

# Potential impact of fall armyworm on cotton

Fall armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*) is an exotic pest that has been detected in Queensland.

Based on overseas experience, fall armyworm larvae can cause significant crop damage if left unchecked.

Adults can fly long distances and migrate quickly, particularly with the aid of weather patterns and jet streams. Check crops regularly to detect the early stages of infestation.

## Pest risk

At this early stage, it is difficult to know if fall armyworm will be a significant pest of cotton in Australia.

Whilst not registered for the control of *Spodoptera* species, the Bollgard 3 varieties that are widely grown, are expected to provide incidental suppression of this pest. The incidence of this pest may be similar to the native cluster caterpillar, *Spodoptera litura*, which can cause limited damage to tropical cotton crops in some seasons.

Similar to the United States of America, fall armyworm is expected to be more prevalent in Australia's tropical regions and could be less frequent in temperate areas further south.

## Appearance

Fall armyworm looks similar to other species of *Spodoptera* already present in Australia. In particular, it has a similar appearance to lawn armyworm (*S. mauritia*) and day-feeding armyworm (*S. exempta*), which are not found in cotton.

Cluster caterpillar (*S. litura*) is native to Australia and can be a minor pest of cotton, but is easily distinguished from fall armyworm.

Cotton Info's [Insect ID Guide](#) provides a detailed guide to identifying fall armyworm.



### From Endemics to Exotics

#### Identifying cluster caterpillar, northern armyworm and fall armyworm

Proper identification is important for knowing if the insect in your field is of economic importance. The correct identification of a pest allows for:

- Appropriate management practices to be implemented, and
- Early identification and detection of potential exotic pests, enabling successful containment and eradication programs.

Key features of a pest throughout its lifecycle can assist with making a correct identification. While a photo is worth a thousand words, ensuring you read the full description of symptoms and visual appearance can help differentiate between similar looking appearances.

If you suspect you have detected fall armyworm, contact the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline.



EXOTIC PLANT PEST HOTLINE  
1800 084 881

## What should I look for?

You should look for the presence of larvae that may be hatching on masses from egg clusters.

It is expected with the control offered by Bollgard 3™, cotton should suppress the survival of the larvae. However, you should be vigilant in monitoring crops for excessive leaf damage and fruiting sites feeding. If damage does appear, it is important to obtain a clear identification of the larvae species likely to be causing the damage.

## How can I manage an outbreak?

Early detection is essential. Regularly check all your crops for insects and damage. Pheromone traps may provide an indication of local fall armyworm activity.

Key to the control of any pest is an integrated pest management approach. The Department, in collaboration with industry, is working to identify strategies and tactics for the medium to long-term management.

Some insecticides used for the control of *Helicoverpa armigera*, other armyworms and caterpillar pests may provide some level of control of fall armyworm. Biocontrol agents released for *Helicoverpa* are also expected to have an impact on fall armyworm.

It is essential with any pesticide use for fall armyworm control that the implications for chemical resistance development in other pests that may be exposed are considered (e.g. *Helicoverpa*, mites, aphids), and the potential impact on natural enemies.

The APVMA is currently assessing, as a priority, applications for permits for the use of chemicals against fall armyworm in cotton. To check for the latest chemical permits applying to fall armyworm, use the [APVMA's permit portal](#)—search for 'fall armyworm' and check the 'pest/purpose' button.

The screenshot shows the 'Search permits' section of the APVMA's permit portal. It features a search bar with the text 'Fall armyworm' and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, there is a link to 'Advanced search'. The 'Advanced search' section has three tabs: 'Search terms include', 'Filter on', and 'Date'. Under the 'Search terms include' tab, there is a list of search criteria with checkboxes: 'Permit number', 'Description', 'Active constituent', 'Pest / purpose' (which is checked), and 'Animal / crop'. At the bottom of the search section, there are 'Reset' and 'Search' buttons.

You should already have strong on-farm biosecurity measures to protect your crops from pest and diseases and should implement good farm hygiene for weed control to remove hosts that could build populations. More information is available at [farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://farmbiosecurity.com.au).

## What should I do?

Be on the lookout and if you suspect fall armyworm, report immediately to the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries on **13 25 23**.

## More information

For more information, contact the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries on **13 25 23** or visit [business.qld.gov.au/fallarmyworm](http://business.qld.gov.au/fallarmyworm)