



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
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Media Release

Pest Alert: Detection of *Tuta absoluta* (Tomato Leaf Miner) for the first time in the eastern parts of Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) hereby announces that the first *Tuta absoluta*, commonly known also as the *Tomato Leaf Miner*, has been detected in the eastern parts of the Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. This pest is disastrous particularly for tomato production and food security in general.

After almost two years of surveillance by industry role players, *Tuta absoluta* was detected for the first time from the five surveillance traps in late August 2016, three of which were set in the Southern Kruger National Park, one on a tomato farm near Komatipoort and one at the Lebombo border post. The specimens collected from pheromone traps were sent to the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) Plant Health Diagnostic laboratories and the identification was confirmed by a Lepidoptera specialist from the Agricultural Research Council (ARC).

This pest spread from South America to Europe in 2006 and across to northern Africa. Since then, it has spread throughout the Middle East to India. It was reported in Kenya and Tanzania in 2014 and from September 2016 in Zambia. The DAFF has been closely monitoring the spread of this pest across the world and has proactively initiated emergency actions to register agrochemicals to prepare for a rapid response to any possible outbreak of this pest in South Africa.

This pest cannot be completely eradicated; however it can be contained and suppressed to lower population levels. The DAFF has already engaged with the tomato and potato production industries and the ARC and underscored an urgent need for development of a detailed plan of action. Such an action plan will be shared with all the relevant role players in due course.

Under poor control measures, *Tuta absoluta* can cause up to 100% loss of tomatoes and could also, to a lesser extent, affect potatoes. This in itself poses a serious threat to food security, owing to the fact that

tomatoes and potatoes are prominently part of the daily diet for many people in South Africa.

This pest can effectively be controlled through the application of good agricultural practices and/ or integrated pest management. To date, several agrochemicals are already registered by the DAFF to control this pest; however, they must be applied judiciously. The biggest challenge with this pest is that it can develop resistance to chemicals within a single season. Therefore, agrochemicals with different active ingredients should be used in rotation and in accordance with the application requirements. A list of agrochemicals registered for *Tuta absoluta* and information regarding surveillance is available on the DAFF website.

Tomato and potato producers are encouraged to apply good agricultural practices and/ or integrated pest management, i.e. to do field sanitation, use detection traps, scout for this pest and apply relevant registered agrochemicals when necessary, such as when this pest has been detected in a field trap. Please alert the DAFF Early Warning Systems division in case you suspect occurrence of this pest in your area.

International travellers are advised to avoid illegal importation of agricultural commodities into South Africa because this may lead to the introduction of new pests and diseases which are expensive and difficult to manage.

Together we can minimise the potentially negative effect of the Tomato Leaf Miner (*Tuta absoluta*) on our sector and the economy.

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