



Contacts

Reitumetse Russell
Communications Officer
FAO Lesotho
Email: Reitumetse.Russell@fao.org

Maseru, 13 July 2017 – FAO assists with transboundary diseases and plant pests.

The Food and Agricultural Organizations of the United Nations (FAO) assists its Member Nations in responding to transboundary animal diseases and plant pests. It is currently working on possible threats posed by Fall Armyworm (FAW) and the Avian Influenza (H5N8).

The Fall Armyworm is a moth native to tropical and subtropical regions of the Americas that feeds on more than 80 plant species and can cause significant damage and yield losses on main cultivated staple and cash crops such as maize, rice, sorghum as well as legumes and vegetable crops. It can also devastate grass pastures thereby severely reducing the availability of livestock grazing.

The pest was first detected in Central and Western Africa in early 2016 affecting: Benin, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, and Togo. In 2017, it has been detected in African countries including: Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya, Niger, Rwanda and Uganda.

The Fall Army Worm has not yet been reported in Lesotho. However, there is concern given the rapid rate of spread of the pest. There may be risk from further spread across boundaries. There is a probability that this pest will affect farmers, as it is a diffusely distributed pest, living in millions of plants across farmers' fields. In maize, the pest affects the crop at different stages from early vegetative stages up to physiological maturity. It damages leaves, feeds inside the whorls on growing plants which destroys developing tassels and feeds on developing kernels. Outbreaks can ultimately have significant impacts on crop yields in the region. The Fall Armyworm cannot be viably eradicated, but rather managed through interventions such as hand picking of caterpillars and egg masses, and design of tools allowing farmers to pluck the larvae out of plants and to destroy eggs and larvae of the pest.

In response to this challenge, FAO has teamed up with relevant member countries and other partners to develop a framework for a coordinated response to FAW based on an action plan agreed upon at a multi stakeholders' meeting in April 2017 in Nairobi, Kenya. This framework will put in place support for early warning and assist with the development of projects and programmes by the various stakeholders. An FAO mission on FAW will visit Lesotho in the near future.

Another threat monitored by FAO, is the Avian Influenza H5N8 (HPAI), which is a new, highly pathogenic strain of avian influenza virus, it is of global concern, more especially in Africa. HPAI is a highly contagious disease causing high mortality in poultry resulting in severe losses in poultry production, which impacts significantly on food security and trade. Avian Influenza viruses can affect humans.

The strain was detected in wild and domestic poultry for the first time in Africa in November 2016, and earlier in Europe and Asia. The transmission of the virus is suspected to be transmitted and spread along wild bird's migratory routes, eventually reaching South Africa in June 2017. Countries affected by Avian Influenza have increased biosecurity measures such as communication campaigns targeting farmers and poultry value chain actors, imposing restrictions on poultry movement or restricting the sale of uncertified chicken products.