

Fighting Fall armyworm? There's an app for that

FAO has launched the [Fall Armyworm Monitoring and Early Warning System \(FAMEWS\) mobile app](#), which provides valuable insights on its behaviour in Africa and guide best response. The app enables farmers to identify, report the level of infestation, and map the spread of this destructive insect, as well as to describe its natural enemies and the measures that are most effective in managing it.



Image Source: [Phys.org](#)

Fall armyworm has already infected millions of hectares of maize in Africa - a staple crop across the continent - threatening the food security of more than 300 million people, mainly small-holder farmers who are already struggling to make ends meet and have enough food for their families. By early 2018, [only 10](#) (mostly in the north of the continent) out of the 54 African states and territories have not reported infestations by the fast-spreading, crop-munching pest

"The app will help us build our collective knowledge of Fall armyworm in Africa, and connect all the dots – from how and where it spreads to what makes it weaker and less damaging," said Keith Cressman, FAO senior agricultural officer who led the development of the app together with the UN agency's partners.

"The app is useful on two fronts: for farmers and agricultural workers in the direct management of their crops to prevent further infestations and reduce damage; and for all actors involved in managing Fall armyworm in Africa, by providing vital analysis on risks, spread and management," said Cressman.

Helping farmers take appropriate action

Once farmers and workers check their crops for infestations and upload the required data, the app calculates infestation levels so that farmers can take immediate actions to manage the situation.

The data is validated by national Fall armyworm focal points and transferred to a global web-based platform. It is then analysed to give a real-time situation overview with maps of Fall armyworm infestations and the measures that were most effective in reducing its impact.

Initially implemented in Madagascar and Zambia, the app is now being rolled out across all countries in sub-Saharan Africa affected by the invasive pest through the FAO-supported [Farmer Field Schools](#) (FFSs) as well as other community-based forums leading the fight against Fall armyworm.

Updates to the app in the coming months will provide additional functionality such as an offline advisory system that provides immediate guidance to the user, based on the collected data, and a diagnostic tool that uses the camera of the mobile phone to determine Fall armyworm damage levels to maize.

The app is an integral part of FAO's sustainable management programme for Fall armyworm in Africa. It supports all stages of Fall armyworm management from early warning and monitoring to response and risk assessment.

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