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Agenda item 10. Greening Desert Locust – how can biopesticides help?

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Overview and background

Chemical pesticides remain the front line of defense against Desert Locust infestations. They are generally cheap, efficient and fast-acting, which makes them an indispensable tool to control Desert Locust outbreaks and upsurges. As a result, chemical pesticides are applied to enormous areas. During the 2003–2005 Desert Locust upsurge, 13 million hectares were sprayed in more than 20 countries with 13 million liters of chemical pesticides. However, there is a growing concern worldwide regarding the overuse of pesticides, which can produce adverse impacts on human health and the environment. During recent years, based on increasing scientific evidence, certain older and more hazardous pesticides are targeted for being phased out by US Environmental Protection Agency and Rotterdam Convention. In addition to human health hazards, chemical insecticides are notoriously harsh on non-target organisms, primarily terrestrial arthropods, which include honeybees and our allies in the battle against locusts – the natural enemies.

Alternatives to chemical pesticides include biological control agents such as fungi, viruses, bacteria and protozoa. So far, only one fungal agent, *Metarhizium acridium*, has been commercialized as Green Muscle and is available for locust control. Despite many positive benefits, its integration into national locust programmes has been slow.

Points for discussion and decisions

- What role can biopesticides play in Desert Locust management?
- What are the reasons why *Metarhizium acridium* has not been widely integrated in national locust control programmes?
- What steps can be taken to adopt *Metarhizium acridium* for Desert Locust control?