

Global actions needed to combat fall armyworm

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Fighting fall armyworm requires global efforts as the pest could spread to more countries, warn scientists.



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Within the past two years, fall armyworm has spread to 44 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, threatening the food security of about 200 million people who depend on maize as a staple food crop, experts say.

The detection of the crop pest in India in July this year and the rapid spread of the worm in the country in a few weeks, the scientists add, shows there is a need for collaboration to find lasting solutions.

"We need to act globally as a team," says Segenet Kelemu, director-general, International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology, explaining that the rapid spread of the pest from Americas to Africa in 2015 and now Asia is an indicator that all countries are at risk.

“ We need the integration of validated technologies in a complementary manner for sustainable management of this pest based on local contexts. ”

The global approach has already taken its first step. "The fall armyworm research for development international consortium which was launched yesterday is the first step towards achieving this goal," says Ivan Rwomushana, senior scientist invasive species management at the UK-headquartered Centre for Agricultural Biosciences International (CABI), the parent organisation of SciDev.Net.

Rwomushana, who is based in Kenya, explains, "A sustainable strategy would need partnerships that are international, multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral, and that includes the farmer in decision making."

Boddupalli Prasanna, director of the global maize program, International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, adds, "There is no single specific solution that can effectively and sustainably manage fall armyworm."

According to Prasanna, integrated pest management is needed to control fall armyworm in Africa and beyond. "We need the integration of validated technologies in a complementary manner for sustainable management of this pest based on local contexts," Prasanna tells SciDev.Net.

Tackling fall armyworm in sustainable ways

Fall armyworm is an insect pest capable of attacking more than 80 plant species but it mostly attacks maize, say scientists from the Kenya-based International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology, and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center. Both organisations held separate events in Kenya to discuss efforts to fight the pest in Africa.

Prasanna calls for more research to identify and create specific technologies that can be combined in a particular country or region so that smallholder farmers can tackle the pest in an affordable and environmentally sustainable manner.

According to Prasanna, although pesticides are easily available through agro-dealer networks, smallholders should be sensitised to completely avoid highly toxic pesticides and use only environmentally safer alternatives.

Sunday Ekesi, an entomologist and director of research and partnerships at the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology, agrees and adds that sub-Saharan Africa needs to use biopesticides or pesticides extracted from natural materials such as plants to control the pest without negatively impacting human health and biodiversity.

But Zachary Kinyua, head of crop health from the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation, says that although environmentally sustainable solutions are needed, smallholder farmers are desperate, hence their use of chemicals. "We are using pesticides because we are in a state of emergency until we get sustainable solutions," says Kinyua, adding that the biopesticides being advocated by scientists, for example, are not yet available and farmers cannot wait for long.

Read the [original article](#) on SciDev.Net sub-Saharan Africa.