



NATIONAL CRIME RESEARCH CENTRE

Tackling the Dangerous Drift: Armyworms Invasion, Food Security and Crime Threat Issue Brief

About Frugiperda Armyworm

Armyworms can strip even a fully-grown maize plant down to the last leaf. *Spodoptera exempta* – is the common African armyworm found in Kenya. It eats cereals and has been causing havoc in Kenya for decades. There exist pesticides in the market to control and manage *exempta*. However, in the last planting season in Kenya, there has emerged a new armyworm known as *Frugiperda*, or the ‘fall armyworm’, which is mainly found in the **Middle East**, North America and South America. It is now being pretty much everywhere in Africa. Western (Ghana declared state of emergency in May 2017), South (Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa) and Eastern Africa (Kenya and Ethiopia). At this stage, no one is really sure on how *Frugiperda* traveled a distance of at least 3000km to invade maize farm in these countries.

This variant, which eats pretty much anything, reproduce at a staggering rate with each female laying about 1000 eggs in a 10-day lifetime and there is no effective pesticide in the local market in this countries. The Ministry of Agriculture policy makers as well as crop researchers are making frantic efforts to tackle the menace. The solutions range from research work towards replicating the virus and employ it as a biological agent in order to eradicate the blight, use of existing pesticides (which are ineffective) and farmers use of traditional alkaline (ashes) substances to fight the *frugiperda*.

The Issue

At present, Kenya is stricken by climate change, and which in some parts (food basket regions, rift valley, western) have recently suffered (or in some cases, is still suffering through) a once-in-a-decade drought. Having armyworms at this stage is not just another manifestation but a food security matter. To make matters worse, armyworms tend to love maize, the local staple food. For many farmers who also grow small amounts of other crops such as beans, peas and other vegetables, their livelihoods are safeguarded to a large extent by other crops. On the other hand, *Frugiperda* will eat anything green so potentially can also eat these other crops if maize is not available. But why this particular plague, and why now? How did it get here from the Middle East or Americas. Did it fly on prevailing winds, caught a plane or delivered through a medium like fertilizers. No one is yet sure. Given that ‘the fall’ has only been in Kenya from April 2017, no one is quite sure how severe the impact will be. People are scared about what’s going to happen, and what is the **root cause** of its sudden emergence. But there is one last, and far more pressing, problem: can the armyworms be stopped before they eats Kenyan farms, farmland bare?

Conclusion and Recommendation

Intelligence and crime research is required to rule out sabotage, extremism involvement to intentionally breed despondent and public anger in the face of food shortages that will lead to street riots and security threat.

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