

Biosecurity Advice

UPDATE

Pest

Spodoptera frugiperda – Fall armyworm

Date

25 February 2020

Location

Croydon (Gilbert River) – Northern Queensland



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Key Points

- The exotic moth pest fall armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*) has been detected in the Croydon region (Gilbert River) of North Queensland. This follows a detection on the Torres Strait islands of Saibai and Erub in January, and Bamaga on the tip of Cape York in mid-February 2020.
- The fall armyworm specimens from Croydon, 750km – 800km south of the Bamaga detections, were collected from surveillance traps in a maize trial crop. When inspected the crop was found to be heavily infested with several generations of fall armyworm. This indicates an established population that is likely to be spread across the area.
- The specimens were identified with preliminary diagnostic testing. Further molecular diagnostic testing is currently underway to confirm.
- The Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests (CCEPP) met on 24 February 2020 and concluded that fall armyworm is not technically feasible to eradicate from Australia due to the heavy infestation at Croydon, the remote locations in which it has been found, and the speed and distance that fall armyworm can naturally spread.
- Currently, fall armyworm has not been detected in commercial production areas.
- Key fall armyworm identification information at: www.pestid.com.au

Situation overview

- The Queensland Government Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is working with the Australian Government, state and territory governments, and with industry groups (**Greenlife Industry Australia**), and communities to assess the host preferences and to prepare industries for ongoing management of the pest.
- A national workshop is being organised for industry, governments and researchers to identify: management and control strategies; information gaps; and priority research needs to enable industry to manage this significant pest into the future.
- **Greenlife Industry Australia** is assessing current plant protection products, available to nursery production, having identified approximately 10 active ingredients under Minor Use Permits that could be drafted into a fall armyworm emergency permit. **Greenlife Industry Australia** is developing the emergency permit for approval by the APVMA.
- Fall armyworm larvae (caterpillar) is known to eat and destroy more than 350 plant species, including maize, cotton, rice, sorghum, sugarcane, wheat and many vegetable, fruit and ornamental crops and


have caused significant economic losses overseas. The following are some of the recorded fall armyworm host plant families:

- Asteraceae – e.g. Chrysanthemum
 - Brassicaceae – e.g. Cabbage
 - Cucurbitaceae – e.g. Watermelon
 - Ericaceae – e.g. Blueberry
 - Fabaceae – e.g. Beans/peas
 - Geraniaceae – e.g. Pelargonium
 - Myrtaceae – e.g. Eucalyptus
 - Poaceae – e.g. Wheat/sugarcane
 - Rosaceae – e.g. Roses/peach/apple
 - Solanaceae – e.g. Tomato/capsicum
 - Vitaceae – e.g. Grapes
- Destruction of crops can happen almost overnight without control measures when larval (caterpillars) population levels are high.

About Fall armyworm

- Fall armyworm is native to tropical and subtropical regions of the Americas. Since 2016 it has rapidly spread to and throughout Africa, the Indian subcontinent, China and Southeast Asia.
- Fall armyworm larvae (caterpillars) are most active during late summer and early autumn months.
- Adults (moths) can fly long distances and their migration rate is remarkably fast. As well as natural dispersal, they can also be spread through movement of people.
- Australia's conditions are favourable for this pest to establish and spread, including our climate and suitable hosts.
- It is most likely found in warm, moist regions with little forest cover or hitchhiking on fresh vegetables or fruit.
- Evidence of the pest could include egg masses, plant leaf damage or fruit or vegetable damage. See www.pestid.com.au
- There are species of *Spodoptera* already present in Australia which can look similar to fall armyworm. Some are pests, such as lawn armyworm and day-feeding armyworm.
- In early 2016, fall armyworm was detected in Central and Western Africa and has quickly spread across most of Sub-Saharan Africa. By December 2018, it had been reported in the Indian subcontinent. In June 2019 it was reported in China and Southeast Asia.

For further information contact the GIA National Biosecurity Manager John McDonald email: john.mcdonald@greenlifeindustry.com.au or call 07 3277 7900.

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