

Protecting Aotearoa from wind-dispersed pests





Monitoring fall armyworm in Taranaki

Some insect pests are capable of reaching Aotearoa New Zealand via the wind. Our research programme *Protecting Aotearoa from winddispersed pests* aims to strengthen our biosecurity net by monitoring when pests arrive from Australia or the Pacific.

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Background

Over time, New Zealand has battled multiple unwelcome insect and pathogens which arrived by wind and are now established. The fall armyworm, *Spodoptera frugiperda* was a recent example, first detected in 2022.

How They Spread

Fall armyworm adult moths are excellent migratory fliers. They have recently spread from the subtropical America, to Africa, Asia, Australia and now New Zealand.

While predicted to be a serious pest of maize and corn around coastal regions of the North Island, they have only been observed occasionally in Taranaki.

Monitoring

Our research project on surveillance of pests is teaming up with FAR to find locations to undertake scientific monitoring of fall armyworm moths.

We will deploy CropVue Technologies automated scouting solar-powered traps. They work by attracting the male fall armyworm into the trap with the alluring smell of the pheromone similar to the female moth.

The moths are trapped on a sticky base, a solar powered camera takes a daily image of the moths and using the best available AI pest recognition, the trap automatically delivers accurate results to a computer monitored by FAR.





Impacts

The only negative of this method is byatch. Because of the similarity of the fall armyworm female sex pheromone to that of some other species, we are likely to also catch some native moths.

The bycatches could include

- Ichneutica mutans the New Zealand cutworm (very common through NZ and often considered an agricultural and garden pest)
- Ichneutica semivittata the common dotted owlet (also common in a variety of grassy habitats throughout New Zealand)
- Wiseana capularis (summer porina) a grass feeding moth common to the lower North Island
- Agrotis ipsilon (greasy cutworm) a serious agricultural pest distributed world wide due to its excellent migratory ability. It also flew to New Zealand from Australia.

Successful trapping will:

- Inform the Protecting Aotearoa programme of any new arrivals from Australia on the wind.
- Enable scientists to collect the dead moths caught in the traps for further analysis
- Inform FAR to improve pest spread predictions
- FAR can then alert Taranaki maize growers to the presence of fall armyworm pest in their region
- Growers can make informed decisions on protecting their maize crops
- Corroborate climate models



Contact information

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About Scion

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