Cotton Armyworm

Recognize the problem
Armyworm is an important insect pest of cotton. It causes heavy damage to cotton and lowers production. The adult is a dark brown moth with white lines on its wings. However, it is the worm-like young (larvae) that cause the damage. The larva is the size of your small finger and has bright yellow lines on the back and sides of the body. On touching, the larva curls at once and drops. Eggs are laid on the underside of leaves. To begin with, the eggs are greenish and turn black later on. The larvae feed on leaves, stems and bolls. After larvae have fed on the leaves, it appears as if large chunks of the leaves are missing. If the attack is severe, all of the green part of the leaf is missing and only veins are left behind.

Background
Cotton armyworms are active from March to November. Groups of eggs hatch after 3-5 days, then the larvae feed for 2-3 weeks. The larvae go to the soil and crop residues and grow into pupae. They stay there until February, sleeping. They then become adult moths. Larvae also feed on tobacco, okra, potato, berseem, jantar and other vegetables. They attack crops in patches and move from one field to another in large groups, which is why they are called armyworms.

Management
• Remove weeds and other alternate host plants from the field while preparing seed beds
• Practice deep ploughing to expose pupa to sunlight and birds during winter
• Manually collect and destroy egg masses and newly emerged larvae from March to November
• Jantar is the most preferred alternate host plant of armyworm so rotavate Jantar at the end of April to check its shifting on cotton crop
• Destroy (burn) crop residues outside the field after harvesting the crop
• Make trenches about 1 foot deep around the heavily attacked fields and fill with water to avoid larval movement from one field to another
• Sow millet in July to attract birds that feed on the larvae
• Spray lufenuron @ 200ml/acre or spinosad @ 100 ml/acre whenever the larva is seen in the field. In the initial stage, spray in patches. Purchase pesticide from an authorized pesticide dealer.

Scientific name(s) > Spodoptera exigua, Spodoptera litura,

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Pakistan

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Edited by Plantwise.