



Fruit Flies Present New Threat to African Crops

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By Phuong Tran

Discovered three years ago in Kenya, an Asian fruit fly species is spreading throughout Africa, posing a threat to crops and livelihoods. Farmers and government officials are starting to devise strategies to combat the epidemic. For VOA, Phuong Tran reports from Dakar.

Mamadou Hane on his family's mango farm, next to a fly trap filled with pesticide

Here on Djibril Mamadou Hane's family farm in Niague, 50 kilometers northeast of Dakar, he lost more than half of his mango crop to fruit flies this year. His grove is barren of fruit, the harvest ending a month earlier than usual this year.

Hane says the problem is catastrophic. He lost one third of his crop in 2005, and more than half in 2006.

Hane is not alone. In meetings across Dakar, producers, exporters, researchers and government officials express their concern that mangos, which constitute more than 60 percent of Senegal's fruit production, are being threatened by *Bactrocera invadens*, an Asian fruit fly first discovered in Kenya in 2003.

The mission of saving Senegal's mangos by educating the public about this newest invader is bringing together farmers and elected officials, fruit packers and exporters, vendors and consumers of Senegal's mangos.

"Mango is a food item that the common man consumes every day," said Patrick Nugawela, the business development advisor for USAID, an American government economic development program, which is supporting the Senegalese government and private sectors' battle against fruit flies. "Mango is a fruit that is important to the food security of the country," he noted. "It is the most affordable, it is the most consumed fruit in the country at less than one dollar per kilo."

Also at stake is economic security, says Nugawela. By his calculations, almost 25,000 are directly employed in Senegal's mango sector.

"The mango industry, there is a wide spectrum of people depending on it," he said. "So the mango flies is affecting everyone across the spectrum, from the producer to the exporter."

In interviews with farmers across Dakar, their alarm is evident. Papa Amadou Diour with the African Consortium of Agriculture Development, lost one third of his crop to fruit flies last year.

"We lose 30 percent of our harvest because fruit flies are very difficult to control," he explained. "It's getting to be a state of emergency. We only have mangoes. And if we don't succeed in mango exportation, we are not going to make any money."

Last year, 60,000 metric tons of mangos were produced in Senegal, valued at almost \$10 million (US). Four-thousand tons were exported, mostly to the European Union, which was worth a little over \$4 million (US).

People linked to the mango industry fear that fruit revenues will drop if the region does not control the fruit fly population.

"Senegal is not isolated," said Mbaye Diaye, coordinator of the Fruit Fly Program in Senegal's Department of Agriculture. "Senegal alone cannot combat fruit flies, it requires a regional approach."

Mamadou Hane, the general manager of the Niague family farm surveys his family's 48 hectares of mangos, which eight farmers work at year round. He himself makes \$80 (US) a month overseeing the workers. During harvest season, he hires up to 10 more, in addition to people to harvest, pack, wash, and transport them to the local market or to shipping centers for exports. His father started planting mangos in 1978, but this year's losses make him question next year's plans for the farm.

Speaking in Senegal's local Wolof language, he says that of course, he is afraid of losing the family farm.



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