 25 acres of maize crop in the area has been affected.

"The spray recommended seems not to have any impact on this worm. It is going to seriously affect our yields," Nakagolo lamented.

John Makoma, a farmer, revealed that he lost almost four acres of maize during the last planting season.

"Many of us are now opting to abandon maize and similar crops attacked by the worm. We would rather do fish farming or poultry," Makoma said.

Abdullah Balunywa, the Bulamagi sub-county chairman, said the armyworm invasion could lead to famine.

Abdul Samanya, the Iganga district natural resources officer, said the impact of the worms on the environment is disastrous.

"In certain instances, the armyworms have affected other plants besides maize. We need a lasting solution to the menace," Samanya suggested.

Yumbe

Steven Adrapi, a farmer in Anyavu parish, Logiri sub-county, said the worms have attacked his maize garden although he has sprayed with pesticides.

Arua

Gertrude Badaru, the agricultural officer of Arua district, says the district has exhausted all the pesticides the ministry procured. She says there are still cases of farmers coming to demand for the pesticides.

"We tell them to buy, since the Government cannot provide to all farmers," she said.

Wakiso

Koprian Mugerwa, a resident of Luguzi village in Namuyumba town council, Wakiso

district said the armyworm is still a big problem in the area.

He pointed out that he is still hesitant to plant maize because the armyworm is already affecting the gardens of those who have planted.

Nebbi

A fresh outbreak of fall of armyworms have been reported in many parts of Nebbi district. Hellen Akello, a farmer in Parombo sub-county, said the worms have invaded several maize plantations.

Paul Wamm, the Nebbi district agricultural officer, confirmed to *New Vision* the presence of Fall Armyworms in the district. He advised farmers to procure pesticides on their own as they wait for government intervention.

Rukungiri

In Rukungiri district, there has been an invasion of brown-tailed caterpillars destroying castor oil, yams, banana leaves, cassava, mangoes, apples, amaranth (*dulo*), cabbages, sweet potatoes, coffee and shrubs, among other plants.

The district agriculture officer, Pius Oneck Kwesigwa, says the caterpillars can destroy an acre of plantation in a few days.

The resident district commissioner, Martin Mugabe, said they have contacted the agriculture ministry over the matter and are waiting for a response.

Masindi

Melckizedeke Kanaginagi, a farmer in Bokwe village, Pakanyi sub-county, said: "I have about 10 acres of newly planted maize that have been hit. I am using a chemical called Lava and Rockett to spray my crops."

Robert Atugonza, a farmer in Budongo sub-county, said the farmers that have been most hit are in Bwijanga sub-county.

"I have colleagues who have gardens in Kabahaara village, Bwijanga sub-county and some have complained that their gardens have been attacked," Simon Onadra, said. He says he has seven acres of maize that have been affected.

But Lawrence Tusimomuhangi, the acting district production officer, said he has not yet received any complaints.

Masaka

Fred Kabango, the district agricultural officer, said the worms remain a threat and advised farmers to plant other crops such as beans and groundnuts, not maize.

Katakwi

Raymond Odeke, the Usuk sub-county chairperson, criticised the Government for not supplying sufficient pesticides.

Kaberaaldo

The chairperson of Aperikira sub-county, Paul Ewoyu, said all the 44 villages have been affected by the armyworms, which he says also destroy potatoes.

Eddy Edward Okello, 31 a resident of Agule village, Olelai parish, said all his seven maize gardens have been attacked by the armyworm.

But the Kaberaaldo RDC, Jimmy Ebil, said plans are underway to distribute 200 litres of pesticide.

(Compiled by Pascal Kwesigwa, Prossy Nandudu, Caleb Bahkaho, Benedict Okethwengu, George Blita, Priscillar Nyamahunge, Dismus Buregyeya, Hope Mafaranga, Emmanuel Opolo, Simon Naulale, Paul Watala and Robert Arlaka)