

New locust alert for northwest Africa

FAO warns of impending threat



A locust can consume its own weight in fresh food every day

23 October 2012, Rome - FAO has alerted Algeria, Libya, Mauritania and Morocco to prepare for the likely arrival of Desert Locust swarms from the Sahel in West Africa in the coming weeks.

The four countries are being urged to stand by to mobilize their field teams to detect the arrival of the swarms and control them.

Swarms of adult locusts are currently forming in Chad and are about to form in Mali and Niger following good summer rains that provided favourable conditions for two generations of breeding and which triggered a 250-fold increase in locust populations in those countries.

Prevailing winds and historical precedents make it likely the swarms, once formed, will fly to Algeria, Libya, southern Morocco and northwestern Mauritania," said Keith Cressman, FAO Senior Locust Forecasting Officer. "Once there, they could damage pastures and subsistence rain-fed crops. They could also pose a threat to harvests in Chad, Mali and Niger."

After becoming airborne, swarms of tens of millions of locusts can fly up to 150 km a day with the wind. Female locusts can lay 300 eggs within their lifetime while a Desert Locust adult can consume roughly its own weight in fresh food per day -- about two grams every day. A very small swarm eats the same amount of food in one day as about 35 000 people.

Hazardous security

FAO has been able to monitor the situation in Niger and Chad, but conflict in Mali has made it very difficult to track the situation there. Control operations, with spraying by ground teams, started in Chad in early October. Similar interventions are beginning now in Niger, though teams must be accompanied by military escorts to ensure their safety.

The hazardous security situation plus difficult access to some locust breeding grounds are constraining control efforts, Cressman said. This makes it unlikely that all locust infestations will be found and treated on the ground - especially in Mali.

FAO has brokered agreements with countries that have available appropriate pesticide stocks - Algeria, Morocco and Senegal - to donate them to Mali, Niger and Chad. This will avoid increasing stockpiles of hazardous chemicals in the region. The supplies are being airlifted with the support of the World Food Programme.

FAO appeal

Last June, FAO appealed for \$10 million to maintain and expand operations. So far, \$4.1 million has been received, allowing field operations to continue throughout the summer in Mali, Niger and Chad, thanks to the support from the governments of France, United Kingdom and United States, as well as bilateral assistance to Niger.

A regional meeting organized last month by the FAO Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Western Region (CLCPRO) and the World Bank confirmed that the full appeal is sufficient to cover the costs of the control campaign in the region until December. Efforts are currently underway to obtain the remaining funds.

Frontline countries in the Sahel such as Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad have trained locust survey and control teams but they need external assistance, especially vehicles, equipment and pesticides, to respond effectively to a full-scale emergency. Mali is particularly short of equipment after more than 30 pickup trucks were looted in the northern part of the country.

Related links

- [FAO Locust Watch](#)
- [FAO Locust Information Service on Twitter](#)
- [Locust FAQs](#)
- [Comité de Lutte contre le Criquet Pèlerin dans la Région Occidentale \(CLCPRO\)](#)
- [FAO Emergency Prevention System \(EMPRES\)](#)

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