

Pesticides boost arsenal against deadly armyworm

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries has identified two pesticides it believes will conquer a fall armyworm plague ravaging maize crops.



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The voracious larval pest has been identified throughout Limpopo and in northern Gauteng and could ruin the entire country's maize harvest if not contained.

The migratory worms, native to South and Central America, also attack sorghum, soybeans, groundnuts and potatoes.

"The department realises that transboundary pests and diseases, especially migratory pests, threaten food security and that coordinated efforts are important to address these risks," Minister Senzeni Zokwana said yesterday.

The fall armyworm is new to South Africa, meaning no pesticide has been registered for use, and proven successful, in fighting it. An emergency process has now registered two pesticides that are likely to work if used correctly.

The department is extending its programme to other provinces with awareness campaigns and tests for identifying the worm's presence.

"Pheromone traps will be imported into South Africa to determine the exact extent of the spread and the specific strain of fall armyworm in South Africa."

Zokwana urged the nation to remain calm, saying the pesticides identified were safe for use. "We will ensure that no residue can affect South Africans [through their food consumption]."

The department met the national Treasury yesterday to ask for funding to assist the farming community. It has also started a plant pest action group - made up of provincial agriculture departments, researchers and producer associations - to evaluate its progress in curbing the worm's spread weekly.

Zokwana could not say what the impact of the pest had been thus far but said the department was acting quickly to minimise damage.

Source: The Times

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