

Fall armyworm spreads to Cameroon

YAOUNDE, Cameroon - Fall armyworm has spread to Cameroon. The pest has attacked crops in at least 24 African countries. In Cameroon, the Ministry of Agriculture says it is particularly concerned about the impact of the Fall armyworm infestation in the north and the east of the country. Minister-delegate Ananga Messina says fall armyworm has infested six of the central African state's 10 regions.



©Mikhail Kochiev via [123RF](#)

She says the armyworms have been a serious threat to food security in Cameroon because cereals like maize, sorghum, rice and legume plants like cowpea, peanuts and beans are increasingly being attacked every day. She says the situation is particularly worrisome on Cameroon's northern border with Nigeria where the population and 100,000 Nigerian refugees are already suffering from food scarcity due to the Boko Haram conflict.

The Ministry of Agriculture says nearly two million people are currently in need of food assistance in northern Cameroon.

Messina told VOA about half of Cameroon's 23 million inhabitants and millions of livestock risk hunger in the months ahead. She said the armyworms have extended to Cameroon's eastern border, putting neighboring Central African Republic at risk, a country gripped by a severe humanitarian crisis after years of conflict.

Use of chemicals not the best approach

Cameroon has launched a task force to manage the infestation.

Some farmers have been using chemicals to kill the pests, but agriculture technician Anicet Mvondo says that is not the best approach. "The problem is that the insecticide is not good for the health of the farmer," said Mvondo. "It is not good for the environment. It kills other organisms in the environment. Using insecticides is not a good way. We should try to look for other solutions because these insects on the field are also eaten by other organisms."

Drawing from lessons learned in Americas on sustainable Fall armyworm management

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization reports Fall armyworm was first detected in four countries in West Africa in early 2016. It has since spread to at least 20 other countries. Experts say the Fall armyworms can reproduce rapidly and can fly long distances in moth form, though it remains unknown how the pest spread to West Africa from South America.

The FAO is leading the regional response efforts in Africa, and it says it is drawing from lessons learned in the Americas on sustainable Fall armyworm management. FAO Subregional Coordinator for Southern Africa, David Phiri says methods like regular monitoring and hand-picking of worm larvae can be effective.

"Fall armyworm has a lot of natural enemies and we should enhance their use to control the fall armyworm... So the message is that Fall armyworm has come here to stay and also that use of chemical pesticides should be reduced to a minimum," said Phiri.

Staple crops like maize, sorghum, rice, and sugarcane have been hit hard in Africa, though the Fall armyworm can ravage more than 80 other plant species. Losses for Africa are estimated at at least \$13bn.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>