How to develop a pest scouting calendar

Recognize the problem
Many different pests and diseases affect crop growth, leading to poor yields. Some farmers notice their presence a bit late. This makes the pest control more costly or sometimes impossible. This is due to the farmer’s failure to scout and monitor their fields at specified regular intervals such as once in a week.

Background
Scouting involves regular visits to a field from planting onwards to monitor the health of the crop. It identifies the presence and severity of any pests, weeds and diseases in the field. Regular scouting helps the farmer develop the ability to identify the life stages of diseases, pests and weeds and to understand the damage they cause, as well as what symptoms develop and the crops most affected during the season. Scouting helps in the decision making process to quickly and effectively manage the pest, disease or weed problem. This also reduces the cost of control and potential yield losses. To help scouting regularity, a scouting calendar is used. The calendar is a simple table showing the months, type of pest, weeds and diseases that normally affect the farm in a season. Such records are kept for many years.

Management
• Scout at least twice a week in case of vegetables, and once per week for other crops.
• Scout either early morning and/or late afternoon
• Record your findings in the scouting calendar
• Fill in the months usually affected and type of pest or disease noticed and stages of attack of the crop so to help you remember next season.
• Shade the box in the table in the column representing the month and against the pest/disease noticed.
• In the shaded boxes of the month column, write the number of insect pests and/or diseased plants affected, such as 2 to 6 plants in the month of July had this or that pest or disease
• Based on the figures observed and farmer experience control measures can be taken or not.
• The observations from the scouting calendar will help the farmer whether to take control measures against a disease/pest found
• Keep the records for the following seasons to understand history of pests.