

Media release

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PEST ALERT: THE UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF *TUTA ABSOLUTA* (TOMATO LEAF MINER) IN SOUTH AFRICA

Tuta absoluta, commonly known as the Tomato leaf miner is a potentially disastrous pest, particularly for tomato production as this is the main host, and it might affect food security in general. The pest also affects other crops in the *Solanaceae* family. It was first detected in South Africa in August 2016. To date this pest has been detected in all the provinces of South Africa in pheromone traps in both tomato and potato fields. It has so far negatively affected tomato production in the KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape, Western Cape and North West. It has been also detected in pheromone traps throughout the Kruger National Park in high numbers indicating it can sustain populations in natural vegetation, probably utilising *Solanum* weed species such as bugweed and nightshades.

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 and across to northern parts of Africa. It was reported in Kenya and Tanzania in 2014 and Zambia in September 2016. The DAFF has been closely monitoring the spread of this pest across the world and 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 eradicated; however, it can be suppressed to lower population levels. The DAFF is in discussions with the Provincial Departments of Agriculture, tomato and potato production industries, ARC and other role players to intensify the on-farm management programme aimed at suppressing this pest. The programme embraces, among others, participation of role players in the *Tuta absoluta* task team, training and capacity building on good agricultural practices / integrated pest management, technical advisory on the usage of agrochemicals, registration of agrochemicals, mapping the affected areas, scouting, continuous surveillance and reporting.

Tuta absoluta can cause up to 100% loss of tomatoes if poorly controlled.. This in itself poses a serious threat to food security, considering that tomatoes and potatoes are part of the daily diet for many people in South Africa.

To date, several agrochemicals are already registered by the DAFF (details available on DAFF website) to control this pest; however, they must be applied judiciously. The biggest challenge with this pest is that it can develop resistance against insecticides within a single season. Therefore, agrochemicals with different active ingredients should be used in rotation and in accordance with the application requirements.

There are currently limited small pack insecticides available for small-scale farmers but nothing for backyard gardens or home use yet. However, small-scale farmers and home gardens are recommended to monitor the pest with pheromone traps, use plant material without traces of *Tuta absoluta*, scout daily for mines on leaves and infested fruit, remove and destroy infested plant material as well as dropped fruit by burying it at a depth of 50 cm, or deeper, remove *Solanum* weeds near any planting area, implement crop rotation in planting regimes, if not rotating crops then leave harvested fields fallow for at least six weeks 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 any 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*) in our sector and economy.

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