



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Media Advisory

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Pest Alert: *Tuta absoluta* (Tomato Leaf Miner)

A new tomato pest called "*Tuta absoluta* or Tomato Leaf Miner (TLM)" has been prominent in the news since 2006 as it emerged in Europe where it caused serious damage to host crops. The pest originates from South America and has successfully invaded parts of the EU, North Africa and some west and east African countries.

The pest was detected in Sudan in 2010 and the invasion has subsequently crossed the Sahara desert, being found in Kenya in 2014. The most recent records are from Tanzania (unconfirmed) in August 2014. There are no records of this pest occurring in South Africa. The main concern is that it can cause serious yield losses of 50 to 100% and it can rapidly develop resistance to pesticides.

Tomato plants are the main host but other plants in the family Solanaceae, such as eggplant, peppers, potatoes and several weeds, are also attacked. The larvae (worms) of this minute moth pest tunnel inside leaves and may also enter the fruit. This damage causes leaves to dry up and die and fruit such as tomatoes to become unmarketable.

The pest spreads on seedlings as well as fruit. Considering its rate of spread in Africa, this pest may be detected in South Africa in less than a year's time. Prevention, early detection and rapid response will entail a coordinated approach between DAFF, Provincial Departments of Agriculture (PDAs) and industry to ensure growers are protected as much as possible from this pest.

The National Plant Protection Organisation of South Africa (NPPOZA) within DAFF is already developing an early warnings system (EWS) for this pest in collaboration with the Tomato Producers Organisation, PDAs, Potato South Africa and the Potato Certification Scheme. This is in line with the South African Emergency Plant Pest Response Plan (SAEPPRP).

More role players will be approached in the development of the EWS to ensure all relevant organs of state, as well as research organisations, agricultural chemical manufacturers and suppliers, commercial, small scale and subsistence producers are included.

Considering the high volumes of tomato production in the northern parts of our country, this pest must be taken seriously, since tomatoes are a staple crop for small scale farmers, and contribute immensely to job creation and economic growth and most importantly, are a main ingredient in at least one food source for the majority of South Africans every day (either fresh or processed).

International travellers and the trading community are advised not to import host plant nursery material or travel with tomato fruit from any country into South Africa without following the necessary import procedures.

Please contact DAFF in case of any suspicious looking symptoms on tomato or potato leaves or tomato fruit.

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