



MAURITIUS SUGAR INDUSTRY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Recommendation Sheet No. 27

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ARMYWORMS IN SUGAR CANE

Armyworms are caterpillars of the moth *Leucania loreyi* and they are on occasion numerous in fields of young ratoon cane. Intense attack seems confined to fields that were burnt at harvest and occurs within 8 weeks after harvest.

It appears that the moths are attracted to fields that have been burnt, with the result that concentrated egg-laying occurs. The caterpillars that hatch then develop in unison and almost complete defoliation of the small ratoon shoots may occur before the attack is noticed. When the caterpillars complete their development and transform into moths, these latter disperse so that the attack comes to an end.

Characteristically, therefore, armyworm attack occurs within a few weeks of harvest in fields that were burnt and is of short duration. Defoliated shoots soon put out new leaves when the attack passes. However, it is known that severe defoliation, even of such small shoots, can adversely affect ultimate yield. It is therefore advisable to destroy armyworms before serious defoliation results.

The following measures are recommended:

Fields burnt at harvest should be regularly inspected for a few weeks afterwards (say weekly for 6 weeks). At the first sign of leaf damage by caterpillars (which in the daytime will be found curled up in the soil, under trash, or in the axils of the leaves) spray the shoots immediately with Decis 2.5% at 1 cm³/litre or with Lannate 90% s.p. at 1 g/litre. Gusathion 20% e.c. at 2 cm³/litre will also give a quite good control. These chemicals are all contact/stomach insecticides, and a thorough coverage is essential. A single application should be sufficient.