

SUGAR INDUSTRY WORKING TOGETHER TO MANAGE FALL ARMYWORM RISK

Fall armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*) has been found on Erub and Saibai islands in the Torres Strait and at Bamaga on Cape York Peninsula.

This is an invasive moth pest that has been recorded on more than 350 plant species (including 80 crops), causing damage to crops such as maize, rice, sorghum, sugarcane and wheat, plus other horticultural crops and cotton.

The Australian sugarcane industry, through CANEGROWERS and SRA, is working with governments and industry groups to manage the threat posed by fall armyworm and respond appropriately, but the community, industry and agronomists are encouraged to report any unexpected symptoms in the field by phoning the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

CANEGROWERS (Mick Quirk) is the industry representative organisation for the response, and SRA has assisted with specialist knowledge via Key Focus Area Leader for Pest Disease and Weed Management, Dr Kevin Powell; and Principal Researcher, Disease Management, Dr Nicole Thompson (SRA Woodford). Kevin is based at SRA Meringa and has experience with this pest.

Work is underway to determine the likely distribution of the pest and a response strategy. The level of impact of the pest for different crops will depend on the strain or strains of armyworm that are present.

Growers should have on-farm biosecurity measures in place to protect their crops from pests and diseases.

Fall armyworm larvae are light coloured with a larger, darker head. As they develop, they become browner with white lengthwise stripes and develop dark spots with spines. Adult moths are 32mm to 40mm in length (wing tip to wing tip) with a brown or grey forewing and a white hind wing.

Native to tropical and subtropical regions of the Americas, it was first detected outside its native range in early 2016, spreading to Africa, the Indian subcontinent, China and Southeast Asia. A strong flier, fall armyworm is believed to have covered most of its geographical range through natural dispersal, but can also spread through the movement of infested plant material. ■

(Top right) Fall armyworm moth.
(Bottom right) Fall armyworm larvae.

