

Editor's note

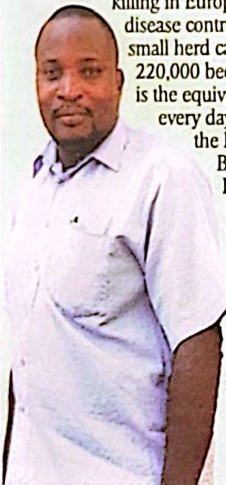
Allow systems to work

One of the bad habits affecting agriculture in Uganda is doing things in quarters and halves, or nothing at all. This practice involves looking at the pixels, rather than focusing on the big picture or the future. This is why many enterprises have failed to move to the next level, which includes acceptance by the international market.

Over the last three weeks, we have examined the reasons as to why nearly the entire cattle corridor of Uganda is under quarantine. Among the conclusions is that most of the stakeholders, including cattle keepers, traders and the Government are not doing enough to stop the diseases.

Despite the quarantine, cattle traders are buying and selling cattle. As for government authorities tasked with enforcing the quarantine and carrying out regular vaccinations, it is the same old story of lack of personnel and funds to carry out these activities. The bottom line in all this is that we do not let things work. The cattle keepers and traders who smuggle the animals are focused on short-term gains, rather than the larger picture of the big gains in the European Union markets. As long as our animals are diseased, no large market will buy our livestock products.

Meanwhile, a smaller country like Botswana, whose total cattle herd is only three million, is making a killing in Europe because they let the disease control systems work. That small herd can produce at least 220,000 beef cattle each year. That is the equivalent of 605 beef cattle every day. Meanwhile in Uganda, the Egypt/Uganda Friendship Beef Processing Unit in Bombo needs just 250 beef cattle every day, but we cannot supply them from our huge herd of 14-15 million cattle. The reason is that we do not let things work.



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Fall armyworm back



Wakiso farmer Edward Rwajokare inspects maize leaves destroyed by fall armyworms last year

By Joshua Kato

The months of March to May 2017 were a nightmare for farmers of cereals across Uganda. This is because most of them woke up to a ruthless pest that had descended on the young maize and millet farms and eaten the crops. It was later identified as the fall armyworm.

The fall armyworm is similar to the common armyworm that has traditionally attacked crops across the world, however it is more ruthless and devastating in nature than the latter.

"This is terrible. How shall we pay back the loans that we took to set up these farms?" farmers lamented. *"Tusaba gavumenti etuyambe* (we are asking for government's help),"

A year later, the same worm has been sighted in several parts of the country, although the damage is still minimal. Farmers and the agriculture ministry report that the worm has been sighted in parts of Nakaseke, Wakiso, Luwero, Mpigi, Masaka and Mayuge, among other areas.

"The worm wrecked havoc last year because it was the first time Ugandans were seeing it at such a big scale," says Abbey Kazibwe, the director of Nsanja Agro-chemicals.

Attacks other crops
While the worm was initially seen in maize, it was later discovered to attack other crops. These include bananas, most cereals as well as

Tips

HOW TO CONTROL THE ARMY WORM

The agriculture ministry has recommended two insecticides to fight army worms – Rocket and Striker.

According to agriculture minister Vincent Ssempijja, the recommended pesticides remain the extreme lines of control.

"Farmers are requested to use the pesticides according to instructions, because it has been proved that the worms can be defeated," he

says.

Kazibwe says: "If these insecticides are applied properly in measurements of 30ml for every 20 litres of water, then the worm can be defeated".

A litre of the insecticides cost sh33,000 at the moment. Farmers are advised to buy from only certified distributors because there are many dealers selling uncertified chemicals on the market.



pulses, tomatoes, ginger, spinach, amaranthus, onions, citrus, cucumber and sunflower.

It can eat over 100 other crops, although maize is its main food.

According to the agriculture ministry, Uganda produced around 4.6 million tonnes of maize in 2016/2017. However, the yield may have been higher had the fields not been attacked by the worms. Earlier projection had put the expected harvest at around 5.2 million tonnes.

In bananas, it attacks the young middle leaf, which is responsible for the production of bananas. The larger banana leaves are tough for the worms.

Kazibwe, however, says the impact may be minimal since bananas continuously develop new leaves. He says for now, there are a few cases of banana crops being eaten by the fall armyworm.

The worms have also been reported to eat napier, which is the major feed for cattle.

"I have been told that they also eat napier, but I have not seen any case so far in Uganda," says Dr Jolly Kabirwa, a livestock forage expert.

"However, the worm eating napier grass may carry dire implications for the livestock sector. Such grass cannot be sprayed, since it is fed raw to livestock. If this happens, certainly...



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How farmers can beat pests



A farmer sprays his crops affected by the armyworm. Experts recommend Rocket and Striker pesticides as the most effective in killing the relentless worm



Use pheromone traps to monitor the arrival of armyworm moths

Other armyworm control methods

■ According to Peter Byaruhanga, an agriculture researcher and farmer in Luwero district, intercropping cereals such as maize with legumes like beans controls the worm.

"I did it on my farm and realised that the impact went down by between 30-40% when I intercropped the maize," he says.

Byaruhanga is a qualified agriculture extension worker from Makerere. You can also plant napier on the outskirts of the farm because it may attract the worm faster than the maize.

■ Use pheromone traps similar to those used to trap fruit flies to monitor the arrival of moths. When you first notice them, look for the distinctive white dot on their forewings. This will show you that the worms have arrived. Once you confirm this, it is time to start closer inspection of your plants to see if they have already laid eggs.

The traps will catch most of the male moths, hence affect the mating process. These traps are commonly sold in agri-input stores at sh10,000 each. An acre may require around three traps.

■ Early detection is also key. Look out for larvae and signs of damage beginning in early crops. Caterpillars

will often be found feeding on the undersides of leaves and on new growth. At this stage, you can avoid bigger damage to the crops by hand picking the caterpillars from the crops. However, do not kill them on the farm because they may have eggs that may drop and continue to grow. Rather, have a bucket with a disinfectant chemical, for example, liquid soap or vim and drop them in. Then dispose them off in a pit and cover them, far from the farm.

■ Planting early at the beginning of the season also saves the crops because the worms attack fairly late in the season. For example, if a farmer planted in late February when the rains started, the attacks coming in late March may not affect him.

■ Some farmers are using drops of sand or grainy soil, put in the whorls of the maize (middle parts of the plant) to prevent the caterpillars from feeding on them. But of course, this exercise requires a lot of work.

■ Birds eat the moths and will pull larvae from the plants and soils. Before you plant, allow birds to scavenge through the drying grasses of the farm. These birds can even be your local scavenging chicken.

found its way into Africa. However, researchers believe it came through cereals imported to several South African countries between 2014 and 2016. Several of these countries had a poor cereals' harvest and so they import the grains from Latin America.

The armyworm is a migratory moth that moves from one area to another. The larvae (caterpillars) are ruthless pests of pastures and cereal crops, previously in Latin America, but now in Africa south of the Sahara, in countries like Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda.

Armyworms are prolific and responsive to rainy weather. Their eggs are laid in fluffy masses on crowns of seedlings and on leaves of older plants.

In five to 10 days, tiny caterpillars hatch and feed for several days. They then pupate and emerge as adults 10 days later. Three and more generations are commonly produced each season. Just as you are killing worms from the leaves of your garden

Application

■ One litre of the certified pesticide can be used on three to four acres.

■ For cereals that are around six inches high, mix at a rate of 15ml for every 20 litres of water. Beyond this, the young crop may be scarred and wither.

■ For older cereals mix the pesticide at a rate of 20ml (use the provided measuring cap) to 20 litres of water.

■ It is advisable to spray very early in the morning or at night when the worm is most active. Application during cool hours helps the pesticide stay longer in the farm, hence more effective.

■ Direct the nozzle of the pump in the middle parts of the crop because that is where the worm hides.

■ Use protective gear on the hands, feet and eyes.

■ If there is a visible attack, apply at least once every three days.

Birds like chicken eat army worm moths, so allow them in your garden

plants, another generation is preparing to leave the soil to replace them. Some species of the armyworm will lay up to six times.

The moths move long distances, covering many thousands of square kilometres and traversing international boundaries in search of food. This is how they managed to move from Southern Africa, where they were reported first to East Africa.

These particular outbreaks seem to have followed the onset of wet seasons when dry grasslands produce new

growth and cereal crops are planted.

The severity and extent of outbreaks are increased by extended drought, followed by early season rainstorms, which concentrate egg-laying moths and provide flushes of new grass as food for newly hatched caterpillars.

The outbreaks are also increased by dry and sunny periods during the caterpillar

development, which promote survival and rapid development. Therefore, major upsurges occur in seasons of sporadic rainstorms and long sunny periods throughout the outbreak period.

The deadly worm was first reported in southern Africa, especially in Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique in February last year before entering Uganda at the beginning of

March the same year.

Other countries affected included Botswana, Namibia, Angola, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Benin, Ghana and Togo.

Last year, the worm destroyed hundreds of acres of maize and other cereals, although fast and effective controls helped some of the affected crops to recover.



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