

U.S. BRACES FOR NEW TOMATO PEST

Sandy Welches, MGV '05

America's favorite summer vegetable (or fruit, if you prefer) may soon get a lot more expensive to grow. The tomato leafminer, a South American insect smaller than a tomato seed but capable of destroying entire tomato crops, is considered a threat to invade the United States.

Where is it?

The tomato leafminer (*Tuta absoluta*) arrived in Spain in a plant collector's luggage in 2006. Since then, it has rapidly infested swaths of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, and is currently heading for Asia. Recently the pest also started moving into Central America, which has led to concern about the potential to reach the United States. The insect escapes containment and spreads so quickly in areas where its natural predators are absent that the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has prohibited importing the insect for research.

"It will cost millions of dollars to manage the pest if it gets introduced," says Muni Muniappan, an entomologist at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, who is heading global efforts to control the tomato leafminer. "Tomato prices may go up at grocery stores, and although home growers may not have to rethink growing tomatoes, the cost of production will likely go up."

The tomato leafminer consumes tomatoes in its destructive larval stage, then develops wings and spreads as an adult. In addition to tomatoes, it feeds on other solanaceous crops, such as potatoes, eggplants, peppers, and tobacco. Control methods include pheromone traps, biopesticides, parasitoids, predators and mass trapping.



www.tutaabsoluta.com

Common Name Tomato Leaf Miner



www.shop-russipm.net



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