



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

## ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE GLOBAL ACTION FOR FALL ARMYWORM CONTROL

GUIDANCE  
NOTE 7



Fall armyworm (FAW) is a polyphagous, transboundary pest that has spread across more than 100 countries in less than four years, beyond its native territory in the tropical and subtropical Americas. Once FAW finds favourable conditions for reproduction, it establishes itself with no possibility of eradication. It feeds and reproduces on suitable host crops such as maize, sorghum, millet and many other plants. FAW devastates crops and considerably reduces crop yields if it is not well controlled; thus, it represents a significant threat to food security and the livelihoods of millions of farmers. In response, in December 2019, FAO launched a bold, transformative and coordinated Global Action for Fall Armyworm Control, which aims to reduce yield losses caused by the pest by strengthening national capacities for sustainable management of FAW.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Director-General Qu Dongyu:

“The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting food systems and all dimensions of food security across the world. No country is immune. We have to ensure that food value chains are not disrupted and continue to function well and promote the production and availability of diversified, safe and nutritious food for all.”



In March 2020, a global pandemic was declared in relation to COVID-19, a disease caused by a transboundary and highly contagious virus that can be fatal to humans. Governments have taken urgent actions to control the spread of the virus, such as restricting the movements of people and materials

via lockdowns, travel restrictions, border closures, confinement, curfews or quarantine measures. Some of these actions are affecting agricultural production activities, including the implementation of the Global Action for Fall Armyworm Control.



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Given the capacity for rapid spread and adaptation demonstrated by FAW and COVID-19, it is apparent that a global response is necessary, via joint, concerted and well-coordinated actions that are not limited by national borders. These actions, which must focus on threatened areas, also emphasize the necessity of changing the way the international community faces transboundary pests and diseases, regardless of whether these originate in humans, crops or livestock. Clearly, a holistic, operative and inclusive approach must be applied. The Global Action was conceived with such an approach in mind.

Indeed, this holistic approach is the hallmark of the One Health initiative – spearheaded by FAO, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and other partners – which seeks to expand interdisciplinary collaboration and communications in all aspects of healthcare for humans, animals and the environment. It is also one

of the drivers behind FAO's new data-driven Hand-in-Hand Initiative, which prioritizes actions in countries where national capacities and international support are most limited or where operational challenges, including natural or human-induced crises, are greatest.

## The current situation

In many FAW-affected countries, pest management activities have been reduced or even stopped. These activities include: monitoring for the pest; field activities for FAW management; capacity development initiatives; and distribution and application of pest management products such as pheromones, biopesticides and, in some cases, chemical insecticides. Yet as FAW continues to fly into new areas, so too must the Global Action continue FAW control efforts, despite COVID-19 and its impact.





Through this guidance note, FAO is offering advice that aims to ensure continued support and coordinated efforts among Member Countries through the implementation of the Global Action to sustainably manage FAW.

### 1. Ensure people's safety



It is very important that anyone who is officially allowed to continue with FAW sustainable management activities strictly follows COVID-19 measures implemented by the relevant country's government. It is strongly suggested that face masks and other protective equipment are provided by employers and/or governments, as well as training in the use of that equipment for professionals involved in the Global Action. Employers should ensure regular health checks for their employees. Employers and governments should ensure that any required special permits for movement are provided. All necessary measures to protect the health of agricultural labourers should be taken.

### 2. Enhance capacity for urgent emergency response



National task forces should establish an emergency response mechanism to tackle urgent matters

caused by COVID-19 regarding FAW control. Work plans should be modified, and activities adjusted and adapted to new policies and actions by governments against COVID-19, to ensure continuity in the implementation of national FAW programmes. Coordination and collaboration should be strengthened at national, regional and global levels; and necessary supporting policies and enabling environments developed for the implementation of the Global Action.

### 3. Ensure continued monitoring and early warning



Monitoring and early warning activities are crucial to identify FAW infestations for immediate action through early application of solutions to limit yield losses. While fully respecting national government measures to control the spread of COVID-19, it is suggested appropriate actions are taken to ensure FAW monitoring and early warning. These may include: reducing the number of monitoring sites, given potential travel restrictions and quarantine measures; assigning monitoring tasks to extension agents living close to the sites; using more remote monitoring facilities, including the FAW Monitoring and Early Warning System (FAMEWS) application, which is also a very valuable educational tool;



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focusing on monitoring breeding areas and migration; and identifying potential FAW transient populations. Other actions may include: adopting an online reporting system, such as FAMEWS, to limit personal movement; enhancing regional data- and information-sharing on potential infestations; and, if required, obtaining special movement permits for experts in monitoring.

#### 4. Ensure availability and application of integrated pest management practices

The COVID-19 pandemic offers opportunities for the adoption of innovative approaches to FAW control. For example, you may want to consider new ways to disseminate integrated pest management (IPM) practices at the national level – through rural radio, TV programmes, mobile phone, Internet, webinars and other means of virtual training. Consider engaging professional pest management services for FAW control, mindful that any service providers involved should be supplied with personal protective equipment against COVID-19, regardless of the IPM strategy being implemented in the field. Consider promoting

coordinated regional management and applying the “bridging information” principle in which technologies already validated in one country can be applied in other countries with the same local conditions. Also consider means to leverage online and mobile communication platforms to disseminate and receive information from all stakeholders.

#### 5. Ensure financial and material support



Most national FAW implementation plans will be supported by policy decisions and budgets at the national level. During the COVID-19 emergency, it is important that national policies support continued production of food and ensure that domestic, as well as international, trade channels are kept open. Development of special policies and measures to support food production is recommended, beginning with plant protection policies. Financial subsidies are recommended for production and transportation, plant protection equipment and materials, and transportation with special vehicles, where necessary. Further, financial support must be continued for IPM measures, especially biological control, to protect harvests and reduce yield losses.

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