

THE CURRENT STATUS ON THE NEWLY IDENTIFIED EUCALYPTUS TREE INSECT PEST

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On 21st of July 05, an article appeared in the Horizon columns of the Daily Nation Newspaper about the Blue Gum Chalcid pest in Kenya. The article was meant to give information on the status of the newly identified *Eucalyptus* insect pest and on measures for control of the spread. However, the article has generated concerns from tree growers and investors especially on the advised to the farmers to cut down all trees under two years. We would like to emphasize that the pest situation has not reached epidemic levels to raise fear or panic and that cutting down of trees is not a solution for pest eradication as there are other more sustainable and appropriate integrated pest management practices.

The pest has been identified as *Leptocybe invasa* (commonly referred as *Eucalyptus* Chalcid) belonging to the bee/wasps family and originating from Australia. It has been found to infest various *Eucalyptus* species more prevalently *E. camaldulensis*, *E. grandis* and *E. saligna* the latter two when planted off recommended sites. Fortunately, so far, these observable symptoms have not been noted to cause any deaths with only stunted growth of infested trees. Damage level is only 4% for tree under 5- years and 20% to seedlings. Currently the pest has restricted itself to some parts of western Kenya region particularly those bordering Uganda from where the pest seems to have crossed. Recently it has also been reported in a small area of Mtwapa in Coast Province where it was accidentally introduction through infested planting material transported from Western Kenya. So far there is no unequivocal scientific evidence on susceptibility of the clonal hybrids from South Africa planted in Kenya to the chalcid pest.

The following efforts have been made to contain and manage the infestation within the identified region: -

- Restricting movement of seedlings within the areas of infestation.
- Close inspection and withdrawal of infested planting stock/seedlings.
- Release of regular updates to forestry stakeholders in form of pest alert leaflets, posters, press releases and, workshops
- Research is in progress to come up with long-term management solution(s). This will include implementation of the biological control programme, identification of resistant hybrid clones/species, and appropriate silvicultural practices.

All tree growers and stakeholders should take the following measures: -

- Any suspected infestation **MUST** be reported to the nearest Forest Office, KEFRI Centre or any Government office immediately.
- Ensure you obtain your planting stock/seedlings from professionally managed tree nurseries to avoid contaminated stock.
- In case of doubt, a farmer is free to seek technical advise from any Forest Office or KEFRI Centre on issues concerning species-site matching, control measures and other additional information.

Worldwide there are about 800 species of *Eucalyptus* of which slightly over 100 have been introduced in Kenya. So far, in Kenya the pest has only affected three identified species, these are, *E. camaldulensis*, *E. saligna* and *E. grandis*. This pest has been identified in other countries like Iran, Israel, Morocco, Italy and Uganda. Research is being undertaken in collaboration with affected Countries to find long-term a solution.

Kenya has one of the smallest areas under Eucalypts in the world despite its multiple uses such as fuelwood, poles, timber, and pulpwood amongst others. This small area is currently increasing as more tree growers adopt planting of improved species and hybrids. We wish to encourage enhanced growing of *Eucalyptus* and other tree species as pest and other management capacity have sufficiently been achieved in Kenya to address emerging situations.

Since other countries are ahead in eucalyptus farming, what lessons can the Kenyan farmer learn from them as we engage in the current eucalypt debates? Indeed, sharing scientific information and perceptions of various stakeholders both locally and internationally is critical for the wise use of a potentially useful species in a region which has undergone a dramatic decline in forest cover and facing a growing deficit in wood energy and production.

Commercial production of *Eucalyptus* is a great opportunity for income generation from small holders but there is no proper economics information yet. Ethiopia and South Africa have 250,000 ha and 477,000 ha under *Eucalyptus* plantations respectively compared to only 6,000 ha in Kenya. Therefore, their long experience is highly relevant for Kenya. Investments in tree planting should be promoted by providing low cost loans because of high investment and long period before harvest. Plantations offer a sustainable source of wood to meet the growing global demand for paper and other products, generate employment, reduce global warming and protect watersheds as well as take pressure off natural forests.

The tradeoffs between income generation and water use of *Eucalyptus* should be assessed for each area using the approaches such as applied in South Africa.

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