

## Egypt probes 'virus-infected' tomato seeds

The Egyptian authorities opened investigations after a group of farmers suffered losses in their 2018 tomato crops which resulted from planting seeds of class 023, infected with tomato yellow leaf curl virus (TYLCV).

The infected crops were planted on around 10,000 acres across many rural areas, mainly in Nobarria and Wadi al-Natroun cities located at Alexandria and Beheira governorates. The cost of cultivating one acre of tomato was estimated at LE 50,000 (US\$ 2,795). Tomato is considered one of Egypt's major exported crops.

Committees of the state-owned Agricultural Research Center (ARC), started to analyze samples of the infected tomatoes from several planted areas.

Last month, a number of farmers filed a complaint to Minister of Agriculture Ezz el-Din Abu Steit, calling to launch a probe pertaining to infected seeds, bought from a private company. They stated in the complaint that the company claimed that the sowed seeds are resistant to the TYLCV virus. However, it was proved the opposite, according to a copy of the letter published by youm7 newspaper.

Abu Steit himself affirmed that the Agriculture ministry is a part of the problem as the import company of the infected seeds had previously obtained a license from the Plant Research Institute, which is affiliated to the ARC, to import the tomato seeds of class 023.

He retaliated that those who responsible for the crisis would be held accountable.

Meanwhile, a lawsuit was filed against the company before the General Prosecution to investigate into the destruction of the crops, Masarwy news website reported farmers' lawyer, Mohamed Iraqi Hatatah, on September 9.

Egypt cultivates a total of 500,000 acres of tomatoes annually in different areas nationwide. Around 20 tons of tomatoes are produced in one acre, the head of Vegetables Department at the state-owned central Administration of Horticulture, Alaa al-Bahrawy, told Infrad website.



He added that the destroyed areas were allocated to meet the local market's needs for the three months (October to December) until reaping the crops of the next round of tomato's cultivation in December. Tomatoes are being planted four times in Egypt annually.

Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee of the House of Representative, Raef Tamraz, has called to form a fact-finding committee to investigate the "crisis of infected tomato seeds."

Egypt's tomato exports in the first quarter of 2018 amounted to \$13.5 million, in compare with \$6.6 million in the same period of the last year, according to Egypt's Foreign Trade's annual bulletin.

Furthermore, It has been reported that Egypt will export tomatoes to the Canadian markets as a part of its plan to increase vegetable export outlets.

**Lien article :** <http://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/58573/Egypt-probes-%E2%80%98virus-infected-tomato-seeds>

