

Infestation of the Fall Armyworm (FAW) and AU's Response

A Brief by H.E. Mrs. Josefa Sacko, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, AU Commission

04 August, 2017

Background

The Fall Armyworm (FAW) is a moth that is native to the tropical and subtropical regions of the Americas. It is believed to have come to Africa from South America. So far, it has been reported in more than 25 African Union Member States and is spreading fast across the continent. It mainly affects maize but has the potential to infest over 80 crop species, including sorghum, rice, vegetables which are staples in most African countries. The African Union is very concerned about the impact this pest will have on food production, food security, farmer incomes and regional trade. We are concerned that the impact of this pest will further increase the stress brought about by recent droughts, especially in Eastern and Southern Africa, where most countries have report the FAW. The AU Commission is taking leadership on the matter and would like to raise awareness among our Heads of State and Government, and among the Ministers responsible for agriculture using the different platforms at continental and regional levels. The FAO Advisory Note on the FAW in Africa in June 2017 reported that the pest was first detected in Central and Western Africa in early 2016 (Sao Tome and Principe, Nigeria, Benin and Togo) and in late 2016 and 2017 in Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, and it is expected to move further.

AU's Response to Date

The Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA) has been active in trying to understand the nature and spread of the FAW on the continent. It has taken several actions:

1. DREA has held three meetings with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. The FAO is providing technical information and has mobilized other technical organizations (CIMMYT, CABI) to combine efforts in understanding the FAW and generating information for use by decision makers. FAO is also support member states to prepare their action plans for the control and management of the FAW.
2. DREA brought the matter to the attention of the AU Commission and formally brief the Deputy Chairperson (DCP). As a result, the DCP immediately wrote to the Assistant Director General and FAO Representative to Africa, Mr. Bukar Tijani, for support through a Technical Cooperation Project (TCP). If approved, the TCP will serve two objectives: (i) support the AU Commission to organize high level meetings of Permanent Representatives of Member States to the African Union, and Ministerial meeting for Ministers responsible for Agriculture; and (ii) strengthen the capacity of IAPSC to collate the most up to date

information for the Commission to use in the various meetings, as well as support participation of our technical staff in continental and regional meetings.

AU's Planned Actions

1. In order to increase awareness and mobilize support, both within and outside Africa, the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA) is planning to organize a Fridays of the Commission meeting to brief Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to the AU on the FAW. In order to maximize impact, the meeting will be addressed by either the AUC Chairperson or the Deputy Chairperson. The meeting will take place in August at a date to be confirmed by the Chairperson.
2. The Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture will hold the second meeting of its Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment (ARDWE) in the first week of October. The STC will bring together Ministers responsible for agriculture and the FAW discussion is on the agenda. AU will use this opportunity to get updates on what the AU Member States are doing to control the pest, but also urge them to do more, and encourage those that haven't reported its presence to be vigilant.
3. In partnership DREA, FAO is planning to hold side event during the STC meeting in October to specifically discuss the FAW and actions that member states are taking or need to take to control infestation of the pest and limit it further spread to areas that have not yet been infested.
4. AU will support IAPSC to strengthen its capacity to collect the latest information on the FAW and keep the Commission updated. The Commission needs updated data and information in order to mobilize political support among African Leaders and also the international community in the fight against the FAW.
5. The Ministerial resolutions and decisions from DREA's STC will be presented to the Executive Council in during the January 2018 Summit for consideration and presentation to the AU Assembly.
6. Given the importance of this matter, the AUC should consider organizing a side event on the FAW during the January 2018 Summit, taking advantage of the Heads of State and Government to raise awareness and call for concerted efforts to control the pest. This should be possible with the approval of the Chairperson.
7. DREA will partner with FAO to develop and information portal where member states can easily obtain updated information as and when it becomes available from field surveillance and from scientists.