

## FALL ARMYWORM OBSERVED IN MAURITIUS

Fall armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*), FAW, is a Lepidopteran of highly polyphagous nature. It can attack more than 80 plant species, and can cause serious damage to maize (preferred host), rice, sorghum, sugarcane as well as vegetable crops.

The pest was confined to the Americas until it recently appeared in Africa in early 2016, in West Africa. It has now quickly spread across sub-Saharan Africa, leaving only a few countries in northern Africa not infested and is also recorded in Bangladesh, China, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Yemen.

At end of March 2019, FAW has been observed in Rodrigues and Mauritius on maize plants. In Rodrigues, the pest has spread all over the island.

In **Mauritius**, FAW was observed on 28 March 2019 in a maize plantation at Belle Vue. On 29 March, it was reported on maize plantations in several sites in the North (Belle Vue, Petite Julie, Barlow), Centre (Highlands, Floréal, Belle Terre, Valetta), South (St Avoild, Rose Belle, New Grove) and East (Flacq) of Mauritius.

As the pest is a potential danger for **sugarcane**, scouting of sugarcane fields should be carried out on a regular basis to check for any attack by FAW. Early detection is required to contain any infestation and spread of the pest in sugarcane plantations.

### Damage :

FAW generally feeds on foliage. On maize, it can attack the plant in nearly all stages of development.



*Damages on a 6-7 weeks maize plant collected at Valetta (left: ragged leaf; middle: ragged leaves outside whorl; right: deep feeding of larva in whorl)*

On sugarcane, FAW presence has been confirmed in sugarcane fields in Tamil Nadu, India and in Sri Lanka.



Damage on cane shoot  
(source: ICAR Breeding  
Station, India)

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### How to recognize the FAW larvae in the field?

1. Larvae vary from light brown to black, with three light yellow stripes on the back
2. A white inverted "Y" mark is present on the front of the dark head
3. It has four dark spots arranged in a square on the posterior dorsal side of the abdomen.



Four dark spots on abdomen and  
'Y' mark on head



### What to do if you suspect presence of FAW in sugarcane fields?

- Take pictures of any visible damage symptoms on plants
- Record the variety, age of plant and location of the field
- Check for any maize field in the surrounding
- Collect larvae and forward to the Entomology Department, MSIRI for identification.

### Preferred general control measures:

- Adoption of integrated pest management approach is recommended.

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