

WHITE CANEGRUBS: A POTENTIAL PEST CHALLENGE TO THE SUGAR INDUSTRY IN KENYA

J MUTONYI

Nzoia Sugar Company Limited, PO Box 285, Bungoma, Kenya

E-mail: nzuco@africaonline.co.ke

Abstract

Keya (1995) pointed out that Kenya is relatively free from most sugarcane diseases and pests. However, crop improvement programmes must take cognisance of sugarcane smut, mosaic, ratoon stunting disease and pests such as root feeders, shoot feeders, stem borers, leaf and stem feeders and animal pests.

Damage to the Australian sugarcane crop by insect and animal pests cost the industry more than \$20 million in 1996. The figure included the value of lost production and cost of pesticides. Reliance on pesticides had a negative impact on the environment and a good knowledge of the pest was also needed (Allsopp *et al.*, 1993).

In the year 2002, an unusual wilting and final death of crop on some 50 hectares was a very new experience in one of the outgrowers' sugarcane g zones of Nzoia sugar factory. Given the average cost of Ksh 32,410/=(USD 405) for the establishment of one hectare of cane, a loss of up to Ksh 1,620,500/=(USD 20,256) was incurred.

The implications of this damage to the crop could be far reaching to the entire sugar-growing scheme. An immediate step was taken to establish the cause of damage and it was established that white grubs of the *Lepidiota* species had infested the fields.

Various remedial measures including cultural and chemical control were adopted. Deep ploughing of the fields using the mouldboard completely eliminated the occurrence of the pest on the Nucleus Estates. Usage of Imidacloprid on the crop had a systemic action that killed the pest in the root zone as opposed to direct spraying. The use of Chlorpyrifos in the furrow and directly sprayed on the pest had good results.

Keywords: sugarcane, white grub, cultural control, chemical control

