

Can insect-resistant Bt corn help African farmers fight invasive armyworm?

African nations are gearing up to battle an invasive crop pest called the fall armyworm, which has been rapidly spreading across the continent since its arrival there just over a year ago. The caterpillar has wreaked destruction on staple crops including maize (corn), millet and sorghum. Experts warn that Europe and Asia could be next.

Researchers are also launching studies to understand the behaviour of the pest in new environments, as well as its susceptibility to insecticides.

This will include studies into the efficacy and management of the fall armyworm on a form of genetically modified (GM) maize called *Bt* maize. This GM crop is widely grown in the country, and the hope is that it may be more resistant to the pest than conventional maize — as experience in Brazil [has demonstrated](#). The fall armyworm is a serious problem in the countries where it is endemic.

The FAO estimates that Brazil alone spends US\$600 million each year to control infestations.

Although no one knows how the insect found its way into Africa, increased trade and climate change are the likely culprits, say experts.

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