



Desert locust outbreak in Eritrea

Alert level increased to “caution” in the Red Sea area

23 February 2007, Rome – In Desert Locust early warning, vigilance is critical, particularly on the Red Sea coastal plains where a Desert Locust outbreak developed in Eritrea in December 2006, FAO says. Locust numbers continued to increase along the coast between Massawa and the Sudanese border during January. Recently infestations have also been reported in adjacent coastal areas in Sudan.

Other countries along the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden could face important locust infestations this winter because of unusually good rains and favourable ecological conditions.

Small-scale breeding is in progress in coastal areas of Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and reports of locust concentrations on the northwest coast of Somalia have been received by FAO.

In Eritrea and Sudan a second generation of breeding is underway that could cause locusts to rapidly increase in number.

"When vegetation begins to dry out, these locusts may form hopper bands and swarms that could move to neighbouring countries," said FAO expert Keith Cressman.

FAO is closely monitoring the situation as continuing rains could lead to further deterioration and greater threat to the countries around the Red Sea in April/May.

Control operations

Control operations against locusts are continuing in outbreak areas on the Eritrean coast.

Eritrean ground teams have treated more than 15,000 hectares of hoppers and adults that were forming small groups on the northern Red Sea coast since last December. Most of the control has been carried out in millet crops on the coast near Shelshela and Sheib.

The governments of Sudan and Yemen have mobilized additional locust teams to monitor the coastal plains in their countries and control any infestations that may endanger crops. A spray aircraft has been deployed on standby on the Sudanese coast.

Workshop on biopesticides

Biopesticides are derived from natural materials such as animals, plants, bacteria, and certain minerals. They help to fight pests while minimizing risks to human health and the environment.

The potential of the biopesticide Green Muscle® as a method to combat Desert Locust has been demonstrated in several field trials in Africa.

These results have just been announced in an international forum on the future of biopesticides for Desert Locust management that FAO and IFAD organized in Senegal from 12 to 15 February 2007.

The workshop signalled the growing acceptance of bio-pesticides in Desert Locust and grasshopper control. The first practical outcome of the workshop is that FAO will conduct field trials on the Red Sea coastal plains in Sudan in collaboration with the national Locust Control Centre and the international research institution, ICIPE, in the next month.

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