

More locust swarms are invading Sahel countries

27 July 2004 -- The number of desert locust swarms invading Mauritania, Senegal and Mali has increased in the past two weeks, FAO said.

27 July 2004, Rome -- The number of desert locust swarms invading cropping areas in Mauritania, Senegal and Mali from Northwest Africa has increased in the past two weeks, according to the latest locust update published by FAO today.

In Northwest Africa, where intensive control operations have been in progress since February, there are signs that the situation is improving, FAO said.

No swarms have been reported in Chad or Darfur, Sudan, but the risk there remains high. There is a potential danger that swarms could also reach Burkina Faso, FAO warned.

More aid needed

So far, \$9 million of emergency assistance has been pledged. FAO has contributed nearly \$2 million from its own resources and donors have provided \$7 million. In addition, each affected country has contributed substantially to the locust campaign.

Several countries have appealed for additional international assistance that is urgently required to supplement the major national efforts already made and to prevent the situation from developing into a plague.

Locusts in the Sahel

In mid-July, numerous swarms were seen moving south in the Adrar region of central Mauritania, causing damage to date palms. Most of the swarms dispersed throughout summer breeding areas in southern Mauritania. Others continued east and south into northeastern Senegal and western Mali.

As good rains have fallen throughout the Sahel and ecological conditions are favourable, large-scale breeding will commence shortly, causing locust numbers to increase further in West Africa.

Control campaigns in the Sahel are being organized, but are hampered by a lack of available resources and the difficulty of locating and treating the highly mobile swarms. In 2004, control operations treated a total of 182 000 hectares (ha) in Mauritania and 900 ha in Senegal.

Nine countries are meeting today (27 July) in Algiers to discuss regional locust control campaigns that are required this summer.

Northwest Africa

Intensive ground and aerial control operations continued in Northwest Africa where more than 5 million ha have been treated so far this year.

However, by mid July, there has been a decline in the number of hectares treated in Morocco and Libya. This suggests that the situation is starting to get better in both countries and should become calm in the region over the next few weeks.

Facts about locusts

All efforts should be made to use the most environmentally friendly products and properly calibrated spray equipment to minimize risks to the environment and human and animal health, FAO said. FAO is actively encouraging field trials on the use of alternative products such as biological pesticides.

A desert locust eats its own weight (2 grams) of food every day. Desert locust swarms range from less than one square kilometre (km²) to hundreds of square kilometres in size. There are about 50 million locusts per km² of medium-density swarm. The total number of locusts in a swarm varies from a few hundred millions to several billions.

Desert locust swarms travel a few kilometres to over 100 km per day, or as much as 3500 km in a month. One tonne of locusts (a very small portion of an average swarm) eat as much food in one day as about 10 elephants or 25 camels or 2500 people.

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- **Update on the locust situation**
<http://www.fao.org/NEWS/GLOBAL/LOCUSTS/Locuhome.htm>